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LITERARY REVIEW

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 1

REVIEW EDITORS
GEORGE BURTON, JACOB BARNETT, OLIVER MILNES AND COLE FOXTON



Welcome!

To the Wickersley Partnership Trust Literary Review

We are proud to present the first edition of the WPT Literary Review - written word from students across our schools. This publication brings together personal reflections, and critical essays that showcase the talent and unique voices of our young writers.

Through this review, we aim to inspire a love of literature, give students a platform to express themselves, and highlight the power of storytelling. Every piece included has been chosen for its originality, insight, and ability to spark thought.

Whether you're here to explore new perspectives or simply enjoy some fantastic writing, we hope you find something that resonates with you.

Thank you for reading - and welcome to our literary world.

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LITTLE WOMEN

Author: Louisa May-Alcott

This timeless classic by Louisa May Alcott follows four American sisters over the course of a year; published in 1868. Follow their tale, seeing them through sorrow, joy and anguish. A heartwarming tale like this is perfect for a relaxing read or personal advice on life through Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy's trials whilst their father is away at war.

Personally, I enjoyed reading about the character Jo, as I can reflect on her character in depth. At the start of the book, Jo is boyish, wild and unladylike, but throughout the plot she matures to think about her future and become more selfless than ever. I feel that this change could have been caused by the near loss of her dear sister Beth, or how each sister turns towards religion, trying their best to follow their pilgrim's progress, by influence of their Marmee. I find this change interesting to read, as it represents growing up accurately.

Other interesting characters are Laurie and his grandfather, who are both rich but argue constantly. Their relationship can threaten to be violent at times, but the March sisters, especially Jo and Beth, help them out of these situations, each March sister with their preferred friend.

In the story, Laurie begs to be a musician and pursue this side of himself; however, this pains his grandfather as it reminds him of family members who have died and Laurie's own parents, especially his father, who abandoned him when he became a musician. Instead, Mr Laurence wants Laurie to go to college to study.

Overall, I think that this is a book many should read, as it holds lots of advice on controlling anger, selflessness and choosing right over wrong, as well as offering a comfortable, enjoyable read. If you enjoy this book, I would continue to the second volume of *Little Women* called *Good Wives*, or watch one of the many films that combine both volumes of the story.

Reviewed by
Sophia Skalycz



LOOSE HEAD

Author: Joe Marler

Joe Marler's *Loose Head* is an entertaining and insightful autobiography that provides a raw and honest look into the life of one of rugby's most charismatic and unpredictable figures. Known for his humour and no-nonsense attitude on and off the pitch, Marler brings that same energy to his writing, creating a book that is as engaging as it is revealing.

One of the biggest strengths of *Loose Head* is the level of detail Marler provides when recounting his early years in rugby. From his childhood ambitions to his rise through the ranks, he paints a vivid picture of the challenges and triumphs he faced along the way. The inclusion of photographs adds an extra layer of authenticity, making these moments feel even more real and personal. His storytelling is filled with wit and self-deprecation, making it highly relatable-especially for young players who see themselves in his journey.

However, one drawback is that while Marler goes into great depth about the beginnings of his career, he doesn't offer the same level of insight when discussing his later years in the game. Given his continued presence at the top level of rugby, it would have been interesting to hear more about his recent experiences, both on the pitch and behind the scenes. This slight imbalance leaves the book feeling a little unfinished in places.

That said, *Loose Head* is still a fantastic read for rugby fans, particularly those who appreciate Marler's unique personality. It balances humour with honesty, giving a real sense of the ups and downs of professional rugby. Whether you're a long-time supporter or a young player dreaming of making it in the sport, Marler's story is both entertaining and inspiring.

Reviewed by
Cole Foxton

“One of the biggest strengths of Loose Head is the level of detail Marler provides ”

SKANDAR AND THE SKELETON CURSE

Author: A.F. Steadman

Skandar and the Skeleton Curse is the fourth book in the best-selling Skandar series by British author A.F. Steadman.

