

Tekst 8

Sign here to book your money-back guarantee

By Jim White

- (1) It is called in the trade, as Andrew Marr revealed on these pages last week, "spoilt". Once autographed by its author, a copy of a new book cannot be remaindered; it might sit for months on the shelves untouched by paying customers, but it still counts as sold.
- (2) This is useful information for budding writers, which I was first tipped off about by the gangster Frankie Fraser. Frankie was at the launch party of a book I'd written (I'm not sure why he was there, but nobody on the door was going to stop this gatecrasher). He took me by the elbow and whispered conspiratorially: "Let me give you a word of advice, son, author to author: whenever you pass a bookshop, go in and sign copies of your book. That way, even if you never sell a bean, the bastards have still got to pay you."
- (3) I thought of this when I heard a caller to BBC Radio 5 last week ringing in to say that he had just gone out and bought 15 signed copies of a new hardback the day it arrived in his bookshop. Not to read them; no, these were to remain pristine in his attic. They were, he said, investments.
- (4) The book that the caller reckoned was worth this extravagant punt is called *Wolf Brother* by Michelle Paver. This is not an author who is likely to trouble judges of the Booker Prize. Nor will her work feature in the literary pages of the Sunday newspapers. The only context in which most of us will have heard of her before is when her name is appended to the words "record advance".
- (5) An unprecedented £2.8 million she received from Orion to snaffle up the rights to a five-book series called *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness*, a sum so vast it is usually associated in publishing terms only with the ghosted life stories of Premiership footballers. *Wolf Brother* is the first instalment in pay-back time.
- (6) You will find *Wolf Brother* in the children's section, but its intended audience is much wider. As its rather sophisticated dust jacket suggests, this is the sort of book that could discreetly be read on the train by adults on their way to work. On the inside cover is a hand-drawn map of the journey undertaken by Torak, the youthful hero, a boy growing up in the world of prehistory, as he makes his way across the Deep Forest and the Ice River past the Mountain of the World Spirit.
- (7) But the territory that the book is aiming to traverse is more familiar: turn left at Tolkien Peaks, walk for several days across the Pullman Plains, cross the Rowling Foothills and there you will find the Money Well, with its inexhaustible torrents of cash.
- (8) Not much seems to enrage the traditionalist critic more than the concept of the "kidult" book. Why should adults be reading the wearisome adventures of Rowling's *Harry Potter*, the pompous sword and sorcery of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or the GCSE philosophising of Philip Pullman, when they could be engaging with Dickens,

Trollope or Austen? Or even Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, modern fiction-spinners who at least deal with the world of grown-ups? Though in Amis's case perhaps grown-up is pushing it.

40 Publishers, on the other hand, love the concept of the kidult book. This is sales terrain without discernible boundaries, where young and old club together, encourage each other, producing a market in which there is no age limit. And personally I have nothing against J K Rowling. For me, anyone who makes reading a competitive sport among 10-year-olds deserves canonisation. No matter how derivative and turgid their prose.

45 **(9)** The triumph of Philip Pullman and J K Rowling, though, is that they found their own market against all precedent. In order to play catch-up, to seize some of the ground opened up by those pioneers, publishers are obliged to join the race at a much pricier entry point.

50 **(10)** The cost began, in the case of Michelle Paver, with the advance. That in itself became a story. Then with the money came the mystique: we were told that, like J K, she had her tales mapped out in her head years ago; she had known for two decades what would appear on her final page. The hype was all in place before a book hit the stores, so much so that optimists were punting on first editions becoming collectors' items.

55 **(11)** But the real gamblers here are the publishers, who are playing with stakes entirely provided by other authors. If this book fails, there will be no money for future projects. If it succeeds - and it is, to be fair, a rollicking, easy read - it will only reinforce the growing habit of putting resources solely behind those whose work fits into pre-conceived marketing boxes.

60 **(12)** It is too early to tell which direction *Wolf Brother* will go. But when I went into my bookshop to pick up a copy, the pile of unsold items was sky high.

(13) What's more, every single one of them was signed by the author.

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- 1p 33 Which of the following is true of paragraphs 1 and 2?
- A They describe a dubious method of raising a writer's income.
 - B They explain the increased market value of a book signed by the author.
 - C They stress the importance of raising publicity for a new book.
- 1p 34 What do lines 15-16 ("This is ... Sunday newspapers.") deal with?
- A The artistic merit of Michelle Paver's work.
 - B The publicity surrounding Michelle Paver's work.
 - C The reader's appreciation of Michelle Paver's work.
- 1p 35 Which of the following becomes clear from paragraphs 6 and 7?
- A Although aimed at children, *Wolf Brother* actually appeals more to adults.
 - B The adventures in *Wolf Brother* take place in the main character's imagination.
 - C The writer of *Wolf Brother* hopes to profit from the success formula of other writers.
 - D *Wolf Brother* represents a new dimension in fantasy writing.
- 1p 36 Which of the following sentences from paragraph 8 reflects Jim White's personal opinion?
- A "Why should ... or Austen?"
 - B "Or even ... grown-ups?"
 - C "Though in ... pushing it."
- 2p 37 Geef van elk van de onderstaande beweringen over J K Rowling aan of deze wel of niet in overeenstemming is met de inhoud van de alinea's 8-9.
- 1 She should be thanked for stimulating young people to read.
 - 2 Her use of language lacks originality.
 - 3 Never before was an author so widely imitated.
 - 4 The royalties she receives exceed those of any other author.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- "The hype was all in place before a book hit the stores" (lines 51-52).
- 2p 38 Welke twee nieuwsfeiten hebben volgens alinea 10 tot deze "hype" geleid?
- 1p 39 What does the writer point out in paragraph 11?
- A Even writers of serious literature are now turning to fantasy writing.
 - B It would be good for literature if *Wolf Brother* did not sell well.
 - C The publishing strategy described in the article puts new developments in literature at risk.
 - D Young and unknown writers stand to gain by the success of *Wolf Brother*.