



Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We currently support more than 100 groups in over 65 prisons nationwide. If you're interested, check with your library to see if there's a group in your prison. PRG is part of registered charity Give a Book.

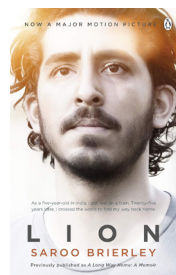


## Reading Group Round-Up

Promoting reading and reading groups in prisons

### The power of a reading group

Reading groups have a lot to offer. They help readers get out of their comfort zones and try new authors and genres. They're also a chance to get together with others to compare responses – best book ever or like wading through mud? And these groups can build trust and friendship in a relaxed and safe space.

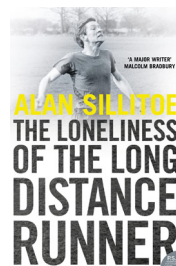


This month's reports from three different groups show this in action. One of the groups at Wormwood Scrubs recently read Saroo Brierley's *Lion*. It's the true story of five-year old Saroo who lived in a poor village in India with his mother and three siblings until one day he boarded

a train alone and got lost. For 25 years. The book follows what happened to him, first on the streets of Calcutta, then as part of a comfortable middle-class Aussie family in Tasmania before he finally found his way back home. In 2016 the book was made into a film starring Dev Patel, Nicole Kidman and Rooney Mara.

Discussion ranged from questions of fate, destiny and miracles to life on the streets and mother love, and everyone was keen to hear and respond to what others thought, "As the brother says", "I agree".

The group was also very inclusive and encouraged a new recruit who was born in India to share his knowledge and experience. At the end of the session one member summed it up: "This group is great, can we meet more often?"



The Hollesley Bay group read Alan Sillitoe's 1959 short story, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*. The central character is Smith, a teenager from a dismal working-class area of Nottingham who has little in his life except the running he takes up to find

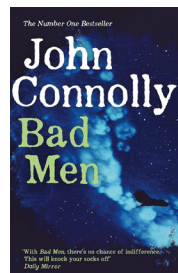
emotional escape from his situation. When he's sent to a Borstal for petty crime his talent for running is spotted by those in charge. They offer him better conditions for the last six months of his sentence if he wins an important cross-country race against a prestigious public school. The outcome brings the reader up against a fundamental question: what does freedom really mean?

The story led to lively debate about class and background as well as the possibility of freedom in prison. At the end of the session members were asked what they liked about the reading group:

"Meeting other people and hearing their interpretations is both challenging and enjoyable."

"Feeling part of a group and feeling respectful and valued is very positive."

And from a new member: "It was good to feel comfortable so easily and quickly among a group I hadn't met before."



At Liverpool the group opted for John Connolly's *Dead Men*. The story is set on an island off the coast of Maine with a centuries-long history of violence. A band of killers has arrived to hunt down a young mother and her son. All that stands between them is a rookie

cop and the island's longstanding policeman, a troubled man and guardian of the island's ghosts.

The group had read another Connolly novel a while back and had given it a pretty complete thumbs down. But *Bad Men* had been lobbied for by one of the members and everyone worked hard to find the positives in it: a stronger narrative voice, better pacing and some intriguing intertwined story lines. At the end of the session they jokingly agreed to let the chooser stay in the group but threatened to eject the group facilitator who hadn't finished it!



## Finding a Good Read

A column to help you find intriguing books

Bethan Morgan

### Science fiction & fantasy

Science fiction and fantasy stories are as old as humanity itself, from the very first tales humans began telling each other by firesides to the biggest movies in the world today. The oldest recorded stories were written down thousands of years ago on clay tablets and papyrus scrolls. Two of the most famous examples are *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*. One of these is about a great king's quest for immortality. The other is about an old warrior who must battle many terrifying monsters on his long journey home. Both teach us to be braver, kinder, and more human.

The science fiction and fantasy genres are often where we tell our most entertaining, inspiring, and empowering stories, because they transport us into a far stranger, far more magical world. In doing so, they allow us to find the magic in our own world – to see it and understand it better. We've all heard of the classics. Here are some more recent favourites, all published in the last year.



*The Poet Empress* by Shen Tao is an epic fantasy inspired by medieval China about a young peasant girl who must learn poetry magic to defeat the empire. If you enjoy this, you should read *The Sword of Kaigen* by M.L. Wang next.

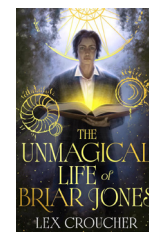


*Alchemy of Secrets* by Stephanie Garber is set in modern-day Los Angeles. Holland St James must solve a murder mystery before midnight on Halloween or she'll die. But there's magic hiding around every corner and nothing is quite what it seems. If you enjoy this, you should read *The Library of the Dead* by T.L. Huchu next.



*Kissed by the Gods* by Caty Rogan is a dazzling romance set in a fantastical world of warring gods and flying horses. If you enjoy this, you should read *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros next.

*The Unmagical Life of Briar Jones* by Lex Croucher follows two childhood best friends who dream of attending the world's only school of magic. Briar doesn't. Years later, Briar gets a job at the school as a cleaner and discovers their best friend has become the villain. If you enjoy this, you should read *Vicious* by V. E. Schwab next.



*Voidwalker* by S. A. MacLean is set across multiple worlds. Fi has the power to walk through the void between them, like the devilish beasts who were born there with their gleaming antlers, claws, and tails. She doesn't mean to fall in love with one. If you enjoy this, you should read *Quicksilver* by Callie Hart next.

*The Wolf and His King* by Finn Longman is a beautiful retelling of one of the oldest myths about werewolves in Europe. A knight falls in love with a king. The king doesn't know he spends half his life as a wolf. If you enjoy this, you should read *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller next.

*Lucid* by Oraine Johnson is a superhero story a bit like *Batman* but set in Birmingham. If you enjoy this, you should read *The City We Became* by N. K. Jemisin next.

*The Devils* by Joe Abercrombie is a roller-coaster of an adventure about a secret group of werewolves and vampires who team up to unite the world against an invading army of murderous elves. If you enjoy this, you should read *Between Two Fires* by Christopher Buehlman next.

*Some Body Like Me* by Lucy Lapinska asks you this: if you met your clone, what would you do? If you enjoy this, you should read *Death of the Author* by Nnedi Okorafor next.

*How to Defeat a Demon King in Ten Easy Steps* by Andrew Rowe is exactly what it sounds like. A young hero must set out on a quest to save the world – and she's got a 10-step plan to do it. This book feels exactly like playing a video game and is part of the increasingly popular "LitRPG" (Literary Role-Playing Game) genre. If you enjoy this, you should read *Dungeon Crawler Carl* by Matt Dinniman next.

With thanks to Give a Book and PRG volunteer Bethan Morgan



**Extra £10 bonus available for the Star Letter, Star Poem and Star Rap plus the outright winners of the Inside Knowledge Quiz, just for helping us to monitor our service.**

To qualify you must add to the bottom of your entry:

1. The date this month's copy of Inside Time was available on the wings or in the library.
2. Tell us if there was an advertising leaflet enclosed. Not all prisons will have leaflets but we need to confirm which ones do. If there was, give the name of the firm(s) if not, write 'NO LEAFLETS'.

As a thank you for your help these winners will receive a £10 bonus prize.

## TurningPages

### Prisoners who can read teach prisoners who can't

If you would like more information on how to become involved, as either a Mentor or a Learner, contact the Reading Plan Lead in your prison (ask a Shannon Trust Mentor who this is) or write to:

Freeport SHANNON TRUST



Shannon Trust