This book is about a hero who is under-appreciated by those other than his close friends, and he is judged by others for his elemental alliance, which is viewed as deadly and harmful. The main character of this book series is Skandar Smith, a young spirit-wielder training at the Eyrie: a training ground for those who are destined to be bonded with unicorns. However, these are not the unicorns that you read about in fairytales. These unicorns are trained to wield powerful magic alongside their rider that, if used to wreak chaos, could tear the Island apart forever. Other key characters in this series are Mitchell Henderson, Bobby Bruna, and Florence Shekoni, the three other members of Skandar's quartet, as well as Kenna Smith, Skandar's revengeful sister. Without his quartet, Skandar would never have conquered his fears and faced his enemies to stand up for what was right.


Favourite quotes and extracts:

“Light does not equate to good. And dark does not equate to evil. There is no light without shadow, no darkness without dawn, no death without life.”

— Konrad, *Skandar and the Skeleton Curse*, page 349

This quote shows that it is the choices that we make that matter and that we are all capable of both good and bad. I also think that Steadman is warning the reader about the dangers of making assumptions and not to judge a book by its cover. The quote highlights the idea of balance – good and bad, dark and light – these cannot exist without the other. This is a theme of the book series, as Kenna (Skandar's sister) fights to find her place amongst good and evil while she battles against those who reject her for being who she is.

