

**DEMONS
AND
THIEVES**

Reviews

My sincere thanks to everyone who has bought the private edition of *Demons and Thieves*.

The book has been read at the following schools:

Heathside (Weybridge), Broadwater (Godalming), St Osmund's (Dorchester), The Green School (Isleworth), Warwick (Redhill), Reigate (Surrey), Royal Alexander & Albert (Gatton Park), Winston Churchill (Woking), Rydens (Walton-on-Thames), Wishmore Cross (Chobham), and Bishop David Brown (Woking).

A handful of heart-warming reviews, received from the above schools, are listed below:

'Dear Mr Person, who will publish this book in stores:

I found this book an extraordinary adventure, which kept me on the edge of my seat. The characters really fused with my emotions. I will be waiting eagerly for the next edition of this series to read. Sooo, please, please put it on the shelves! And no, I'm not finished yet. The reason why you should put it out to the world is:

IT IS AWESOME!

And will keep me interested forever.' – **Hannah**

'I want to read it all the time because it's so exciting!' – **Josh**

'I became very attached to the characters when I was reading the book and really felt the emotions that they were going through. It felt like I was there doing everything with them. I couldn't bear to put the book down until I had finished it – and even then I wanted more!' – **Emma**

'*Demons and Thieves* is a fantastic book, full of breathtaking adventures and I can't wait for number two. I hope it is as good as number one.' – **Jacob**

‘*Demons and Thieves* is a bit of a thriller, with lots of twists and turns. I would like to see it in the bookshops because kids everywhere will love the whole plot of the trilogy. When we were first told that the class would be reading a book together, I thought that it couldn’t be that exciting, but it was AMAZING! A couple of times I even had to read ahead!’ – **Annabelle**

‘It’s a mysterious, juicy book that if you read the first few pages you can just dive in and feel like you’re there. You can picture everything. My favourite bit was the Bridge of Terror. Tension built up and was getting my heart going, and I like the way Lynda Berger didn’t reveal it all in one place. She slowly uncovered the truth.’ – **Matt**

‘I think *Demons and Thieves* is a brilliant and well thought out book. My class loved it and many other children will love it too. It is funny, gripping, sad and tense. It is a really good book. The first book of the trilogy was so gripping, lots of people at my school want to read the next two books.’ – **Ciara**

‘You should put *Demons and Thieves* in the bookshops because it is exciting, sad, emotional, dangerous, fantastic. The characters are amazing!’ – **Ryan**

‘I think that *Demons and Thieves* is absolutely amazing and I know more than 200 people who would agree with me. It kept me on the edge of my seat and I went home and purchased a copy myself. My older sister and I read it together and we loved every word of it. We cannot wait to read the next thrilling adventure!’ – **Anna**

‘It is by far my favourite book I have ever read because it teaches you to always follow your dreams, no matter what. How you built up tension blew my head away.’ – **Joe**

‘I would really like to see *Demons and Thieves* in the bookshops because it is very catchy, once you start reading it. I would definitely recommend this to people who love reading and enjoy adventurous and exciting books. You read the first chapter then you can’t stop. I would definitely buy the book if it was in the shops.’ – **Emily**

‘*Demons and Thieves* is an extremely wonderful book, full of imagination. I always wanted to read on but I had to wait. My favourite part of the book was the Bridge of Terror because of the tension and excitement. I don’t normally like reading, but I just wanted to read more of this book.’ – **Archie**

‘Amazement rushing through my head, explosions of ideas and my favourite things coming all at once! All I could think of when we were reading this fabulous story was what would happen next. It was mind-blowing.’ – **Eliza**

‘Most students have absolutely loved the book. In fact, in my set we were finishing reading it today, and two students who were due to go to a literacy workshop said they weren’t going if it meant missing reading the end! (Actually, they re-thought the “won’t” and went and asked their workshop teacher if they could be excused – and she was happy to oblige.)’ – **Head of English, The Warwick School**

‘After your suggestion of having two “back-to-back” workshops, I checked with the department and it seems we have a couple of year 8 groups now studying the novel too, due to its success with year 7s. The pupils are really, really enjoying the book.’
– **Head of English, Broadwater School**

‘My students have thoroughly enjoyed this novel. They have loved the colourful characters, interesting plot and use of imagination within each chapter.’

– **Louise Cooper, English Teacher, Heathside School**

‘I am happy to report students were very engaged throughout, look forward to meeting you, and can’t wait to read the sequel!’

