



# The Best Stories of 2004

[151](#) [1]

Article Category:

Other Articles

Byline:

Librarians and booksellers recommend their top titles.

2004 was another strong year for children's publishing with fiction (particularly fantasy titles) and novels for older readers to the fore. But which were the highlights? **BfK** invites enthusiastic and knowledgeable children's librarians and booksellers to choose their top title of the past year.<!--break-->

## **Annie Everall, Service Manager, Young People & Policy Development, Derbyshire Libraries & Heritage Division, chooses?**

This is a wonderful collection of stories in verse. It includes a mixture of old and new, traditional and modern from the rhythm of Tony Mitton's 'Bad Boy Rap' and the humour of Roald Dahl's 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' to the taut atmosphere of Henry Longfellow's 'Paul Revere's Ride' and the warm familiarity of Clement Moore's 'A Visit from St Nicholas'. Each poem is championed by a leading children's author (including J K Rowling). Reading this, I felt I was on a journey that I didn't want to end, as I kept discovering old favourites that came to life in new ways. This book is a real gem, that itches to be read aloud, as well as offering a rich individual reading experience that teaches much about the magic and power of storytelling. It's a book that I know I will return to again and again.

**Once Upon a Poem**, foreword by Kevin Crossley-Holland, ill. Peter Bailey, Siân Bailey, Chris McEwan and Carol Lawson (Chicken House, 1 904442 31 5, £14.99). For 6-11 year olds.

## **Louise Grieve, Children's Bookseller, Waterstone's West-end, Edinburgh, chooses?**

 I am a huge fan of Cornelia Funke's work and **Dragon Rider** didn't disappoint. It is one of my favourite books of 2004 due to its gripping adventure story that is enthralling to read. I especially liked that it is aimed towards younger readers. Despite being a hefty 500-plus pages, it is still highly accessible to this younger age group with its fast paced narrative and extras, such as the fold out map! **Dragon Rider** absorbed me from start to finish with its menagerie of fantastical creatures and globe spanning settings. I'm excited to see what Cornelia holds for 2005.

**Dragon Rider** by Cornelia Funke (Chicken House, 1 903434 90 4, £12.99). For 8-12 year olds.

**Rosemary Hetherington, Librarian, Children's and Schools' Section, Dublin City Council Public, chooses?**

I approached the reading of **The Star of Kazan** with keen anticipation, high expectations and a degree of trepidation. Would I enjoy it as much as I had enjoyed **Journey to the River Sea**? I was not disappointed. A child's longing to find her birth mother is not an unusual theme in children's books but set the story in Vienna, in the early years of the nineteenth century, blend in a remarkable cast of child and adult characters, an intricate plot, a daring rescue involving a large harp, add a boy and a horse, and you have all the ingredients for an enthralling, absorbing and exciting read. Though the story is ultimately predictable in its resolution, the journey to that resolution is full of surprises. The many strands of the plot are deftly woven together but it is the love, friendship, loyalty and courage shown by the principal characters, which gives the story an enduring appeal.

**The Star of Kazan** by Eva Ibbotson (Macmillan, 1 4050 2054 7, £12.99, paperback in May 2005 ? 0 330 41802 5, £5.99). For 8-10 year olds.

**Liz Weighell, Children's and Youth Service Manager, Hampshire Library and Information Service, chooses?**

What would you do if you discovered that the bear you'd found in a skip outside a charity shop, is worth a fortune? And your dad's business had just lost a major contract and your family really needed the money? This is a wonderful story, set against the backdrop of family life, friendship and first romance with Joel and his bear, Horace, taking centre stage. When it emerges that there is more to Horace than his value, Joel has some difficult decisions to make. There is lots to talk about here ? the power of money, honesty, relationships and families ? but its real strength is that it's such a good read. Joel's family is brought to life and they are depicted as ordinary people with the everyday worries and stresses familiar to us all. The characters are so real that you care about what happens to them, and you want it all to work out in the end. And it does.

**Horace** by Chris d'Lacey (Corgi Yearling, 0 440 86445 3, £4.99 pbk). For 8+.

**John Webb, Children's Buyer, Waterstone's, chooses?**

I'm a huge fan of the Edge Chronicles, so I had to choose **Freeglader** as my pick of 2004. It is the seventh in the series, continuing the adventures of Rook Barkwater as he leads a rag-tag band from the ruins of New Undertown in an escape to a new life in the Free Glades. The journey is dangerous, and the Free Glades may not be free for very long if the goblins have their way...

The Edge Chronicles are great for reluctant readers, especially boys, and it's easy to see why. Paul Stewart's pacy, exciting text hooks the reader, and is enhanced by Chris Riddell's glorious illustrations. This latest instalment has a darker tone, as the Edgeworlds descend into war, and Chris has turned out some of his best art of the series to match this. The shrykes are truly scary, but I particularly loved the Freeglade Lancers charging into battle on their mighty prowlgrims! I can't wait for Book 8...

**Freerider** by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell (Doubleday, 0 385 60462 9, £12.99). For 10-14 year olds.

**Wayne Winstone, Children's and Non Book Director, Ottakar's, chooses?**

✘ This is a marvellous book about a pre-history tribe of hunter gatherers fighting for survival against supernatural forces. The main character Toriq (a young boy) loses his father to a terrifying bear and then goes on a journey where he slowly unravels his heritage and the special powers that have been passed on to him by his parents. Central to this is his ability to communicate to wolves. The story gathers pace very quickly evoking a tremendous sense of place with the mystery of the forest taking a pivotal role. The research into this book is such that you are easily drawn into the story and can get a tremendous feel of what the characters are experiencing throughout their adventures. After reading this we arranged for books to be sent out to all our buyers. The enthusiasm was echoed by the stores and we managed to sell 12,500 copies.

