

opening extract from

the ultimate teen book guide

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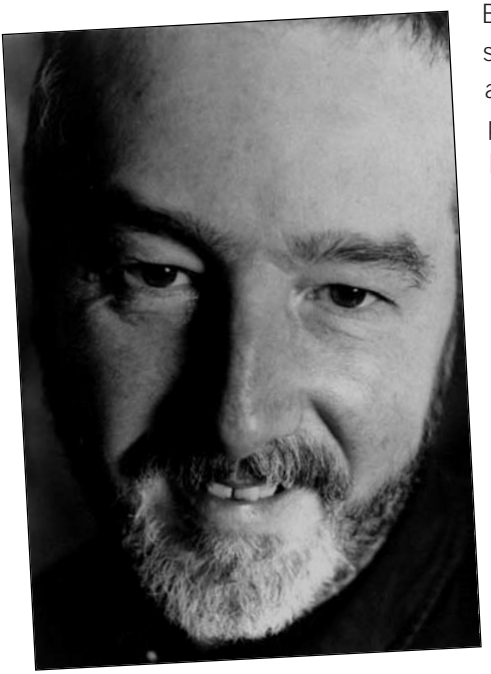
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Introduction

by David Almond



Books. There they are lined up on shelves or stacked on a table. There they are wrapped in their jackets, lines of neat print on nicely bound pages. They look like such orderly, static things. Then you, the reader, come along. You open the book jacket, and it can be like opening the gates into an unknown city, or opening the lid on a treasure chest. You read the first word and you're off on a journey of exploration and discovery. When you find your own best books, which might be nothing like the best books for other readers, a kind of magic occurs. The language and the story and your own imagination blend and react and fizz with life and possibility. Sometimes it's like the book was written just for you, as if it's been waiting just for you, its perfect reader. It doesn't always happen, of course. Sometimes a book will fall flat for you. What's all the fuss about? you'll ask. But then you'll find another one that excites you, that speaks clearly to you, that sets up weird resonances in you. It goes on happening all through your life. It's happening to me now, this week, as I read Yukio Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*. Why have I waited till now to read this wonderful book? Because I've been reading other books, of course.

Reading is a lifelong adventure. Mishima's is just the latest in a long line of books that have gripped me. Other recent highlights include Sarah Waters' hypnotic narratives, and the novels of Ha Jin. In my teenage years? Two out-of-print books: *The Grey Pilot* by Angus MacVicar that took me from my Tyneside home to flee through the Western Isles with Bonny Prince Charlie;

and *The Adventures of Turkey* by Ray Harris that allowed me to share the adventures of a Huckleberry Finn-ish Australian lad. Then John Wyndham's marvellous *The Day of the Triffids* (UTBG 96) followed quickly by his *The Chrysalids* (UTBG 77), *The Midwich Cuckoos*, *The Kraken Wakes*, as I discovered the excitement of exploring an author's whole oeuvre for the first time. Next an astonishing book called *The Third Eye* by the ex-Tibetan monk T. Lobsang Rampa. For a time I felt that I was Lobsang in some weird way. Then he turned out to be a bloke from Essex. Did I care? Not a bit. His book had worked its magic on me. The 'hoax' was just another part of that magic. Then Hemingway came along. I remember pulling out a collection of his short stories from the library shelf, opening the book, reading the first line of a story called 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place', a story in which hardly anything seems to happen, but which set up resonances inside me that have never stopped. Then Stevie Smith's poems, and Sylvia Plath's, and Kafka, and so it went on and so it goes on.

The wonderful book that you're holding in your hands now is a kind of traveller's guide. It points you to many sidetracks and highlights and landmarks that other travellers have found worth visiting. Many of them will be as exciting to you as they were to the folk who recommend them. Others might not be. The world of books is almost limitless. As you travel, you'll hit upon your own best books, the books that have a particular fascination and excitement for you. You'll keep moving on, free to roam and explore and discover at will…