– **Assistant Head of English, 2012/13, Winston Churchill School**

‘*Demons and Thieves*’ is an engaging novel filled with imagination and excitement. Berger has managed to capture the essence of a fast-paced, fantasy video game and packed it into an extraordinary story. This unique approach has inspired many students at Reigate School and for some has reignited their interest and passion for reading. The characters Berger conjures are weird, unpredictable and quirky, leaving you unsure of their next move all the way along. The journey of ‘*Demons and Thieves*’ has not left our students and will stay with them for a long time to come. We cannot wait for the next adventure.’ – **Miss Couzens, English Teacher, Reigate School**

For more reviews, please visit: www.demonsandthieves.com

THE SEVEN KEYS TRILOGY: BOOK ONE

DEMONS AND THIEVES

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All of the characters in this book are fictitious and any resemblance
to actual people, living or dead, is purely imaginary.

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To Catherine

whose words were the inspiration for this book

One

The Accident

‘I’m going to kill him!’

Tad could hardly look at the screen. There he was on YouTube – singing into a hairbrush in front of the mirror. His brother had secretly filmed him. ‘He must’ve been in my wardrobe all the time. Waiting for a chance to show me up.’

Tad felt hot and sick. Now, the entire world would laugh at him. His heart banged against his chest as he shot out of his room and raced downstairs.

Nick, looking as smug as ever, was sitting in the kitchen with their mother – the perfect son doing the perfect homework. Even his spiky brown hair looked perfect – unlike Tad’s, which needed a bucket-load of gel to stay in place.

‘I hate you!’ Tad launched himself at his brother, his hands ready to throttle him. Nick dived out of the way, his chair crashing to the floor along with Tad.

‘What’s going on?’ their mother cried, hurrying over to help Tad up. Nick was trying, unsuccessfully, to stifle a giggle.

‘Ask *him!*’ Tad’s bottom lip was quivering.

‘What have you done, Nick?’ she demanded.

Nick strolled over to the sink and poured a glass of water, his back conveniently turned towards them. 'Nothing that someone with a sense of humour would worry about.'

'Oh yeah?' Tad yelled. 'Well, how would *you* like it if I stuck a stupid video of you on Facebook, falling over your stupid feet on your stupid skateboard?'

'Oh, get a life!' Nick retorted. 'You're eleven now. Grow up!'

'And you're thirteen and you should know better.' The voice came from the doorway. It was their grandpa, Sam. 'I suggest you apologise, Nick. We've got a really nice day ahead of us and it would be a shame to spoil it. Just make up now and get in the car. The races start in an hour.'

'I'm not going anywhere if it means being with him,' Tad snapped.

'Well, looks like it'll be just you and me then, Grandpa.' Nick smirked as he breezed past Tad and made his way out of the kitchen. 'I'll be in the car.'

'I wish you were dead!' Tad shouted after him.

'Come on, Tad,' his grandpa said. 'He's just jealous. If he could play the piano the way you do, he wouldn't bother winding you up.'

Tad didn't believe any of it. Lots of people could play the piano whereas Nick was athletic and achieved the highest grades for everything.

'Go on, Tad,' his mother urged. 'Get in the car. You know how much you love the horses. Your grandpa planned this for the pair of you. Don't disappoint him.'

'No, I can't. I just can't. I'm sorry, Grandpa.' Tad turned and ran out of the kitchen.



Sam sighed. His car rattled along the wet suburban road, the windscreen wipers hypnotic in the rain. It had all gone so terribly wrong. Not only had he failed to persuade Tad to come with them, but now he had upset Nick by criticising the boy's treatment of his younger brother.

Sam tried to concentrate on the road but in his mind's eye, all he could see was Tad's sad blue eyes staring back at him. Why couldn't the boys get along?

His phone buzzed from his inside pocket. Fumbling for it, Sam cursed as it slipped through his fingers and fell onto the floor. 'Serves me right,' he muttered, as he tried to reach it.

As his car shot across the junction, he caught a glimpse of the traffic light mocking him from the side. It was red. A sudden sense of dread swept over him as he realised his mistake. He stamped on the brake, sending the car into a skid. Traffic was speeding towards him from both directions.

'Please, God, no!' he cried, pressing his foot to the floor. The car spun round and round as Sam wrestled with the steering wheel. Screeching tyres, burning rubber, thoughts of death, his wife Joan. Then silence. The car had stopped.

'It's okay. We're okay,' he gasped.

Sighing with relief, he glanced to his right. A bus was bearing down on him. Sam could only look on as the bus rammed his car sideways into the path of a fuel tanker.

