

# viewpoint

on books for young adults

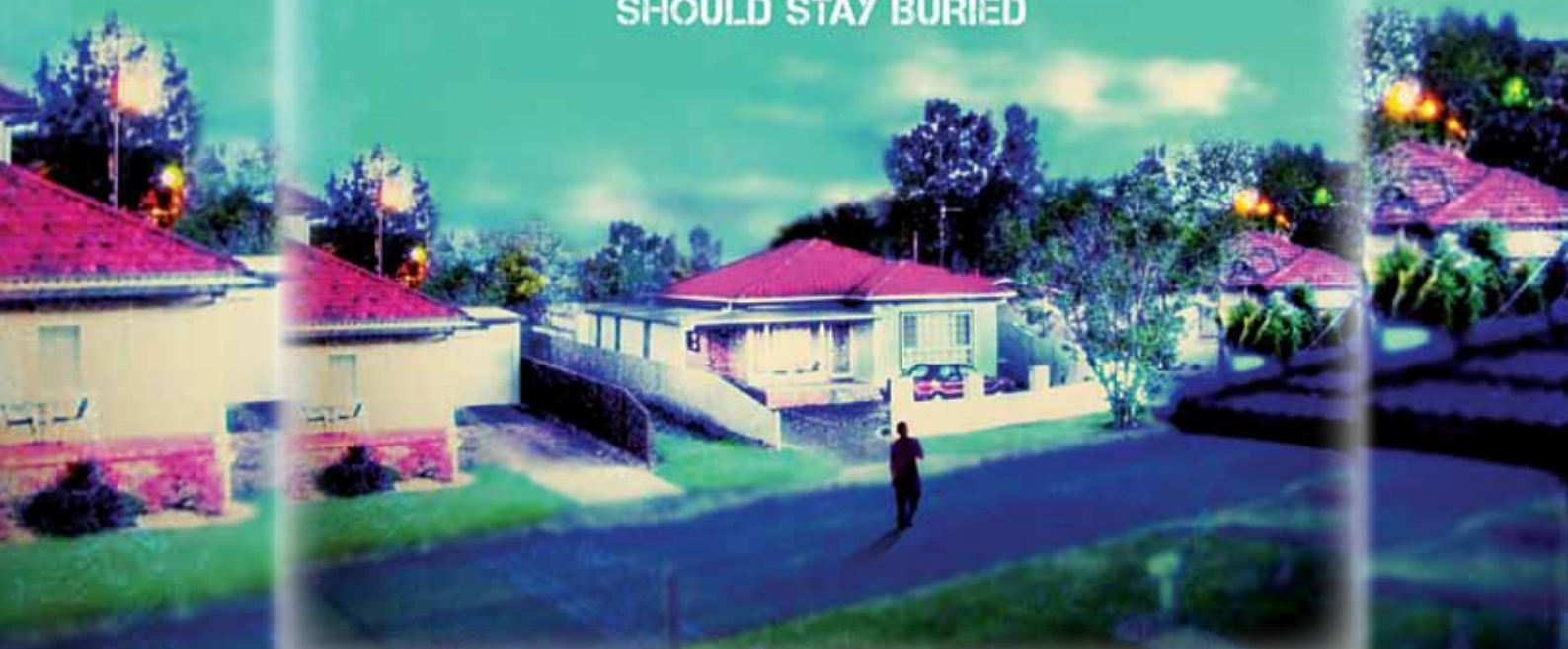
vol 19 no 2

winter 2011

ADRIAN STIRLING

# THE COMET BOX

SOME SECRETS  
SHOULD STAY BURIED



## Current Issue Volume 19 Number 2 Winter 2011

### Feature Reviews

<i>Red Riding Hood</i> by Sarah Blakley-Cartwright & David Lesley Johnson	Sam Franzway	2
<i>The Laws of Magic: Heart of Gold</i> by Michael Pryor	Pam Macintyre	3
Books to Get Your Teeth Into	Simon Clews	4
<i>Yellowcake</i> by Margo Lanagan	Moira Robinson	6
<i>Black Glass</i> by Meg Mundell	Elizabeth Braithwaite	7
<i>Hold Me Closer</i> by Lish McBride	Blair Mahoney	8
<i>Plague</i> by Michael Grant	Mario La Marca	9

