



### THE TERRIBLE TWO

(Mac Barnett and Jory John, Armet Books, £8.99)

Tempt those teens still addicted to Wimpy Kid with something slightly more challenging; it's written in the first person, which allows a more sophisticated level of humour, and the two likeable protagonists are refreshingly three-dimensional. Stylish, full of skilfully imagined pranks, and frequently laugh-out-loud funny, this has all the makings of the start of a series with staying power.

# Meet the AUTHOR

## BALI RAI BRIDGES THE GAP...

### WERE YOU EVER A 'RELUCTANT READER'?

I was the exact opposite! I became an avid reader from the moment I first visited a library. From non-fiction to Roald Dahl and others – I loved everything about books and reading, and I still do. Whenever I read, I learn things and fed my imagination, and that felt like taking part in some magical experiment. Reading fed my dreams of becoming an author too, and everything I now know about writing fiction was learned from reading.



### WHY IS IT, DO YOU THINK, THAT GRITTY, FRIGHTENING AND EVEN VIOLENT STORYLINES ARE SO OFTEN USED TO MOTIVATE STRUGGLING OLDER READERS?

It's about making an instant impact. They are more immediate and visceral. Many reluctant readers will say books are boring. The gritty stuff challenges that and the readers connect with it. Certainly that is my experience when working with such pupils. The darker stuff engages those most resistant to reading. And the subject matter is more apt too. Teen reluctant readers might require simpler writing styles and word counts but they aren't children. Teens are naturally more informed about the world around them than children, and the gritty stories speak to such readers more readily.

### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT, IN YOUR OPINION, FOR SCHOOLS TO TRY AND NURTURE A LOVE OF READING IN OLDER STUDENTS WHO MAY WELL BE MORE KEEN TO SPEND THEIR FREE TIME ON THE FOOTBALL PITCH, OR ONLINE?

It's vital. We know that reading for pleasure is the best thing teens can do, outside of getting an education, to improve their life chances. The pupils who read the most, succeed the most. Those that don't read at all, or very little, tend to remain trapped in cycles of poverty and low-achievement. Education coupled with a culture of reading is the basis of social mobility, the attainment of goals, and the broadening of horizons. I am a passionate advocate of reading for pleasure across every age group, and I think that it must become the basis of all school-based learning. It is that important.

### 'KISS OF DEATH' ENDS RATHER AMBIGUOUSLY... MIGHT THERE BE A SEQUEL?

Haha! I have no plans to write a sequel. The ending was supposed to allow the reader to decide for themselves what might happen. It was supposed to make them think, and leave them shocked. Sometimes reluctant reader stories can be too structured, and too rounded-off. The idea with Kiss of Death was to offer a challenging storyline and structure, with a theme that provokes thought and debate, coupled with a simpler style. I was very, very happy with the way it turned out!



### BRITISH-ISLAMIC IDENTITY

(Aminul Hoque, IoE Press, £26.99)

As recent events demonstrate with chilling clarity, it is all too easy for schools to focus on nurturing an inclusive and tolerant atmosphere amongst staff and students – yet still neglect to take full account of all the other influences to which their young people are exposed. In today's atmosphere of increasing uncertainty and suspicion between small but vocal sections of various communities it is wise for educators to take every opportunity to increase their own understanding of the experiences their students may be having at home, with their peers, and via the internet. To this end, thoughtful and scholarly works like this study by Aminul Hoque can be incredibly useful. Hoque presents an in-depth ethnographic study of the lives and identities of six third-generation, British-born Bangladeshi teenagers – and reveals a complex process of self-definition through the construction of a new, positive British-Islamic identity. Fascinating, enlightening – and very, very important.



### HEADSTRONG

(Dame Sally Coates, John Catt Educational Ltd, £14.99)

Dame Sally Coates has a pretty impressive CV by anyone's standards – she's worked in some of the toughest schools in the country and raised standards in all of them – and by about three pages into this book that's part manual, part memoir, you will start to get an understanding of why. Described by Toby Young as "a phenomenon, sweeping through school corridors like a tornado, making improvements wherever she goes", Coates has a presence that is indeed formidable, even translated through print. You would expect strong opinions, clear directions and an expectation that those around her will give of nothing less than their best – and that is what you get. What might take you by surprise, however, is the charm, self-awareness, humour and above all, passionate humanity that accompanies those drivers. The result is a book that is not only packed with sound advice that you'll be itching to put into practice in your own school, but is also a thoroughly enjoyable and uplifting read.