Time tumbled into a strange frame from that point on, somewhere between fast and forever. As the bus slammed into the truck, sandwiching Sam's car in-between, his eyes met those of another. A face in the bus, screaming.

He didn't feel the explosion, nor the rage of the flames. He was high above them by then, skimming the clouds as something light pulled him away.

~ ~ ~

In his bedroom, Tad was picking out chords on his guitar when he felt a jolt as if his insides had been wrenched from him. He leant against a chair to steady himself. Perhaps he was dehydrated. He made his way back down to the kitchen and poured himself a glass of cola.

A family photo on the windowsill had fallen over. He set it back up, his gaze falling to the picture of Sam. Tad loved the old man. He was so wise, so fair, so kind – although a little weird at times, talking to things as if they were real.

Tad smiled sadly and checked his phone. Still no reply from Grandpa. Maybe he was driving and hadn't read the text. Tad just wanted him to know that he was sorry.

He sank into a chair, angry with himself for letting Sam down. 'How could I have let Nick get to me like that? I'm going to make it up to you, Grandpa, I promise. We'll go out. Just you and me. My treat. I've saved up quite a bit.' He smiled.

The local news was playing on the radio:

'Firth Street in Bleakton has been closed due to a fire following a serious accident. All traffic is being diverted as emergency vehicles attend the scene.'

The doorbell rang. His mother must have answered it because minutes later he heard her anguished, unearthly howl. It would be the soundtrack to his nightmares for weeks to come afterwards.

And life, after that, would never be the same again.

Two

Three Years Later

‘Nick’s dead!’ Mrs Bailey screamed at her husband. ‘When will you get that?’

Tad could hear the row from his bedroom. He hurried over to the door and peeped out. His parents were downstairs.

‘I’m busy, Rebecca. I don’t have time for this right now,’ Tad’s father was saying.

‘You *never* have time, Jonathan. Not for me or for Tad. You were bad enough before the accident, working all hours. But now ...’

‘Keep your voice down,’ he spat.

‘Why? Are you worried Tad will hear? Do you even care about him, Jonathan? Because you don’t show it.’

‘Get out, Rebecca! Leave me alone.’

‘I’ll get out all right. If you don’t get your act together, I’ll get out for good!’ She slammed the door and raced up the stairs.

Tad’s father flew out of the study and caught hold of his wife on the half-landing, his eyes bulging with fury. ‘Don’t you *ever* threaten me!’ he spat, pulling her roughly towards him.

Tad’s mother looked scared. She grabbed hold of the cold

mug of tea that was perched on the windowsill beside her, and hurled the liquid at her angry husband.

Tad, watching from his bedroom door, stood horrified as the tea splashed across his dad's face and then dripped onto his brand-new shirt. His father looked stunned. Tad wasn't sure what he was going to do. His father was prone to angry outbursts, but his mother had never fought back like this.

For one long minute his dad just stood there, as if crushed by his wife's action. Then silently he turned round and retreated downstairs to his study, closing the door behind him.

Tad's mother, visibly shaken and in tears, made her way to the top of the stairs and turned into her bedroom.

Tad closed his door quietly and leant back on it. His parents seemed to be heading for a divorce and there was nothing he could do about it.

He pulled out his rucksack from the space beneath his bed. It was already packed – sweater, wallet, phone, torch, matches, a bottle of water and biscuits – all of which he had prepared six months ago when things had started to get really bad.

There was no sign of his mother. She was probably still in her room. He slipped downstairs. The stereo was blasting away in his father's office.

Opening the front door, he took one look back and ran out ...



Tad's mind was racing as he fled down the road towards Siren Forest. Life had been so hard recently, not just at home but at school too. Why couldn't he be bigger, taller? Then, perhaps, those idiots who picked on him would leave him alone.

Night was creeping in, changing light into shadow and beauty into ghostly shades that teased his imagination. But the

images that were really burning through his mind came from his troubled life. Even his dog, Bo, had gone missing – somewhere here in these woods. If he could put nothing else right, Tad was determined to find him.

The wet and muddy floor of the forest made a treacherous carpet beneath Tad's feet and he slipped suddenly, falling heavily into some brambles.

Disentangling himself from the thorns, Tad stood up – he'd heard something. It was hard to focus with the approaching dark, but the sound was quite unmistakable. Several yards ahead of him, clad in black helmets and leathers, two bikers were busy jumping a steep ditch and bouncing onto the opposite bank.

