



## Series Titles - January 1996

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?Cartwheels? continue with their bright and breezy approach and in the latest batch Robert Leeson brings us a cautionary fairy tale called **Geraldine Gets Lucky** (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 00234 6, £5.99, ill. Susie Poole). Our heroine is a frog who dreams of finding a handsome prince who will kiss her... etc. Despite the mockery of other frogs she sets off in pursuit, escapes the predatory intentions of a pike, a crow and a snake and duly finds her prince who is everything she imagined *mais malheureusement* the prince is French and we all know what Frenchmen like to do with frogs, don't we, boys and girls? With a hop she?s off, back past the snake, the crow and the pike to the safety of the lily pad where she steadfastly refuses to be put down by the mockers. All good fun with lots of links to more traditional tales.

In the fullness of time Diana Hendry?s *The Thing-in-a-Box* has grown up enough to become **The Thing-on-two-Legs** (A & C Black ?Jets?, 0 7136 4262 9, £5.50, ill. Sue Heap) and is still an object of some wonder to Mulligan, the family?s dog. Seamus can now burble and gurgle, bounce in his baby bouncer and sometimes lay on the floor and wave his legs about. ?But that was all he did. It was quite beyond Mulligan to understand why Mr and Mrs Dembo thought Seamus was so very, very wonderful.? We follow Seamus through the crawling stage and onto his first few tottering steps. This is the end as far as Mulligan is concerned as the days of Proper Walks seem to be over forever. ?It could take an hour to get to the end of the road and by then Mulligan, who had also walked VERY VERY SLOWLY, was just about ready to burst with unspent energy. He wanted to run and race, spin and speed, pounce and bounce, scramble and ramble, rush and dash. Instead it was one paw two paws three paws four, VERY SLOWLY like that.? A happy ending is assured, though, as Mulligan makes the acquaintance of Mr Linden and Gary the labrador. A delight from start to finish.

A Sikh wedding is the setting for **Sister of the Bride** by Lisa Bruce with illustrations by Duncan Smith (Heinemann ?Banana?, 0 434 97211 8, £4.99). Jassy?s house is knee-deep in relatives for sister Manjit?s wedding day. Amid the hustle and bustle poor Jassy is saddled with looking after naughty little Rajinder and when the keys to the wedding car go astray she has to take the blame. It seems that nothing can go right until, sent out of the gurdwara ceremony with a bout of the hiccups, Jassy discovers a fire in the kitchen, raises the alarm and saves the day. It?s encouraging to see another book featuring Asian family life, but I feel it leans a little too heavily in the direction of presenting information about Sikh wedding customs rather in the style of some ?faction? books that are available; a feeling that grew stronger when I saw the glossary at the end.

Emma has been told to expect a prize in a competition so when a van arrives and deposits a large crate on her doorstep what is she to think? It?s only after the delivery men have gone that she opens the crate to find **Emma?s Emu** (Hamish Hamilton ?Gazelle?, 0 241 13559 1, £4.99) by Kenneth Oppel, illustrated by Caroline Crossland. Of course there has been a big mistake, involving Emma?s address being remarkably similar to that of the nearby Safari Park. None of the

adults approached will listen so Emma and Howie next door have to take things into their own hands. A lively tale in which I particularly enjoyed the havoc caused by the emu on its release from the crate, including the memorable sentence 'Then, with a flamboyant rustling of its feathers, it pooped enthusiastically on the carpet.'

There is a much more serious tone to **The Skeleton Club** (Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope', 0 241 13489 7, £5.99) by Catherine Sefton, illustrated by Maureen Bradley. This is a tale of bullying and protection rackets in an Irish village school. Jerome, the biggest kid in the school, rules the roost with the aid of a couple of henchmen and a couple of hangers-on, one of whom, Conor Doran, tells the story. The arrival of a new kid is yet another opportunity for the club to show its muscle. This time, though, the other kids have had enough and, led by Conor's cousin Big Annie, the silent majority stand up for the oppressed. Here's one for more mature readers both in terms of its subject matter and its Irish idioms and speech patterns.

Finally, 'Chillers' from A & C Black seem to have been an opportunity lost. Claiming to be 'a series of thrillers, ghost stories and mysteries for young readers' they don't appear to have been able to get away from the humorous approach that proved so successful in 'Jets'. Of their new set, one which does at least try to chill, and has nicely atmospheric and realistic illustrations, is **Ghost from the Sea** (0 7136 4090 1, £5.50) by Eleanor Allen, illustrated by Leanna Franson. Only Clare can smell the awful stench in the bedroom of their Cornish holiday cottage, only Clare can see the old sea-dog asleep on the bed, but a visit to the local lifeboat station helps explain his presence and gives her the chance to free his spirit.

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