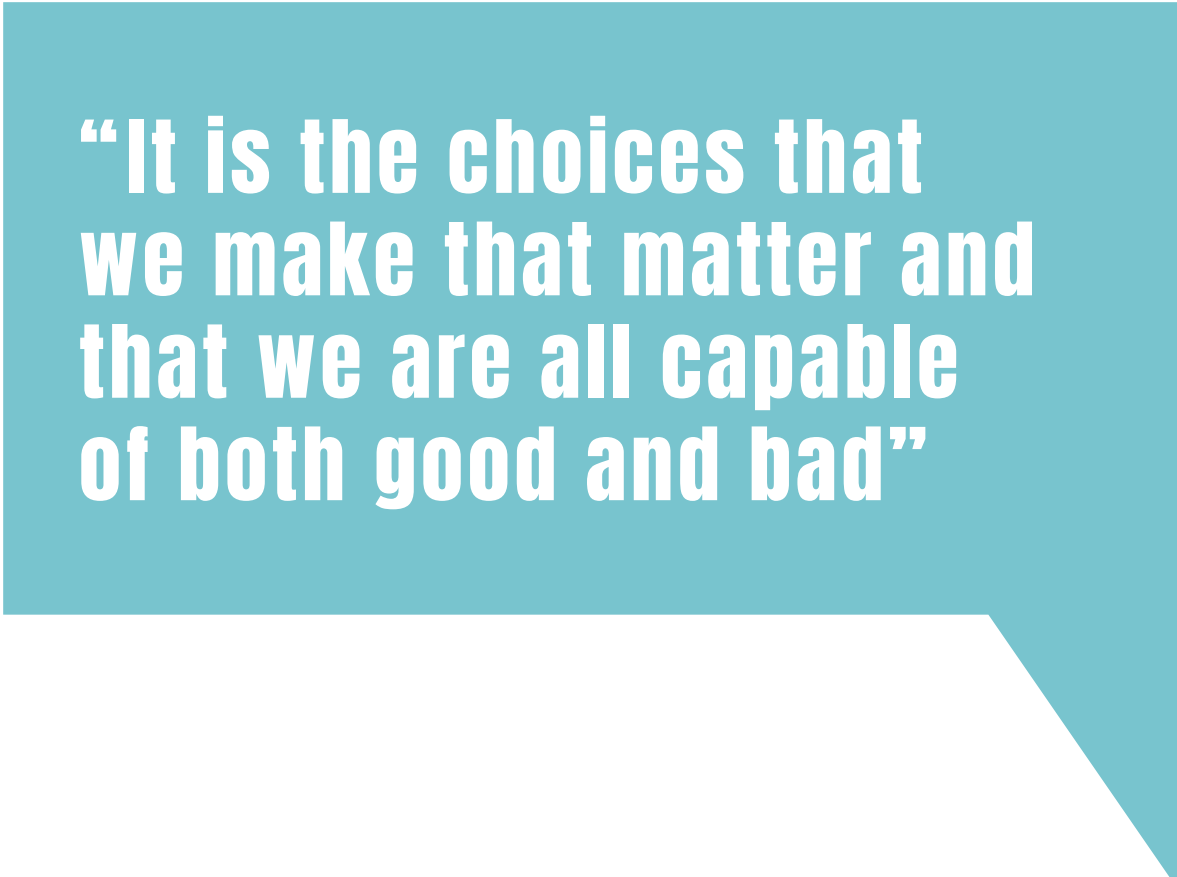




In my opinion, this book is brilliantly written, as it includes a clear description of the setting. This is because Steadman uses a lot of visual representation to create detailed and immersive scenes. Also, I think the themes of the book make it relatable; themes such as the power of friendship, love, loyalty, and courage.

I give this series of books 5 out of 5 stars because it is full of surprising turns, and I would definitely recommend this book to readers who enjoy genres like magic, adventure, and mystery, as it is full of unexpected events.

Reviewed by
Isla Tattershall



“It is the choices that we make that matter and that we are all capable of both good and bad”

HEAD KID

Author: David Baddiel

In the book, the main character, Ryan, who is extremely naughty, has pranked the old headteacher of Bracket Wood Elementary many times before. Eventually, the headteacher snaps and quits his job.

A new headteacher by the name of Mr Carter, who is very strict, is now in charge—and he has one goal in mind: to turn Bracket Wood Elementary from an inadequate rating to outstanding. He also has it in for Ryan Ward – a student who is one of the main reasons for the school's poor performance.

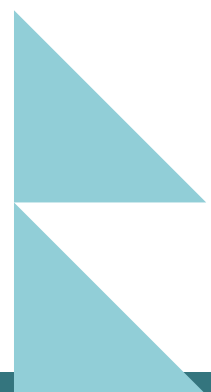
One time, Ryan Ward tries to prank the new headteacher to show him who's boss, but is sent to his office. Mr Carter then takes out a music box that he says he found under the floorboards of his office. He proceeds to scold Ryan, but in the middle of it, the music box starts playing by itself—and they both faint on the spot.

They both wake up in hospital and discover that they have switched bodies. The inspectors are coming very soon but, since Ryan Ward is now the headteacher, chaos ensues. Eventually, Mr Carter and Ryan Ward agree to help each other.

To do this, they decide to try and beat another school called Oakcroft—who are already rated outstanding—in a debate battle in front of the inspectors.

In my opinion, the book is 8 out of 10 because, even though the story is really good, the book is at times a bit slow-paced.

Reviewed by
Rehan Khan



BUNNY VS MONKEY: THE GREAT BIG GLITCH

Author: Jamie Stewart

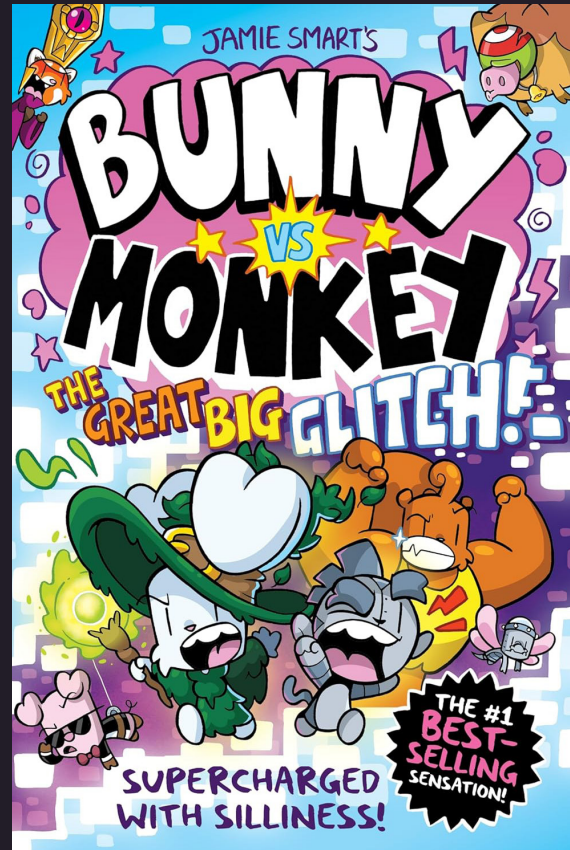
The *Bunny Vs Monkey* series is about woodland animals, namely a bunny and monkey and their team, in an endless war against one another.