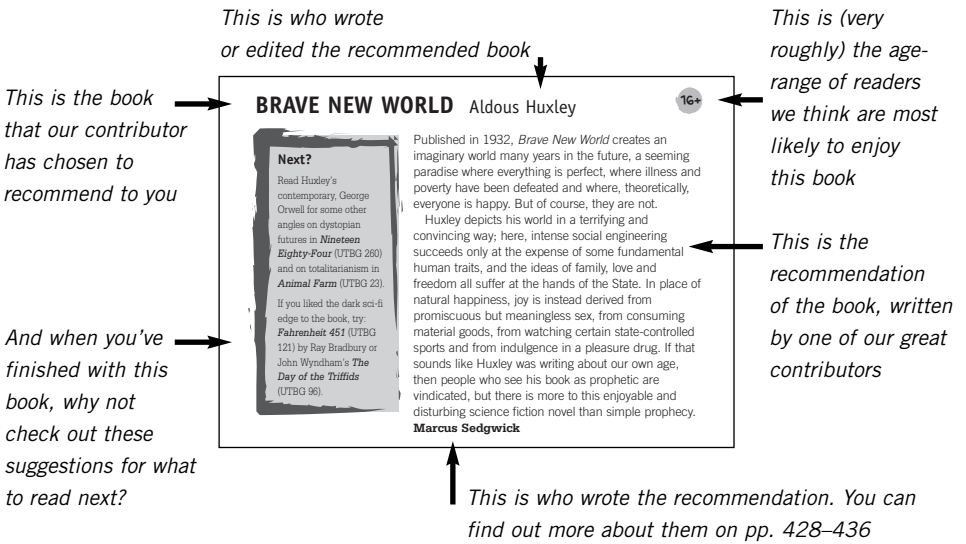


David Almond

How to Use This Book

You'll find that the majority of this book is self-explanatory, and we hope you'll find it easy to use. But here's a bit of help just in case…

Most of *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* is made up of book recommendations. Our team of contributors has recommended over 700 books for you, so there's bound to be stuff you'll like, whatever your tastes. The book recommendations are listed alphabetically by title, and they work like this:



The Next? box gives you ideas of what you might like to read once you've finished the recommended book. It might include other books by the same author, or books which are funny / exciting / inspiring / terrifying in the same way as the book you've just finished, or which deal with a similar subject in a different way. The letters UTBG mean the book to read next has a recommendation in *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* too, which you can find on the page indicated. For example, if you see…

> For another powerful tale of fighting racial prejudice in the American South, read Harper Lee's classic ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** (UTBG 375).

…then you can turn to p. 375 to read about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and decide whether it might be just the book for you.

There are also 13 short features on particular types of book – on fantasy, on historical fiction, on books about love and sex, on horror stories, on sci-fi, etc. If you have a favourite genre of book, you'll find lots of good suggestions about what to read here. Or if you fancy trying something in a genre you don't know much about ('Hmm, I've never really read much fantasy…') the features will give you a good idea of where to start. You'll find a list of these features on p. 3.

The features are all written by experts in the field – usually people who write that kind of book themselves (Catherine Fisher on fantasy, Bali Rai on race, Kevin Brooks on stories about characters going off the rails, K.K. Beck on detective stories). If you want a short and snappy title to start off with – something not too challenging, that will grip you from the first line – Pete Johnson has some great suggestions for you on p. 418. And next to them you'll find lists of relevant titles, most of which you can read about elsewhere in *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide*.

Finally, you'll come across reviews by winners of our schools' competition, the results of our nationwide teen readers' poll (for which, full details of every book can be found on our website: www.ultimatebookguide.com), and all sorts of other bits and pieces…

About the Editors

Since editing *The Ultimate Book Guide* in 2004, **DANIEL HAHN** has curated two exhibitions, lived in Germany, edited a book about the Globe Theatre, translated quite a lot and started writing a new book (as well as putting together this second *UBG*). He's also done little bits of teaching, organised a couple of charity fund-raisers, and, you know, other things like that. As you can see, he's still got no intention of getting a proper job.

LEONIE FLYNN lives surrounded by boxes. Usually she lives surrounded by books, but moving has put paid to that. When not writing, staring at boxes or being heartlessly cruel to young boys (she's a librarian at a school) she attempts to read every book she reads about and to write every story she imagines. Actually, she fails at both, but still manages to remain remarkably cheerful.

SUSAN REUBEN is senior publisher at Egmont Books. Four days before *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* was due to be delivered to the publishers she delivered her first child: Isaac Harry. Any errors and omissions in this volume may be blamed on that. When not feeding her baby, Susan enjoys sleeping.

