



Hugo and the Long Red Arm | Live the Dream! | Swan Boy

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News & Choice:

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These pacy and imaginative stories will readily engage confident young readers. Each with four to five chapters, they form part of the 'White Wolves' series and have a carefully graded vocabulary designed for three levels of reading experience at Year 4.

Hugo, the hero of the first title, belongs to an eccentric family of inventors: Patrick Spoon invents vegetarian recipes, while Lillian Spoon's fabulous creations include 'a paw-operated tin-opener for hungry cats'. Even Uncle Harold is a would-be inventor. Mum's talents come in handy when Hugo falls and breaks his arm. Soon he is sporting a battery-operated extendable arm, fashioned largely out of pegs, clothes hangers and rubber-bands. He is thrilled with the new attachment, until it develops a life of its own and gets him into all manner of trouble at school and home. Then, one night he wakes to discover Uncle Harold trying to steal Mum's ideas for new inventions and the arm proves its worth by holding Harold prisoner till the police arrive.

This title crackles with energy and wit. Anderson packs every page with telling detail like Uncle Harold's hairy-wolf slippers. Her inventive use of language will reward young readers tackling a more challenging book. It is a pleasure to read commissioned work which fulfils its brief so imaginatively.

Live the Dream! is a contemporary fantasy, in which the heroine, Zoey, enters her favourite dream-site on the Web and is directed to type in the 'keyword to your favourite fantasy' by the interactive computer. Zoey tries out several more-or-less predictable identities - princess, supermodel, cowgirl - only to be challenged by the computer, before admitting that her 'deepest dream' is to swim with dolphin. The computer flags up an enticing picture of Zanzibar and invites Zoey to press 'Enter' to live her dream. Soon she is spirited away to a small boat with a friendly local boy, Jusef, under a golden sun. Zoey is entranced when they sail to the dolphin grounds, but there is a problem she couldn't admit to the computer:

she's terrified of water! Soon, the dolphins help her to overcome her fears and she swims blissfully, before returning home.

Live the Dream! will speak to the Web-wise child for whom a computer seems a more likely portal to a fantasy land than a wardrobe. Much the best element of this book is the character of the computer, which operates like a rather bossy electronic Fairy-Godmother, challenging Zoey's preconceptions and prompting her to emotional growth - the absence of her father is a quiet subtext to the story. At times the style of the story is a rather uneasy mix of the gently poetic and rather tired 'cool-speak' ('That was wicked!'), but this is unlikely to trouble its intended readers.

Swan Boy is Hendry's imaginative recreation of the Hans Christian Andersen tale, 'The Wild Swans'. Like Nicholas Stuart Gray's full-length novel, **The Seventh Swan**, her version centres on the one brother (Caleb, the sixth brother in this telling) left with a swan's wing after his sister's spell releases the siblings from the witch's curse. As you would expect from this excellent writer, she breathes new life into an already beautiful tale, concerned with identity, transformation and the redemptive power of love. In contrast to the original tale, Caleb retains his swan's wing because he is reluctant to resume his restricted life as a boy and wriggles at the crucial moment. In addition to the freedom of flight and water-gliding, his incarnation as a swan brings him a new companionship with his rather querulous brothers.

It becomes Caleb's task to find acceptance in his final form and to do this he has to leave his family and castle home for the magical Isle of Nanna where, a wise woman tells him, the people 'have wings in their hearts and wings in their minds'. Hendry subtly addresses questions of sibling relations and the constrictions of given roles in the family through a spare, understated prose in an elegant story, which has much to offer thoughtful readers.

Running Order:

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