

## books

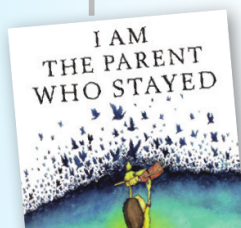
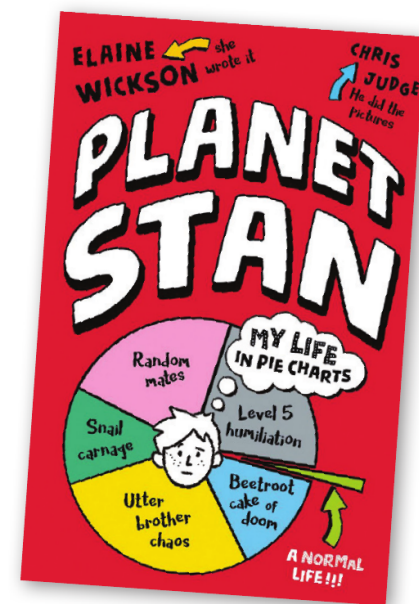
Ellen White reviews the new releases.

# Life with Pie

Poor Stan just can't catch a break. If it was up to him everything would be tidy and ordered, but dinosaur-obsessed younger brother Fred has other ideas - like leaving snails in Stan's bed or bogies all over his solar system poster. Welcome to 'Planet Stan', the debut children's novel from Oxford-based author Elaine Wickson charting the trials and tribulations of eleven year old Stan and his chaotic life.

A lot of themes may already be familiar to readers (annoying younger brother, crazy family, school embarrassment and the like), but the writing style is funny and fresh and the graphs and charts scattered throughout add a new spin. On almost every page is a graph charting Stan's current state of mind, ranging from 'Black Hole of Doom' to 'Over the Moon', which adds a nice character dimension. The graphs and charts, however, are a treat, with Stan's tips on everything from 'The Five Stages of Humiliation' to homework excuses. There's a pleasingly generous amount of text for a book containing a lot of pictures, too, ensuring more confident readers won't whip through it too quickly.

**Planet Stan: My Life in Pie Charts** Elaine Wickson, illustrated by Chris Judge, £6.99, Oxford University Press, [www.oxfordchildrens.co.uk](http://www.oxfordchildrens.co.uk)



## Staying power

Leadership and parenting coach, author and TEDx speaker Nina Farr understands what it's like to be a single parent - she is one herself. Now she's using her knowledge to dispel myths and stigma around single parenthood and help others in a similar situation. Pointing out that a quarter of children in the UK currently live in a

## Chilly thrills

Author of 'The Wilderness War', Julia Green's latest novel chronicles the adventures of Jamie, the mysterious Mara and Django, the dog. Set in the Outer Hebrides, 'To the Edge of the World' follows Jamie and Mara on a seaborne journey towards the remote





that a quarter of children in the UK currently live in single parent families, Farr rejects the 'broken family' label and helps parents navigate the changing structure of their lives without guilt, shame or fear. Drawing on her experience working with single parents, Farr covers

difficult topics with an inspiring sense of optimism, including how to create a support network, gaining confidence and self-belief, coping with feelings of isolation and how to help the whole family grieve for the familial unit they might have envisaged.

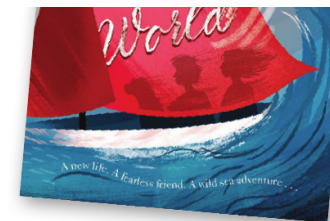
With case studies, practical exercises and plenty of advice from someone who has lived through the situation, 'I Am The Parent' has a warm, supportive tone throughout and covers complex issues without being over complicated. All families will have their own issues and there is no 'one size fits all' solution but Farr's book is a positive place to start.

**I Am The Parent Who Stayed** Nina Farr, £7.99, Practical Inspiration Publishing, [www.practicalinspiration.com](http://www.practicalinspiration.com)

on a seaborne journey towards the remote islands of St Kilda. Sailing at the mercy of the elements and battling wind, rain and waves, it will take all their fearlessness and energy to make it safely to the other side.

Green conjures the cold, remote setting very effectively and you can practically taste the sea spray and feel the ocean breeze in her prose, making a nice change from the bustling life in a city. More serious issues are touched upon, too, as Jamie learns more about Mara, her quest to find her dad and the troubles in her home. Effectively blending a gripping sea adventure with themes of friendship, courage and survival, Green's latest tale is a celebration of the natural world and the effect it can have on those who live within it.

**To the Edge of the World** Julia Green, £6.99, Oxford University Press, [www.oxfordchildrens.co.uk](http://www.oxfordchildrens.co.uk)



## Animal whisperers

'Night Speakers' is the first instalment of a new five part series from author of the successful 'Shapeshifters' books, Ali Sparkes. The trio of protagonists, Elena, Matt and Tima, can't sleep. In fact every night they wake up at exactly the same time, 1.34am. Insomnia is fracturing their lives, until one night when all three meet by chance and discover something extraordinary - they have the ability to communicate with animals. It turns out they're going to need all the help they can get as some disturbing presence is lurking in the shadows, watching and waiting to strike.

Sparkes wastes little time setting up the story and the plot moves quickly,

which is probably required to hold children's attention in an increasingly digital world. The majority of the action takes place in the middle of the night, creating an atmospheric world and adding a layer of mystery and danger without being too scary. Having said that, some younger children might find the shadow monster rather frightening, but this is an accomplished start to what's likely to be another popular series.

**Night Speakers** Ali Sparkes, £6.99, Oxford University Press, [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com)

## Return to the Moon

Isadora Moon returns in the seventh instalment of Harriet Muncaster's series following the adventures of a half-vampire, half-fairy girl. A real human funfair is coming to town and Isadora can't wait for her first ever trip, but when she arrives it isn't as magical as she expected. Can the wave of a fairy's wand or drop of witch's potion liven things up a bit? There are plenty of Muncaster's signature black and pink illustrations and a nice addition in the form of Isadora's witch-fairy cousins Mirabelle and Wilbur.

Each story in the series stands alone, and there are pictures introducing readers to Isadora and her family before the story starts, so it's not necessary for children to have read all six previous books. That said, fans of the series will surely welcome the latest adventure from the fairy vampire clan and the uplifting message about being proud to be yourself still runs through nicely. At just over 100 pages and with large text and lots of illustrations, the books are rather short, but there's plenty for younger children to get stuck into.

**Isadora Moon Goes to the Fair** Harriet Muncaster, £5.99, Oxford University Press, [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com)