1066 AND ALL THAT

12+

W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman

This wickedly funny skit on British history, written by a teacher and an ad man in 1930, is every bit as effective today. It's not just the puns on names, so bad they're positively brilliant (the Egberts, Ethelwulfs and Ethelbalds become Eggberd, Eggbreth and Eggfroth). It's not just the wry recognition that the grand old tales are mostly bunk, and the great old triumphs (a.k.a. the massacre of other civilisations) look a little different now. It's not even the fake test papers ('Why do you picture John of Gaunt as a rather emaciated grandee?'). No – it's the fact that truth really is stranger than fiction, and that this is the kind of 'nonsense' that actually makes more and more sense, the more you know about history.

Sarah Gristwood

Next?

For the same off-beat humour, try the classic school story ***Down With Skool!*** (UTBG 110).

Or George Mikes' guide to being British, ***How to Be an Alien***.

Watch ***Blackadder*** on TV, especially series two and three – and read the scripts; they're hilarious, too.

THE 13½ LIVES OF CAPTAIN BLUEBEAR

14+

Walter Moers

Next?

Someone else who writes extraordinary fantasy is Terry Pratchett; try ***The Colour of Magic***.

Life of Pi (UTBG 218) is a strange story involving a lifeboat, a hyena, a monkey, a tiger and a boy.

A whole life encapsulated in one book? Try Raymond Briggs' ***Ethel and Ernest*** (UTBG 118).

'People usually start life by being born. Not me, though.'

From the first page you are catapulted into a world that is just so refreshingly *different*: full of Hobgoblins, Minipirates, a headless Bollogg, a Bolloggless head, Nocturnomaths and many other weird and wonderful creatures (including, of course, blue bears).

This book covers Bluebear's adventures starting with his rescue from a dreaded whirlpool, as a baby floating in a nutshell, through 12 eventful lives, to his final half-life 'at peace', and holds you entranced throughout.

Not only does this book cater for many genres, from sci-fi to romance, but it also travels at such a fast-moving pace that you will sail through it like a jet-propelled sponge through a sea of information.

Samuel Mortimer (aged 11)

52 PICK-UP Elmore Leonard

14+

The difficulty with an author like Elmore Leonard is he's written so many books – all, by and large, never less than very good – that it's almost too hard to choose which one to point to and say '*that*'s the one you should read!'. In the end I plumped for *52 Pick-up* for no particular reason except that I read it ages ago and still clearly remember it. Like every Leonard book, this one is tightly plotted, has razor-sharp dialogue and comes with a real sting in the tail; it's a thriller, it's about blackmail and revenge and it's very cool.

People often look down on crime fiction as being somehow less than literature, but this book has style, class and a great story. What more could you want?

Graham Marks

Next?

The films ***Get Shorty*** and ***Jackie Brown*** were both based on books by Elmore Leonard – why not read the originals?

Lots of films have been made of Raymond Chandler's books too; try ***The Big Sleep*** (UTBG 40) or ***Farewell, My Lovely***.

Carl Hiaasen's books are also set in Florida; try ***Hoot*** (UTBG 175) or ***Tourist Season*** (UTBG 377).

And have a look at our feature on detective fiction on pp. 104–105.

84 CHARING CROSS ROAD Helene Hanff

12+

Next?

Helene Hanff's ***The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*** is a sequel to ***84 Charing Cross Road***. ***Apple of My Eye*** is about her native New York and ***Q's Legacy*** is about her education in English literature.

Anne Fadiman's ***Ex Libris*** charts a lifelong love affair with books.

A Particular Friendship by Dirk Bogarde charts another friendship between two people who never met.

84 Charing Cross Road is a collection of letters exchanged between down-to-earth New York writer Helene Hanff and London bookseller Frank Doel between 1949 and 1969. Miss Hanff, who had a passion for obscure and out-of-print books, initially wrote to Marks & Co, a bookshop at 84 Charing Cross Road, with a list of second-hand books she would like, if they could supply them, so long as they didn't cost more than $5 each. Mr Doel replied, saying that they had managed to find some of the items on her list and were sending them on, with an invoice.

Thus a wonderful correspondence and a 20-year association began. Rereading a few of the letters today I was captivated all over again – this is one of the most delightful books ever published.

Michael Lawrence