Title: The Outlaws Scarlett & Browne

Author: Jonathan Stroud

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| **LIKES** |
| Hooked immediately. Started reading it on the way home and didn’t want to stop.  The dynamic between Albert and Scarlett.  Snappy dialogue.  Lots of humour –quite adult (use of irony).  Not at all dumbed down – treats the reader as intelligent, able to pick up clues and appreciate subtle humour.  Sometimes the gender reversal of characters can be a bit of a modern cliché but we felt that it worked here.  The slow reveal of Albert’s ‘abilities’ and strengths – to Scarlett and to us.  Descriptions. The landscape. The different elements of society, individual towns etc.  Contrasts – e.g. Albert caring for Etty, sensitive, appreciating the flowers. But also capable of great violence.  Quality of the language. A page turner, but also not afraid to linger over descriptions.  The many mysteries and twists e.g. The Tainted.  The setting,.  A new twist on the Western – a genre students not often familiar with.  ‘Aspirational’ – it doesn’t talk down to you but as a reader you are motivated and want to keep up.  Real sense of peril. Unlike much YA, genuinely didn’t know if the characters would be ok in the end.  A good example of what Stephen King calls ‘portable magic’ – a world I just wanted to stay in. |

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| **DISLIKES** |
| * Slightly contrived at the end. Setting up for the sequel. * Bit of a mix up – past (Wessex, Mercia) and future? * All the killing – Almost cartoon-like at times. Began to feel that there was no value to human life. Perhaps echoing the context. * A few things that could have been developed more eg Scarlett’s character, the ‘Western’ element. * Students can be put off by the climate change theme – something they don’t want to think about because it’s too worrying. * All the mention of ‘deformity’ got uncomfortable at times. * Dr Calloway just would not die! Everytime she re-appeared I thought ‘that stupid woman won’t die’. Not really a criticism – just means she’s a good villain! |

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| **PUZZLES** |
| * What is Scarlett’s mysterious back story? Will we find out more in the sequel? * Interested in the Faith Houses and would like to know more * Wondering if the genders are really subverted here, or just reversed. E.g. Is Scarlett really just a male character given a female name and physical features?   Questions we’d like to ask Jonathan Stroud:   * The mix of genres and historical references: Is the setting a post-climate change world, or just an alternative UK? * How did the Tainted become tainted? * How do you write such credible action sequences? * What were some of your influences? We think we notice some of the following: A Clockwork Orange; Jurassic Park; Stranger Things |

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| **PATTERNS (Within this book and links to other books and real-life experiences)** |
| ***Within the novel***   * Trauma and its lasting impact * Outsiders * Everyone has a secret * Features of a ‘quest’ style narrative * References to Scarlett’s red hair – connotations of rebelious, unusual etc   ***Real life links***   * Journeys to the north of England during times of flooding * Climate change maps * A relative’s experience of people trying to recruit them to a cult and what they offered: comfort and security in chaotic times   ***Links to other books / film***   * A Clockwork Orange * His Dark Materials * Ruby in the Smoke * The Last of Us * Station Eleven * Norse mythology (experience of death) |

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| **HOOKS** |
| * Reading extracts, lots of cliffhangers – it’s a book that sells itself! * NOT the climate change angle – kids a bit weary of that, or worried about the reality and don’t want to read fiction about it |

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| **READING ALOUD, HAVING IGNITED THEIR CURIOSITY** |
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| **OUTPUTS FOLLOWING READING (ORAL AND WRITTEN)** |
| * Making a map of an area in the book and comparing to current maps of the real place * Using the novel as a model for creative writing, for example: ‘hooky’ opening lines; cliffhangers; a flashback to the environmental disaster * Scope for work with the geography dept * Exploring the idea of the ‘outlaw’ and the idea of spirituality/morality (is Scarlett a bad person) * Thinking of adding extracts to existing non-fiction unit on the natural world inc climate change |

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| **RESOURCES** |
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| **OTHER** |
| * One teacher already reading this to Y8 and others have already lent it out and it’s going down well. * Has inspired the creation of a ‘Sparks’ book club. A book group for KS3 pupils who used to read but have lost the habit – to re-ignite the reading spark. This will be the first book – should hook them! |