

At last! The sequel to *The Name of this Book is Secret* is out and it's just what we were looking forward to—another romp through mysterious secrets and magical mayhem as Cass and Max–Ernest set out on a new quest—to find the *homunculus* and join the Terces Society.

There are twists and turns in the plot to keep readers awake way past bedtime—not to mention puzzles, codes and jokes—and the know-it-all narrator is just as witty, even teasing his readers with hints about another book to come (p78). (I can't wait!) There are also new characters of dubious identity to perplex Cass and Max–Ernest, and a 'sock-roach' for the Skelton Sisters to add to their merchandising range.

As if the dangers of their quest to find the *homunculus* were not enough, Cass and Max–Ernest find their friendship tested by the introduction of Yo–Yoji, a school friend who stumbles into their adventure. He's very good looking, which turns out to be useful in unexpected ways, but he provokes emotions that confuse Cass and Max–Ernest as they enter adolescence. Max–Ernest also has to find new ways to negotiate his parents' bizarre behaviour, while Cass has to confront the painful puzzle of her own identity.

But the pace of the story leaves little time for introspection! The evil Dr L and Ms Mauvais are hot on the trail, and Cass, the proudly independently survivalist, is captured. To reveal more would invoke the wrath of the narrator, so it must suffice to say that loyalty, courage and friendship triumph again, and that there will surely be another in the series!

The kids at school can't wait to get their hands on my review copy—this series just has to be made into a film!!

Lisa Hill, Mossgiel Park Primary School, VIC

This book is an excellent sequel to *The Name of This Book Is Secret*. The author, Pseudonymous Bosch, (if that is his real name), continues the story of Cass and Max-Ernest in a hilarious, fast-paced tale.

Cass and Max-Ernest have a mission to complete for the Terces Society, but Cass has been grounded for, according to her mum, running away. There will be no mobile phone, no television, no Internet, no extra-curricular activities, no dessert...in fact NO FUN for the rest of the year.

Somehow, despite being grounded so severely, Cass must use the Sound Prism to help her find the homunculus and figure out the secrets of the alchemist. Along the way there are cryptic clues to solve, a new friend, Yo-Yoji, to bring up to speed and the evil schemes of Ms Mauvais and Dr L to thwart.

Again, the author engages directly with the reader in little asides and explanations. He makes out that he is too scared to write the book and you, the reader, should be too scared to read it. In the middle of the book there is a random Pop Quiz, not really relevant to the story but very funny.

This book is laugh-out –loud funny and would be great as a read aloud to any Year 4-8 class.

Nova Gibson, Summerland Primary School, New Zealand

If you're Reading This, it's Too Late was my first encounter with the *SECRET* series. It is an interesting concept with the contract in the front of the book, which says in the author's note to the reader 'if you refuse to sign, I'm afraid you must close this book immediately.' It sounds like a sure fire way to get kids reading to find out more.

The beginning is designed to build suspense and aims to capture the reader's interest.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, it doesn't work.

Humour and lots of footnotes that refer the reader back to the previous books in the *SECRET* series or explanations about such things as the Freudian slip and who Sigmund Freud was are scattered throughout. While some of this information may be interesting, they quickly became an annoying distraction that takes away from a story that should have had pace and suspense.

Quest stories usually build up drama but this one came across as flat. I'd suggest the author needs to look at someone like Matthew Reilly for how to build tension and drama. The author attempts to built suspense but it doesn't come off.

Similarly while the author intends to be comical, it is overdone. Someone like Terry Pratchett might be good to look at and how he weaves humour into the story naturally.

In books by J.K. Rowling, the villains are suitable villainous. These are bland.

The idea and the story have potential but sadly, it is not realized. I read lots of children's book and enjoy many but I struggled to read this. Comments I'd read claimed it was 'addictive.' I found it anything but. Maybe it will appeal to 8-12 year olds but I found it largely disappointing, as though the author is trying too hard.

Dale Harcombe, NSW

This book is a sequel to *The Name of This Book is Secret* and is compelling reading. When last we left our heroes, Cass and Max-Ernest, they were waiting to join a secret society. Adventures lead these friends into the clutches of their enemies and then back to safety. I don't want to give too much away but his name is Homunculus.

"The secret, what is it, you ask? You'll have to read the story -- if you dare! "

Readers can join the heroes in working to figure out the codes and other puzzles that are found in this book. Throughout the story are the interesting comments and anecdotes of P.S. Bosch, including word definitions, advice and the ever present warning about the dangers to the readers (just because they are reading the story). The book is full of humour and the adventures lead the heroes and the reader to life lessons about true friendship, tenacity and ingenuity.

This book is highly recommended.

Anne Lewis, Mooloolaba State School, QLD

In the second in a series about ultra-survivalist Cass (she has everything she might need in case of a major emergency in her backpack) and her sidekick Max-Ernest (forced to live two identical lives to please his divorced parents), the reader is asked to unpack the anonymous author's postmodern approach to this story of magic, mystery and the supernatural. It's a sophisticated read. With so many asides and red herrings, the pair struggle to identify their mission and then work on a whole lot of trust to defeat the evil Dr L and Ms Mauvais and free the ancient, unearthly homunculus from its mortal coil. It's funny, it's quick-paced and it's compelling as the children deal with all the usual problems with peers and parents – and then some (Cass questions her identity, while Max-Ernest tries to manage his split personality) while still attempting to save the world.

Activities

- Students to outline unlikely pairings (character study). Then, as a class, create a list of adventures and get students to put their characters into one of these plots.
- Discuss stereotypes: evil and good. Apply to novel.
- Choose one character from the novel. Interview them for radio program: *Street Stories, What Are you Doing Now?*

Kim Kitson, Valley View Public School, NSW

Pseudonymous Bosch has done it again! Another classic book in the Secret series following up from *The Name of this Book is Secret*.

Our heroes, Cass and Max-Ernest, are again out to defeat Ms Mauvais and evil Dr L and the rest of the Midnight Sun from creating all sorts of havoc. They also had the assistance this time of Yo-Yoji, a fellow student who followed them and hounded them to go along with them.

In this book, Cass has become the keeper of the Sound Prism, and with it, is her that brings the 500 year old homunculus to rise. After a while, he begins to trust Cass, and tells her a bit of her heritage, her father – a jester! He was a long time friend of the homunculus, and the reason her ears are so much bigger and go red at the slightest thing.

In the Sound Prism file, Cass had found something else – a birth certificate.

Cass had been left in a box at her grandfathers' house when she was a baby, and Cass's mother took her home and raised her as her own.

I loved this book, a great sequel, a riveting adventure, full of twists and turns and rolling with humour, I can't wait until the next book!

I have to get to the bottom of the Secret!!!! [not to mention finding out who exactly is Pseudonymous Bosch!]

Pauline Dunn, Mountain District Christian School, VIC