### Vale

Diana Wynne-Jones	Lili Wilkinson	10
-------------------	----------------	----

### Feature Articles

Mirrors and Windows: IBBY Australia	Robin Morrow	11
A Comic Event	Mike Shuttleworth	12
Mind-powered Time Machines	Sophie Masson	14

### Writers on Writing

Rippin Yarn Soars Like an Angel	Claire Kennedy	15
A Wide Open Future	Bec Kavanagh	16

### Feature Reviews

<i>First Light</i> by Rebecca Stead	Ruth Starke	18
<i>Fromelles</i> by Carole Wilkinson, <i>Simpson's Donkey</i> by Peter Stanley & <i>Valley of Blood and Gold</i> by Tony Palmer	Peter Christiansen	19
<i>The Comet Box</i> by Adrian Stirling	Mario La Marca	21
<i>Kill Shakespeare</i> by Conor McCreery, Antony Del Col & Andy Belanger	Suzanne Rofe	22
<i>Ember and Ash</i> by Pamela Freeman & <i>Tortall and Other Lands</i> by Tamora Pierce	Jenny Zimmerman	23
<i>Tales from the Tower</i> edited by Isobelle Carmody & Nan McNab	Helen Martin	24
<i>Extinction</i> by Lizzie Wilcox & <i>Maximum Ride: Angel</i> by James Patterson	Bill Wootton	25
<i>August</i> by Bernard Beckett	Pam Horsey	26
<i>Being Here</i> by Barry Jonsberg	Chris Thompson	27
<i>Buried Thunder</i> by Tim Bowler & <i>Dangerously Placed</i> by Nansi Kunze	Jo Wishart	28
<i>The Dead I Know</i> by Scot Gardner	Stella Lees	29
<i>The Golden Day</i> by Ursula Dubosarsky	Tony Thompson	30
<i>Violence 101</i> by Denis Wright & <i>My Father's War</i> by Sophie Masson	Pauline Hosking	31
<i>Matched</i> by Ally Condie	Emma Ten Eyck	32
<i>Dash &amp; Lily's Book of Dares</i> by Rachel Cohn & David Levithan	Katy Gerner	33
<i>Resurrection</i> by Mandy Hager	Beth Montgomery	34
<i>Falling Apart</i> by Jacqueline Wilson	Miffy Farquharson	34
<i>Big Girl Small</i> by Rachel DeWoskin	Liz Derouet	35
<i>Forgotten</i> by Cat Patrick	Anna Ryan-Punch	36
<i>Pig Boy</i> by J C Burke	Margaret Kett	37
<i>Triple Ripple</i> by Brigid Lowry & <i>Chime</i> by Franny Billingsley	Susan La Marca	38
<i>Changing Yesterday</i> by Sean McMullen	Stella Lees	39
<i>From King Lake to Kabul</i> by Neil Grant & David Williams	Judy Blyton	40

<b>Young Readers' Viewpoint</b>		41
---------------------------------	--	----

<b>Book and Audio Notes</b>		44
-----------------------------	--	----

## Books to Get Your Teeth Into

The modern vampire has been around since the turn of the last century. In fiction they can be traced back to what was presumably a dark and stormy night at Lord Byron's house in 1816 when Mary Shelley sat at one end of the lounge scribbling *Frankenstein* and Jon Polidori sat at the other jotting down notes for his story, *The Vampyre*. Sheridan Le Fanu brought more public attention to the genre with *Carmilla* in 1872, and Bram Stoker cemented the vampire's place in popular culture when Count Dracula lured Jonathan Harker into his Transylvanian home with a polite, but firm 'enter freely and of your own will' in 1897.

The undead have come a long way since then. And they have had to endure so much. Hollywood, of course, is mostly to blame – first for the high camp of Bela Lugosi, then later for the ignominies of Abbot and Costello. A few decades later sex (but not enough sex, as fans of *True Blood* will attest) raised its ugly head with the technicolour-red-gore-filled approach of Hammer Films in the sixties.