The Great Big Glitch is about glitches in the woods, leading us to see that the whole storyline of books in the series is simply a simulation. When a second glitch happens, the person who made the simulation decides to go in and get evidence of it.

Unsurprisingly, the animals find out and Skunky, an evil skunk genius, gets paranoid and blows all things up, and the other animals work together to go into the land of the 'hoo-mans,' as they call them, and get the devices that the simulation master is using.

They manage to find the device the simulation master used to design their avatars, and most of them choose to change their look. At the end of the book it turns out that it was all just Bunny's dream, and yet they all remember what happens.

Reviewed by
James Freeman





AN HORATIAN ODE UPON CROMWELL'S RETURN FROM IRELAND

Poem Author: Andrew Marvell

Andrew Marvell's *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* explores the rise of Cromwell and the theme of power. It's not just a celebration of Cromwell's success; instead, it provides a more nuanced view, where Marvell seems both impressed and uneasy about Cromwell's achievements and actions.

Initially, Marvell describes Cromwell as this unstoppable, almost inhuman force. He says Cromwell "does through swords and seas / March calmly on, and still the storm doth hush," which makes Cromwell sound like he's above chaos, able to control even nature itself. The imagery of "swords and seas" highlights the danger and violence he's overcome, while the word "calmly" adds this eerie sense of purpose and creates a juxtaposition between the chaos and Cromwell's presence. It appears that Marvell admires Cromwell's composure and military power but also finds it unnerving due to his calm presence during one of the most savage battles in history.

Also, Marvell describes Cromwell's rise to power as being driven by something beyond his own control: "The same arts that did gain / A power, must it maintain." This shows that once Cromwell seized power, he had no choice but to keep using the same ruthless methods to hold onto it. It's a sharp commentary on how ambition can trap people – Cromwell might have achieved greatness, but he's also bound by it. Marvell could perhaps be showing us the cost of power, both for Cromwell and the people around him, and how this power can change people and lead them to committing atrocities like Cromwell's invasion of Ireland.

