



Series Titles

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[Steve Rosson](#) [1]

[86](#) [2]

Article Category:

Other Articles

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In all the adverts A & C Black tell us that their new series 'Chillers' is for 7-9 year-olds but they are wise to use the phrase 'for young readers' on the back of the books as, on the evidence of the first four, they will entertain well into the secondary age range. I particularly liked Mick Gowar's **Jimmy Woods and the Big Bad Wolf** (0 7136 3757 6, £5.50). Jimmy is a nasty little toe-rag who bullies all the kids in the neighbourhood until a chance encounter with our nameless narrator's German Shepherd, Prince, reveals his fear of big dogs and he branches out into terrorising Granny Timpson across the road. The narrator and his big sister, Debbie, save the day using Prince's ability to sit motionless and his violent reaction to a dog whistle. The adult characters, especially, are eminently believable - mum and dad are less than sympathetic to the boy's complaints about being bullied and Granny Timpson is a cantankerous old soul who is terrified of being put in a home.

Barry Wilkinson's realistic style of illustration will satisfy older readers and there are some fine, gloomy double-page spreads in Granny's house.

Conversely, it's the cartoon-style illustration in **The Real Porky Philips** by Mark Haddon (A & C Black 'Chillers', 0 7136 3756 0, £5.50) that might interest its readership.

This would be a shame as it's an interesting tale with some nicely observed family detail. Martin, or Porky, is a retiring lad who 'liked things quiet and simple', so when he's dragooned into being the genie in the school panto he can't help wishing he could fade away into thin air. This is the cue for the arrival on the scene of Martin's doppelganger - a Martin who puts burgers down snotty kids' trousers, who scores brilliant goals in the park, who joins the swimming club, who actually makes his sister laugh. In fact, a Martin with 'oomph'. Needless to say the real Martin triumphs in the end through his realisation that confidence is all and he just needs to 'go for it'. I was left, though, with the niggling thought that the world would be a very tiring place if we had too many 'laddish' lads like the new 'improved' Martin.

Blackie Bears are for 'beginner readers of 6 and up' but **Luke's Dog** by Linda Jennings (0 216 94045 1, £4.50) will please many older, less sophisticated readers. Luke's life is full of uncertainty when the landlady has a stroke and the house where he and Mum have a flat is put up for sale. While Mum has to cope with the practicalities of showing round prospective buyers and getting put on the council waiting list, Luke's only concern is that he will not be separated from his Cavalier King Charles spaniel, Rosita. There's a happy ending, with a lovely, warm concluding sketch from illustrator Jacqui Thomas, but just enough anxiety and heartache along the long way.

Puffin's 'ready, steady, read!' series has another hit with Leon Rosselson's **Swim, Sam, Swim** (0 14 036552 4, £3.50 pbk), illustrated by Anthony Lewis. 'Sam looks glum. He can't swim. Whoever heard of a frog that can't swim?' Well,

there he sits on the opening page in his stripy trunks and water wings and, despite all the best endeavours of instructors, mum and dad, Sam does not learn to swim. 'Swim, Sam, swim,' they all say over and over again. 'Just do what I do. Move your arms like this and your legs like this. It's easy.' My own boys are well past the swimming lessons stage but it brought back vivid memories for me and I'm sure many of the youngsters who pick up this book will find their own experiences reflected here every time Sam 'moves his arms like this and his legs like this, sinks to the bottom, gulps down a bucketful of water and comes up spluttering'. A genuinely funny read.

I'm not a 'doggie' person so you'll have to forgive me if I can't get too excited about a poodle being left 15 million smackeroos by its owner - no, sorry, mustn't say 'it', nearly caused a family row once by referring to a dog as 'it' - in **A Fortune for Yo-Yo** (Orchard 'Animal Crackers', 185213 583 2, £5.99) by Rose Impey with illustrations by Shoo Rayner. Indeed I found myself siding with the dastardly butler and maid as they dream up increasingly more fiendish ways of ridding themselves of this pampered mutt.

Yo-Yo, of course, is able to foil all their plans and the lugubrious pair end up behind bars to be replaced by what look like a couple of grinning presenters from children's TV. A shame, I call it. Prejudices aside, here's another really good book from this series with simple text and *very* funny pictures. It's sure to go down well with youngsters who, for some strange reason, seem to find dogs attractive.

Page Number:

8

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Links:

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