After a brief, but respectful respite when the world of books re-entered the scene and Anne Rice modernised the genre with *Interview with a Vampire* in 1976, vampires were hit hard with a twin assault: firstly from the pop cult of Buffy and then – worse still – from pop cult theorists looking for the next academic niche to fill. And then some sort of tipping point was reached with Stephenie Myer's phenomenally successful *Twilight* series complete with movie and merchandise spinoffs. As I write this I am doing my best to fight the impulse to order an 'I ♥ Edward Cullen' dog's T-shirt – a snip at \$16.50. Luckily I don't have a dog, otherwise I would be powerless to resist.

As a form of disclosure I should probably mention that, despite the lure of appearing in this august publication, I passed on the opportunity to review the first *Twilight* book when it came out – I thought it was awful and would never amount to anything. At least I was half right. Now, fuelled by a desire to suck the last drop from rich veins of the *Twilight* phenomenon, young adult publishing has got in on the act in a big way. Just go down to any book store and you'll be confronted by a wall of slim, matte black volumes dripping with embossed gothic fonts and every one of them featuring a pale-skinned, red-lipped, pouty young woman staring meaningfully back at you. Welcome to teen-fang-lit.

Rachel Caine is up to book ten of her *Morganville* vampire series with, it would be a fair assumption, book eleven already in the pipeline. As with many of the genre her milieu is real teens living in real shared houses going to real colleges in a town that just happens to be populated by an awful lot of vampires. And Caine is not alone with the old vampires-at-school scenario; Douglas Rees takes us there with *Vampire High*, Liza Conrad does the same with *High School Bites: The Lucy Chronicles* and *The Vampire Academy* series by Richelle Mead covers very similar territory. Heather Brewer's *The Chronicles of Vladimír Tod – Eighth Grade Bites, Ninth Grade Slays, Tenth Grade Bleeds, Eleventh Grade Burns and Twelfth Grade Kills* – also ventures into this all-too-predictable world although in one sense they differ dramatically from the rest of the genre – their covers feature a young man and are gloss, not matte.

Apologies. That was, of course, a cheap shot: but who could resist a glib way of pointing out that the world of vampire teen fiction is as colourless and lifeless as the young women that adorn its book covers? Dip into any book of the genre at random and you are guaranteed to read predictable plots featuring interspecies trysts or broken teenage hearts and peopled by two-dimensional characters uttering dialogue that has more in common with a below par *Neighbours* script than anything like Stoker's protagonist's memorable 'Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make!'

Occasionally one will rise to the surface, but these are few and far between. G P Taylor's *Vampire Labyrinth: Redeye* is one such exception. Set in a richly atmospheric war time

England, Taylor's novel has more in common with the work of Neil Gaiman than the world of teen vampire fiction. With more than a passing reference to *Dracula* – the story is set in Whitby – some of his characterisation would make Dickens proud. A promised second volume gives the genre a small glimmer of hope.

Kirsty Eager's *Saltwater Vampires* also catches the eye, if only because it puts a distinctly Australian face on the vampire novel. Somewhere between an episode of *Home and Away* and *The Lost Boys*, the backdrop to *Saltwater Vampires* is the Australian surf beach and the salt-bleached teens who populate it. The plot is not as predictable as many of its kind and its characters less stereotyped and more quirky and recognisable.

But readable teen-fang-lit books such as these are – sad to say – rarities.

Probably the most frightening aspect of teen-fang-lit is that this is not as bad as it gets with two words certain to instil fear in even the hardest of hearts - vampire romance. Sure, there's a fair amount of 'boy meets girl, boy bites girl' in teen-fang-lit, but at least no-one's bodice gets ripped in the process. Lynsay Sands with her *Argeneau* series, Kresley Cole's *Immortals After Dark* series or Kerrelyn Sparks' *Love at Stake* series take love at first bite to a whole new level.

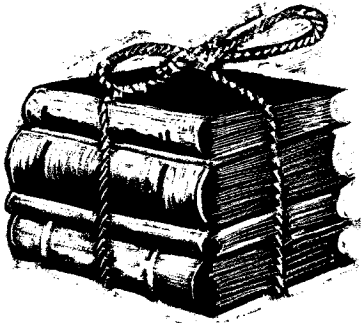
Of course for a genre to become a phenomenon overnight is not new. How many bad teenage wizard stories has the world had to endure since J K Rowling finally found the success she deserved? This explains the publishing industry's obsession with the genre, but not that of its readers. Psychologists point out that young people have no sense of their own mortality: certainly road accident statistics would bear that out. I suppose it makes some sense then for them to identify with a creature that can't die. But don't they deserve better than most of what is on offer to them?