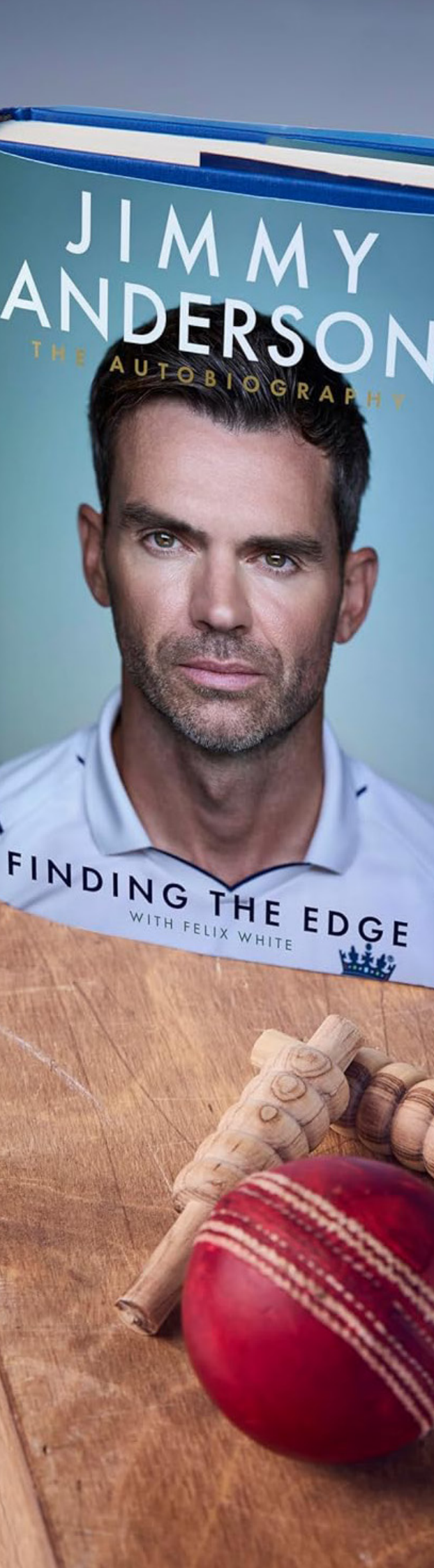
The way Marvell treats Charles I also goes against expectations. Instead of completely siding with Cromwell, he shows respect for Charles, calling him "the royal actor" who "bowed his comely head." The word "actor" is interesting because it suggests Charles was playing a role, as though he was performing his duty as king even in defeat – or perhaps suggesting he was never a true king and was simply acting as one. The phrase "comely head" makes him sound noble and dignified, even in death, which contrasts with Cromwell's ruthless energy. It feels like Marvell is torn between admiration for Cromwell's effectiveness and almost a sense of nostalgia for the loss of the old order represented by Charles.

Finally, Marvell compares Cromwell to Caesar, saying he “cast the kingdoms old / Into another mould.” This classical allusion shows how Cromwell completely reshaped England, just like Caesar reshaped Rome. But the word “cast” makes it sound like the change was forced rather than natural. It’s a reminder that this kind of transformation isn’t smooth or painless – it’s violent and disruptive, especially in the case of Cromwell. This is where Marvell really shows his ambivalence, as he recognises Cromwell’s greatness, but he doesn’t ignore the destruction that came with it. Overall, Marvell’s *Horatian Ode* is a powerful and thought-provoking poem. It captures the tension between admiration and fear, showing how complex leadership can be. The language can be complex, but the use of vivid imagery and classical references makes it worth studying. It’s not just a straightforward praise of Cromwell – it’s a balanced reflection on the costs of ambition and the nature of power, which gives a representative view of how a lot of people felt during that time in England.

4/5 stars - would recommend for people who enjoy history and want to learn more about England under Cromwell.

Reviewed by
George Burton

“It feels like Marvell is torn between admiration for Cromwell’s effectiveness”



FINDING THE EDGE

Author: James Anderson

James Anderson's *Finding the Edge* is a deeply personal autobiography that goes beyond his achievements as England's all-time leading wicket-taker. Rather than just focusing on cricketing glory, Anderson delves into his struggles with self-doubt, mental health, and the pressures of professional sport, offering an honest and relatable account of life at the top.

One of the book's greatest strengths is how it allows readers to understand Anderson's personality—his competitive edge, his moments of frustration, and his resilience. By exploring his personal issues and battles with anxiety, it becomes clear why he behaves the way he does on the field, making him a more complex and relatable figure. He reflects on the highs and lows of his career, from early doubts to his reinvention as a world-class bowler, which shows his strong determination and character.

However, one of the book's drawbacks is its structure. Anderson frequently shifts between past and present, sometimes making it difficult to track which stage of his career he is discussing. While this approach adds depth and context, it can occasionally feel disorienting, leaving the reader unsure of the timeline.

Despite this minor issue, *Finding the Edge* is an engaging and thoughtful read, offering more than just cricketing anecdotes: it's a book about resilience, personal growth, and the psychological battles behind sporting success. Whether you're a cricket fan or simply someone interested in the human side of elite sport, this is a worthy read.

