



Series Titles Reviews

By *admin*

Created *Oct '09*

Article Author:

[Steve Rosson](#) [1]

[88](#) [2]

Article Category:

Other Articles

Byline:

Some of the latest, chosen by **Steve Rosson**.

Some of the latest, chosen by **Steve Rosson**

<!--break-->

What can one say about Scripture Union's 'Read by Myself' titles which they proudly announce have been 'carefully edited to conform to National Curriculum criteria' and 'have been assessed at Key Stage 2 Level 2/3'? The only possible response is to scream 'Aaargh' and move swiftly on to those who know what they're doing.

At the risk of qualifying for what Basil Fawlty called 'a degree in the bleedin' obvious', let me say that some people who do know what they're about are the folk at Heinemann with their Banana Books. The latest group of six is so strong it's almost impossible to select the ones to review, but I suppose I'll have to.

Deft characterisation by Michael Morpurgo enables him to take a fairly conventional 'escaped animal in school' story and introduce the themes of single-parent families, frail elderly relatives and mental bullying in **Snakes and Ladders** (0 434 96636 3, £3.99) with illustrations by Lesley Smith. Wendy is small, thin and quiet and is known as 'weedy Wendy' and 'weepy Wendy', especially by the awful Simon McTavish. Her decision to take Grandad's pet snake Slinky to feature in the class Interesting Things Exhibition inevitably leads to problems but all is resolved happily - including the trouble with Simon.

Spike's Specs (ill. Anthony Lewis, 0 434 97809 4, £3.99) is a fine debut by Elizabeth Dale. Spike, banned from the school soccer team, is forced to attend the Brownie jumble sale with Mum. It's as full of stupid, giggly girls as he feared but he does find the tatty denim jacket of his dreams in the pocket of which are the specs of the title. They enable him to detect lies from truth. After a strong opening (including some marvellous bargaining with a shrewd Brownie) it falls away rather into a fairly predictable 'crook-catching' caper but this is surely an author to look out for.

Tony Ross's distinctive style of drawing adds a lot of the humour to Lindsay Camp's **Cabbages from Outer Space** (Andersen 'Tigers', 0 86264 486 0, £4.99). Emma is addicted to computer games so when Uncle Richard brings her a Mini Max Double X Personal Entertainment System (a Gameboy by any other name) she's able to play in bed, on the loo, eating her breakfast and to and from school. She's so engrossed in the game on her way home from Rebecca's, she doesn't realise she's being tracked by real aliens who are then attacked by the dreaded Thargons. As the text takes us through the various levels of the game involving Cosmic Cabbages and Sonic Shredders the pictures show us Emma's unwitting role in this galactic battle.

Dick King-Smith scores again with **Mr Potter's Pet** (Viking 'Kites', 0 670 84256 7, £5.99) illustrated by Hilda Offen.

50-year-old Peter Potter is finally rid of his domineering parents thanks to food poisoning brought on by a dicey tin of dressed crab. At last he can satisfy his craving for a pet - in this case a Greater Indian Hill-Mynah he names Everest. Now this bird can talk - and I mean *talk*. When he hears about Peter's dismal life so far, he decides to take him under his wing. A lot of the dialogue between man and bird is hilarious and there's a nicely old-fashioned resolution as Peter re-discovers his long-lost childhood sweetheart.

Annie Dalton's **Ugly Mug** (ill. Kate Aldous, Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope?', 0 241 13377, £5.50) is also a bird; a fledgling sparrow discovered by Ned one rainy day in a shop doorway. Ned is having a tough time. Grandad has died, Mum and Dad have split up and it seems as though nothing will ever be the same again. A weekend at Dad's new flat turns out to be a disaster - no furniture, a black-and-white TV, someone downstairs called Gretta who seems to be important in Dad's life and beefburgers for tea when Ned is now a vegetarian. The bird acts as a healing agent as Ned re-establishes his relationship with Dad and Gretta, who's not at all what Ned assumed, teaching him that 'The best changes always make the world a *bigger* place, with *more* happiness for everyone, not less?.

And finally a few issues ago I suggested we might see the re-appearance of Littlest, the Echinodin hatched out by Olly and Elly. Well here he is in Terrance Dicks's **Littlest on Guard** (ill. Bethan Matthews, Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle?', 0 241 13383 1, £4.50). Would that my pools predictions were so accurate.

Page Number:

11

Source URL (retrieved on Oct '21): <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/88/childrens-books/articles/other-articles/series-titles-reviews>

Links:

[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/steve-rosson>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/88>