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The Demon Assassin

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

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Media type:

Book

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You could never accuse Alan Gibbons of being short on excitement; the London Blitz, Reinhard Heydrich and the Waffen SS, 'gobbets of flesh and decals of thick, dark blood,' an assassin stalking Winston Churchill, and that's before p.26. Action crowds the pages, which come packaged in an affordable chunky hardback (16cm x 11cm), the black cover illuminated by staring red eyes 'echoing, maybe, the collectible 'Series of Unfortunate Events'. This is 'Hell's Underground' 2, sequel to **Scared to Death**, in which we first met 15-year-old Paul Rector. His lonely destiny is to thwart his own ancestors, hell-bent upon releasing King Lud and his demonic disciples from their imprisonment deep beneath London's streets 'for Lud means to win control of the city he founded long ago. Knowing what he must do, Paul boards a spectral tube train, slipping back through time from the 21st century to the war-torn winter of 1941. Within minutes, he's struggling to save D.I. George Temple of Special Branch from a demon which can kill with a single glance. The pace is ferocious as Paul and Temple (a mischievous choice of name for a 1940s detective?) battle not merely with ruthless Nazi killers but 'far more dangerous and for even higher stakes' Paul's Great Uncle Harry, one of Lud's lethal minions.

The language is direct, the fights come fast and furious, and if there is the occasional cliché, that may well help less assured readers to feel at ease in the book. There are inconsistencies: Heydrich greets Harry on one page only to meet him, as if for the first time, on the next; we might find 'discretely' for 'discreetly'; and would 15-year-old Paul consistently address a Detective Inspector simply as 'Temple'? The 1940s all-action plot recalls another cliff-hanger from (almost) the same era. **Dick Barton** didn't offer much subtlety of character either, but half the nation tuned in nightly. Dick favoured the straight right to the jaw, but Paul has demonic powers of his own, trading in fear and fire. And Dick never met an opponent who reduces three snarling Alsatians to whimpering wrecks with a stare and dresses for battle in the dripping red fur of a blood wolf. Here, even the good guys 'and girls' meet excruciating, lingering, deaths. You have to find out what happens next, and it's no surprise to read on Alan Gibbons' website the evidence that plenty of boys, many of them not habitual readers, are buying a ticket to 'Hell's Underground'. Book Three is on track.

Running Order:

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