Reviewed by
Oliver Milnes

THE NATURALS

Author: Jennifer Lynn Barnes

Cassie Hobbes has always been different; she knows what people want even before they know. Until one day, a recruiter arrives at her place of work and changes her life. Will it be for better or for worse?

She is then drafted into the Naturals (a programme for exceptional teens), where she solves cold cases with the help of her fellow Naturals.

The Naturals is a book that explores the fragility of innocence as Cassie becomes a part of the Naturals Programme and slowly learns that the world isn't as safe as she once thought it to be. As Cassie and her fellow Naturals discover that one of their allies is not what they seem to be, they put their lives on the line to uncover the truth. However, in doing so, will they end up shutting down the programme they all rely on?

I would rate the naturals book a 4.5/5 for its creativity, mystery and suspense.

Reviewed by
Grace Peck





THE Stranger

THE STRANGER

Author: Albert Camus

If I were to summarise this book in three words, I would say: peculiar, thought-provoking, and life-changing.

Over the course of a month, I read *The Stranger* by Albert Camus—a novel of only around 30,000 words about an emotionally detached French-Algerian man named Meursault (pronounced 'muhr-so'). The novel, which emphasises themes of absurdity, existentialism, and the indifference of the universe, focuses on Meursault's approach to everyday experiences before exploring the consequences of these approaches. Overall, Meursault is forced to navigate a plethora of situations, starting with his mother's death, but it is his perspective on these situations that makes the book enjoyable in a peculiar way.

Camus—the author—presents a narrative that challenges conventional morality and social expectations. Meursault embodies a philosophy where life is devoid of inherent meaning, and individuals must create their own purpose; even with the simplest of tasks, he finds a deep and thought-provoking stance on them. The novel highlights the conflict between humanity's search for meaning and the universe's lack of care for this search. It also stresses the need to question ourselves in moments where we may feel so sure of our actions.

The peculiarity of the novel emerges with Meursault's lack of reaction to events such as his mother's death, underscoring his emotional disconnect from societal norms. His morally ambiguous nature encourages readers to question whether they support or dislike the protagonist, and this is a conflict I enjoy when I read.

I found myself relating quite a lot to Meursault throughout the novel and enjoyed aspects of peculiar and thought-provoking situations, making me question human existence entirely. (Some of his encounters and responses were even quite comical in places!) Meursault's demise—a result of a raw decision in a stressful situation—is quite relatable (to a limited degree, of course), given the nature of stress and anger—something that is

more commonly spoken about nowadays. Some also argue that Meursault shows signs of being neurodivergent, providing another perspective for readers when approaching the novel—something that Camus would've wanted, given the themes and messages within the book.

The novel follows Meursault as he attends his mother's funeral, engages with a romantic partner, and assists a manipulative and strange friend. Towards the middle of the book, Meursault finds himself in a stressful situation. It is this situation that forces him to make a grave decision, costing him more than just time in prison. And even before the end of the book, Meursault is offered religious support, but he rejects this hastily, emphasising the novel's focus on rejecting traditional values and questioning the significance of everything. Meursault states, "I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world, finding it so much like myself."

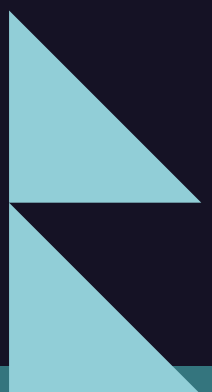
The Stranger is written in the first person, utilising simple and concise prose. The tone is neutral and unemotional, with very simple vocabulary and sentence structure, making it a quick and easy read. (This allows for more time to be spent focusing on the subtext and commentary on the human condition.)

The novel has great philosophical depth, with an effective writing style allowing for a deep exploration of universal themes—from life and death to romance, to existentialism and more. Some argue Meursault's extreme detachment may alienate readers, making him difficult to empathise with, but I would argue this adds to the interesting nature of the book.

The Stranger is profound, challenging conventional notions of morality and human purpose. It is best suited for readers with an interest in philosophy, introspection, unconventional narratives, short stories, and psychology.