Charlaine Harris' *Sookie Stackhouse* series packs a bit more of a punch than your average vampire romp and still manages to come up with the odd surprise even after even twelve books. *The Passage* by Justin Cronin, although in need of a good edit, was a great book that just happened to feature the odd vampire or two. For those Goths and edgier teen readers there's always *Lost Souls* by Poppy Z Brite, or even her highly imaginative book of vampire erotica *Love in Vein*. John Ajvide Lindqvist delivered an astonishingly good vampire story with *Let the Right One In* and no fan of the fang should go past the *Night Watch* Series by Sergei Lukyanenko which is about as close to the darker later Harry Potter books as you can get.

The answer may well be that an easy read is also an easy marketing job. Any matte black book with a vampire on the cover looks pretty much like any other. And when they all bear similar marketing tags: 'If you thought eighth grade was tough, try it with fangs and a fear of garlic', and all boast cover quotes from other authors in the genre, it's very easy for the unadventurous reader to just pick another book off the shelf, fairly certain of what they are getting. Which is both ironic, given the idea that vampirism is supposed to be wild and dangerous, and a great shame.

Count Dracula bids Jonathan Harker to 'sleep well and dream well'. Standing in the young adult section of any book store at the moment he would probably also encourage him to read well. But possibly only after he had recoiled in horror a little at what he saw before him.

By Simon Clews



**THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA  
AWARDS  
2011 SHORT LIST**

**Book of the Year: Older Readers**

Crowley, Cath	<i>Graffiti Moon</i>	Pan Macmillan Australia
Hartnett, Sonya	<i>The Midnight Zoo</i>	Viking Books
Horniman, Joanne	<i>About a Girl</i>	Allen & Unwin
MacLeod, Doug	<i>The Life of a Teenage Body-Snatcher</i>	Penguin Books
Marchetta, Melina	<i>The Piper's Son</i>	Penguin Books
Wood, Fiona	<i>Six Impossible Things</i>	Pan Macmillan Australia