Tad stepped behind a tree and peered out. His heart was thumping. He mustn't be seen. Crouching close to the ground, he reached into his rucksack for his black sweater. As he tugged at the zip of his beige jacket and threw it off his shoulders, the cold night air cut into his skin. He shivered. A thin tee-shirt hadn't been the best idea. Hurriedly, he pulled on the sweater, stuffed the jacket into his rucksack and looked back towards the ditch.

One biker was there, but where was the other?

Nervous, he moved away from the tree, scanning the forest. He knew it well. To his right there was heather, an area full of rabbit burrows and foxholes; to his left, a path leading to the road. There was no sign of anyone there. Tad frowned as he watched the remaining biker stop to adjust his helmet. Although he couldn't see him clearly, there was something about him – something familiar, but disturbing.

It was time to leave. He was about to step back when a sudden noise made him turn. His mouth went dry. It was the other bike.

Pivoting on his foot, Tad made to run in the opposite direction, but the first bike blocked his path.

His legs, weak beneath him, froze as the engines revved a worrying duet. The bikers had found a new game. As they sped towards him, he dived to his right and headed for the heather.

Charging along the muddy track, Tad glanced back. The bikers were weaving along a few feet behind him. He had been in some tough situations before, but how was he going to get out of this one?

He raced forward, then darted off the trail and into the heather. He had remembered something. Pulling the torch from his rucksack, he flicked the switch, searching for the badger sett that his dog had found. It was ten feet away, straight ahead.

He ran as close to it as he dared, then leapt suddenly to the right, rolling down the hill towards the fence.

The bikers couldn't stop in time. As their wheels struck the unexpected gash in the earth, they were hurled into the air, their bikes crashing down beneath them.

Tad didn't wait to see what happened next. He had a plan.

Somewhere by the fence, which separated the woods from private land, Bo had dug a hole under the barbed wire. If he could get there before the bikers recovered, perhaps he could lose them. He ran along the perimeter, flashing his torch.

There!

He bent down and propped the wire up with his rucksack. It was slacker than it should have been – just enough room for him to slip through. With his chin held tight to his chest, he slithered on his back to the other side, snatched up the rucksack and ran into the adjacent field.

Images of Bo flashed through his mind as he darted across the open space. Was it only yesterday that he'd disappeared?

They'd been walking in the forest when Bo had suddenly rushed off. Tad was used to the golden retriever's mischievous antics and had expected him to reappear as usual, covered in foul-smelling sludge from his favourite stagnant ditch.

But yesterday, Bo hadn't come back.

Tad had searched everywhere for his dog, putting up notices on trees and on lampposts near his house. His parents had even contacted the police and the local animal shelter, but no one had reported the dog found. The only place he hadn't been able to look was on this private piece of land.

The sight of a farm just ahead interrupted his thoughts. As he ran towards it, the moon cast an eerie glow on the derelict buildings. At one end lay stables, which had solid roofs but were otherwise in a sad state of disrepair. At the other end, he could see the main building, covered in ivy with the windows boarded up.

He walked round to the front door. Part of him wanted to look inside; the other part was scared. Hesitantly, he gave it a push, expecting it to be locked. It opened – almost too quickly for his liking – gliding silently on its hinges.

The hallway of the cottage was empty apart from a wooden walking-stick that lay propped against the staircase. There was no sign of life – no sound, except for the carpet that squelched beneath his feet as he entered. The rain must have been flooding in under the front door for some time, he thought. No one could live there anymore; the smell of mould was awful.

To his right, a door lay slightly ajar and Tad peeped in.

The room was dark and uninviting, but the moon shining through the broken window provided some light. Apart from a wooden table that lay abandoned in one corner, the only other piece of furniture was an iron bed – still made up with sheets, blankets and pillows.

Tad strolled over and felt the covers, expecting them to be damp. Strangely, they were perfectly dry. Throwing his rucksack and trainers to the floor, he climbed in. He would just rest for a moment and get warm. Sliding under the sheet, his foot kicked something hard at the bottom of the bed.

He reached down and brought it out of the covers, then held it under his torch.

It was a stone. On one side it looked polished and perfect; on the other it was rough and dirty and covered in mud. He tried to clean it with a bit of spit and his sleeve, but the dirt wouldn't budge. He leant back and studied it for a while, rolling it over and over between his fingers.

As he lay there, Tad felt anger and loneliness rise in his throat. He hated school and he hated home. The only good parts of his life had been his grandpa and Bo. And now they were both gone.

A solitary tear slipped down his cheek as he snuggled down into the bed. With the stone still held tightly in his palm, he closed his eyes and fell asleep.