There is definitely more to be said about *The Stranger*, which is why I recommend it. (Then you can see for yourself what happens to Meursault!)

Reviewed by
Jacob Barnett





THE BOY AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

Author: John Boyne

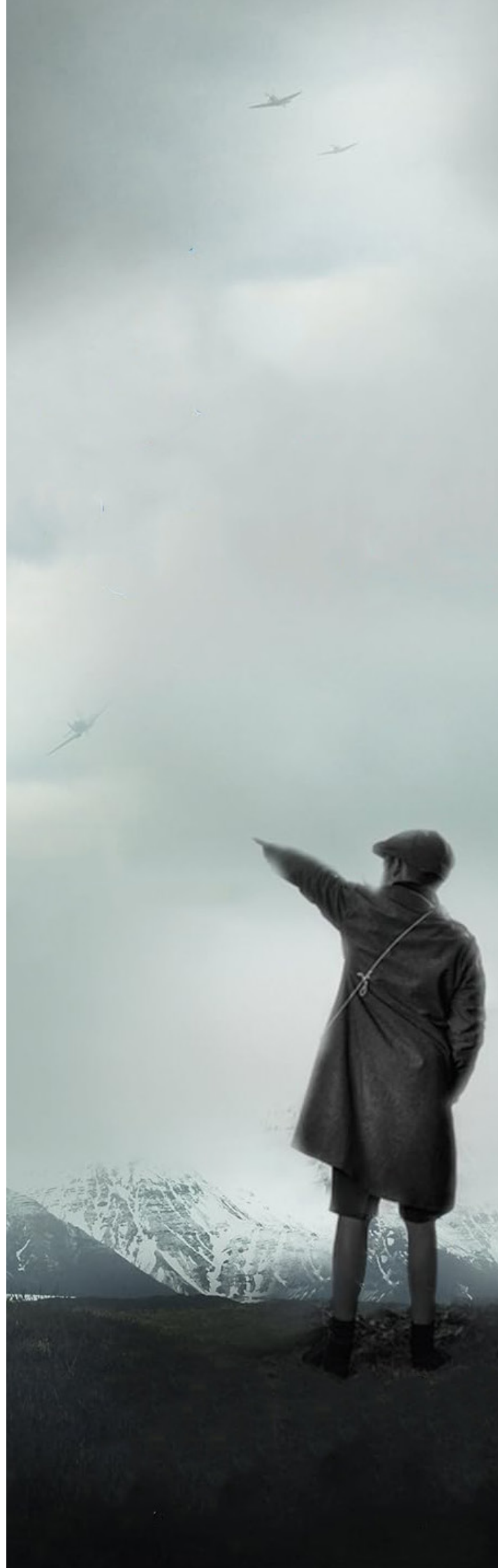
The Boy at the Top of the Mountain is an amazing book written by John Boyne (the same author who wrote *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*). This story follows Pierrot, a little French-German boy who ventures through innocence and corruption. He gets sent to his Aunt Beatrix and meets the Führer (Hitler), who tells him all about Nazi propaganda.

As he lives in the Berghof, Hitler corrupts Pierrot and changes the way he thinks about the world, other people, and his friend Anshel. Pierrot's innocence slowly gets replaced by corruption. He starts hurting the people he used to know and love, eventually leading to tragic events.

This story is set in WW2 and shows the fragility of innocence and just how much a person can change.

9/10: A great book for anyone to read.

Reviewed by
Alexander Ashdown





TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

SKANDER AND THE SKELETON CURSE

by A.F. Steadman

Recommended by Isla Tattershall for readers who enjoy genres like magic, adventure, and mystery, as it is full of unexpected events.

LOOSE HEAD

by Joe Marler

Recommended by Cole Foxton, It is a fantastic read for rugby fans, particularly those who appreciate Marler's unique personality.

LITTLE WOMEN

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Recommended by Sophia Skalycz for readers who enjoy a heartwarming tale that is perfect for a relaxing read.



LITERARY REVIEW