# index to authors and titles

- 7 Souls 46, 47  
*Across the Universe* 43  
*Adoration of Jenna Fox* 36  
*Allegiance* 42  
*Angel Creek* 15  
*Anna and the French Kiss* 47  
*Archer's Goon* 10  
Arena, Felice 41  
*Are we There Yet?* 33  
*Argeneau* 5  
*Arrival, The* 12  
*August* 26  
Baker, Jeannie 11  
Beckett, Bernard 7, 26  
*Before the Storm* 39  
*Being* 8  
*Being Here* 27  
Belanger, Andy 22  
*Betrayal of Natalie Hargrove* 46  
*Big Girl Small* 35  
Billingsley, Franny 38  
*Black Glass* 7  
*Black Juice* 6  
Blakley-Cartwright, Sarah 2  
*Blood of the Lamb* 34  
*Books of Beginning Trilogy* 48  
Borella, Rosie 24  
Bowler, Tim 28  
*Boy Meets Boy* 33  
*Break of Day* 20  
Brewer, Heather 4  
Brite, Poppy Z 5  
*Broken Glass* 21  
Brooks, Kevin 8  
*Buried Thunder* 28  
Burke, JC 37  
Caine, Rachel 4  
*Captivate* 45  
*Careful What You Wish For* 32  
*Carmilla* 4  
Carmody, Isobelle 24  
Caro, Jane 44  
*Case of the Diamond Shadow* 14  
*Castings* 23  
*Changing Yesterday* 39  
*Charmed Life* 10  
Chauncy, Nan 11  
*Chime* 38, 39  
Choldenko, Gennifer 44  
*Chronicles of Vladimir Tod* 4  
Cohn, Rachel 33  
Cole, Kresley 5  
Collins, Paul 44  
Collins, Wilkie 14  
*Comet Box, The* 21  
Condie, Ally 32  
Conrad, Liza 4  
Cooper, Susan 10  
Corfield, Robin 19  
*Crazy Things Girls Do For Love* 43  
Cronin, Justin 5  
*Crossing, The* 34  
*Cupcake* 33  
*Dangerously Placed* 28, 29  
*Daniel X: The Manga* 42  
*Dark Lord of Derkholm* 10  
*Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* 33  
*Dead I Know, The* 29  
Del Col, Anthony 22  
Deveraux, Jude 9  
DeWoskin, Rachel 35  
Dickens, Charles 14  
Dobson, Jill 7  
*Dogsbody* 10  
*Don't forget me, cobber* 19  
*Dracula* 4  
*Drawn From the Heart* 35  
*Dreamrider* 37  
Dubosarsky, Ursula 30  
Dumas, Alexandre 14  
Eagar, Kirsty 4  
*Ember and Ash* 23  
*Emerald Atlas, The* 48  
*Entice* 45  
*Extinction* 25  
*Fables* 22  
*Factotum* 30  
*Fallen* 41  
*Falling Apart* 34  
*Fight for Freedom: Gladiator* 48  
*Fire and Hemlock* 10  
*First Light* 16, 17, 18  
Fitzhugh, Louise 17  
*Fog Magic* 17  
*Folk Keeper, The* 38  
*Forge* 31  
*Forgotten* 36  
Forman, Gayle 45  
*Frankenstein* 4  
Franklin, Emily 45  
Freeman, Pamela 23  
French, Jackie 11  
*Fromelles* 19  
*From Kinglake to Kabul* 40  
Gaiman, Neil 4, 10, 17  
Gardner, Scott 29  
*Genesis* 7, 26  
*Gingerbread* 33  
*Girl Savage* 48  
*Golden Day, The* 30  
Golding, William 9  
*Gone* 9  
Gordon, Kate 41  
Grant, Michael 9  
Grant, Neil 40  
*Great Expectations* 14  
*Guitar Highway Rose* 38  
Hager, Mandy 34  
Halpin, Brendan 45  
Harland, Richard 24  
*Harriet the Spy* 17  
Harris, Charlaime 5  
Heinlein, Robert 17  
*Hexwood* 10  
*Hiding Edith* 46  
*High School Bites* 4  
*Hold Me Closer, Necromancer* 8  
Homer 23  
*Horses for King Arthur* 46  
*Hour of Need* 3  
*Howl's Moving Castle* 10  
*How They Met, and Other Stories* 33  
*Hunger* 9  
*iBoy* 8, 9  
*Ice Maiden* 42  
*If I stay* 45  
*Immortals After Dark* 5  
Ingpen, Robert 11  
*Inheritors, The* 7  
*Into the Wilderness* 34  
*Jenna and Jonah's Fauxmance* 45  
Jones, Carrie 45  
Jones, Diana Wynne 10  
Jonsberg, Barry 27, 37  
*Juicy Writing* 38  
*Just a Girl* 44  
Kacer, Kathy 46  
Kate, Lauren 41, 46  
*Kid on the Karaoke Stage* 47  
*Kill Shakespeare* 22  
*King Dork* 8  
Kluver, Cayla 41, 42  
Kunze, Nansi 28  
L'Engle, Madelaine 17  
*Lake at the End of the World* 18  