This was the book I enjoyed most in 2004 and I am eagerly looking forward to the next in the series.

**Wolf Brother** by Michelle Paver (Orion, 1 84255 170 1, £8.99). For 10-14 year olds.

**Jenny Wild, Children's Manager, Ottakar's Bookshop, Buchanan Galleries, Glasgow, chooses?**

✘ **Dance of the Assassins** begins in 19th-century London with the gruesome murder of Mary Graham creating fears that Jack the Ripper has returned. However this is not real London but a virtual city designed as a tourist attraction which is meant to be crime free! Therefore someone is responsible for creating this virtual evil which is corrupting the ideal. It falls to a witch, Roberta Morgenstern, and her police assistant, Clement Martineau, to combine sorcery and detective work to trace the culprit. Peopled with fascinating characters, this is a thrilling tale drawing the reader into the realms of futuristic fantasy and history as they follow the trail through various virtual eras and cities. It is an unusual and beautifully written story and my favourite children's book of 2004. I am eagerly awaiting the follow-up, **Devil's Tango**, which is due in April.

**Dance of the Assassins** by Hervé Jubert (Hodder, 0 340 87538 0, £6.99 pbk). For 12-16 year olds.

**Rachel Maskelyne, Community Librarian: Children & Young People, Wokingham District Council, chooses?**

✘ It is 17 days before England adopts the Euro and the pound sterling becomes obsolete. Eight-year-old Damian sees a bag stuffed with £229,370 worth of pound notes fall from the sky. He thinks it is a gift from God, an answer to his prayers. In a hilarious caper, he and brother Anthony race to spend the cash, then hide the stash from Dad. Interlaced with the jollity of having to rid himself of so much money is the acute pain that Damian suffers from his mother's recent death. He is obsessed with saints, having visions and visitations of all sorts throughout the novel. The narration is utterly convincing as the voice of a bewildered young boy struggling to make sense of the often confusing world around him. This is a wonderfully crafted story, written with such humour and poignancy that it must be considered one of the simultaneously funniest and most touching novels of 2004.

**Millions** by Frank Cottrell Boyce (Macmillan, 0 330 43331 8, £5.99 pbk). For 10-14 year olds.

**Lesley Agnew, owner and manager of the Children's Bookshop, Muswell Hill, North London, chooses?**

This is a compellingly perceptive first novel, with an engaging and memorable narrator. 15-year-old Daisy is sent from America to stay with her four English cousins, taking her from a markedly urban to a totally rural environment. She is anorexic and dislikes her father's pregnant girlfriend; yet this is by no means just a 'teenage issues' book. Initial expectations of Daisy's and the readers' of idyllic teenage romancing are broken by news of a terrorist outrage followed by oppressive emergency measures. As the story darkens further, Daisy, with her cousins, has to go on the run. Their experiences under conditions of occupation and war give strong messages about survival under oppression. Daisy's very personal narrative style brings out how she herself responds and develops, discovering new resources of inner strength. This moving story while seemingly set in a near future is, in essence, dramatically apposite to any time of oppression or social breakdown.

**How I Live Now** by Meg Rosoff (Penguin, 0 14 138075 6, £12.99). For 12-16 year olds.

**Kathy Lemaire, Chief Executive of The School Library Association, chooses?**

This final book in the Tales of the Otori trilogy which began with **Across the Nightingale Floor** takes the hero, Otori Takeo, as he struggles to regain his inheritance and bring peace to his lands, from a young eager boy to a battle-scarred man. It is a great story, told with a light touch, which encounters but does not dwell too long on battles and cruelty, sex and hate, and spiritual and philosophical mores. It is also a love story. But **Brilliance of the Moon** is much more than this. Hearn's simple but poetic language engages all the reader's senses in a vivid portrayal of the Japanese countryside and people. She portrays the clash of cultures and beliefs as different racial and faith groups encounter one another. Her characters learn from their life experiences, changing their views and actions and surprising the reader when they act like real people.

**Brilliance of the Moon** by Lian Hearn (Macmillan, 1 4050 4135 8, £12.99, Young Picador paperback in April 2005 ? 0 330 41350 3, £6.99). For 14+.

[bestonceuponapoem.jpg](#) [2]

[bestonceuponapoem.jpg](#) [3]

[bestdragonrider.jpg](#) [4]

[beststarofkazan.jpg](#) [5]

[besthorace.jpg](#) [6]

[bestfreeglader.jpg](#) [7]

[bestwolfbrother.jpg](#) [8]

[bestdanceofassasins.jpg](#) [9]

[bestmillions.jpg](#) [10]

[besthowilivenow.jpg](#)

[11]



[bestbrilliancemoon.jpg](#) [12]

Page Number:

6

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Feb '20):** <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/151/childrens-books/articles/other-articles/the-best-stories-of-2004>

**Links:**

- [1] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/151>
- [2] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestonceuponapoem.jpg>
- [3] [http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestonceuponapoem\\_0.jpg](http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestonceuponapoem_0.jpg)
- [4] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestdragonrider.jpg>
- [5] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/beststarofkazan.jpg>
- [6] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/besthorace.jpg>
- [7] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestfreeglader.jpg>
- [8] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestwolfbrother.jpg>
- [9] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestdanceofassasins.jpg>
- [10] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestmillions.jpg>
- [11] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/besthowilivenow.jpg>
- [12] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/bestbrilliancemoon.jpg>