Lanagan, Margo 6  
Lawrence, L S 46  
*Laws of Magic, The* 3  
*Le Fanu, Sheridan* 4  
*Legacy* 41, 42  
Lesley Johnson, David 2  
*Let the Right One In* 5  
Levithan, David 33  
Lewis, CS 10  
*Lies* 9  
Lindqvist, John Ajvide 5  
Lindsay, Joan 30  
Lindsay, Patrick 19  
*Lord of the Flies* 9  
*Lost Souls* 5  
*Love at Stake* 5  
*Love in Vein* 5  
*Love is the Higher Law* 33  
*Low Red Moon* 38  
Lowry, Brigid 38  
*Lucky Luke* 13  
Lukyanenko, Sergei 5  
Lyon, Gary 41  
Mahy, Margaret 24  
Masson, Sophie 14, 31  
*Matched* 32  
*Maximum Ride: Angel* 25  
McBride, Lish 8  
McCarthy, Cormac 9  
McCreery, Conor 22  
McDonald, Caroline 18  
McKinley, Robin 10  
McMullen, Sean 39  
Mead, Richelle 4  
Meyer, Stephenie 4  
Miller, Barnabas 46  
*Mirror* 11  
*Mogworld* 2, 3  
*Mole Hunt* 44  
*Moonstone, The* 14  
Moran, Katy 42  
*Morganville* 4  
Mundell, Meg 7  
Murray, Martine 24  
*My Australian Story* 31  
*My Father's War* 31  
*My Name is Mina* 33  
*Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List* 33  
*Need* 45  
*Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist* 33  
*Night Watch Series* 5  
*Noah's Law* 36  
*No Passengers Beyond this Point* 44  
*No Safe Place* 34  
*Odyssey* 23  
*On the Beach* 9  
*Opal Dreaming* 43  
*Opposite of Amber, The* 47  
Palmer, Tony 20  
*Passage, The* 5  
Patrick, Cat 36  
Patterson, James 25, 42  
Perkins, Stephanie 47  
Philip, Gillian 47  
*Picnic at Hanging Rock* 30  
Pierce, Tamora 10, 23  
*Plague* 9  
*Plain Truth* 40  
*Playground* 11  
Polidori, Jon 4  
Portman, Frank 8  
Prue, Sally 42  
Pryor, Michael 3  
*Realm of Possibility, The* 33  
*Red Planet* 17  
*Red Riding Hood* 2, 3  
*Red Shoe, The* 30  
Rees, Douglas 4  
*Resurrection* 34  
Revis, Beth 43  
Richter, Georgia 47  
Rippin, Sally 15  
*Road, The* 9  
Rowling, JK 10  
Rundell, Katherine 48  
*Saltwater Vampires* 4, 5  
Sands, Lynsay 5  
Sauer, Julia 17  
Scarrow, Simon 48  
*Series of Unfortunate Events* 48  
Sheldon, Dyan 43  
Shelley, Mary 4  
*Ship Breaker* 37  
*Shrimp* 33  
Shute, Neville 9  
*Simpson's Donkey* 20  
Snicket, Lemony 48  
*Sookie Stackhouse* 5  
Sparks, Kerrelyn 5  
*Specky Magee and the Best of Oz* 41  
Speigelman, Art 12  
*Spirit Hunter* 42  
*Spirou* 13  
Stanley, Peter 20  
Stead, Rebecca 16, 18  
Stephens, John 48  
Stiefvater, Maggie 10  
Stirling, Adrian 21  
Stoker, Bram 4  
Story of Tom Brennan, The 37  
Styles, Morag 6  
*Tales from the Tower* 24  
Tan, Shaun 11, 12  
*Tangara* 11  
Taylor, GP 4  
*Thyla* 41  
*Tintin* 13  
*Tomorrow All Will Be Beautiful* 38  
*Tortall and Other Lands* 23, 24  
*Tough Guide to Fantasyland, A* 10  
*Triple Ripple* 38  
*True Blood* 4  
*Twilight* 2, 4  
*Understudy's Revenge, The* 14  
*Unlocked* 48  
Ure, Jean 7  
*Valley of Blood and Gold, The* 20  
*Vampire Academy, The* 4  
*Vampire Diaries* 41  
*Vampire High* 4  
*Vampyre, The* 4  
*Vampyre Labyrinth: RedEye* 4  
Van Cleave, Ryan G 48  
Very LeFreak 33  
*Violence 101* 31  
*Watchers at the Shrine* 7  
Wheatley, Nadia 11  
*When You Reach Me* 16, 17, 18  
*Where She Went* 45  
*Wide Awake* 33  
Wilcox, Lizzie 25  
*Wilful Eye, The* 24  
Wilkinson, Carole 19  
Williams, David 40  
Willingham, Bill 22  
Wilson, Jacqueline 34  
*With Lots of Love from Georgia* 38  
*Woman In White, The* 14  
Wood, Karen 43  
Wright, Denis 31  
Wrightson, Patricia 11  
*Wrinkle In Time, A* 16  
*Yellowcake* 6  
*You Know Where to Find Me* 33