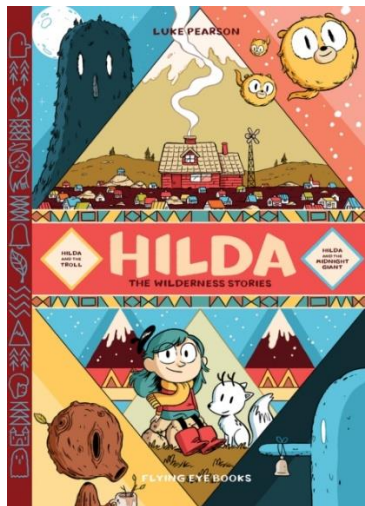




## Hilda by Luke Pearson

[Young Readers]



"How does an armchair fall down the back of a sofa anyway?"

Good point, well made. Did you ever wonder what happened to those odd socks, gloves, or that 2lb slab of milk chocolate you can't find? Err, I can explain the milk chocolate and I'm ever so sorry.

There are six HILDA graphic novels by Luke Pearson filled with intrigue, exploration, independence, resolve, resourcefulness and the wonder of a world which Luke has created, at once familiar yet populated by exotic and fantastical new fauna. That's what you need to light up the eyes and fire the minds of young readers: wonder, surprise and a protagonist o'er-brimming with an insatiable curiosity. Plucky young Hilda's is infectious! One even won the British Comics 2012 Young Readers Award as judged by Leeds schoolchildren, and they are the Very Best Judges.

That, I believe, was HILDA AND THE MIDNIGHT GIANT, a breath-takingly beautiful book, its midnight blues as rich in colour as the daylight splendour. There's a dash of Jordan Crane to the floating Woofs migrating across the sky like fluffy, wide-eyed, long-tailed tadpoles, while the giant is pure Tom Gauld. Bigger than the nearest mountain, its eerie black body blocks out the stars, its white eyes silently scanning as if in search of something... If a form cannot be contained, then it is rendered monumental, and as peach-glowing sunrise seeps slowly over the low, distant horizon, on a second full page the giant o'er-fills the frame from head to toe – even whilst bent on one knee!





In the first book, conversely, there's the best evocation ever of cosiness under canvas! Outside the nocturnal heavens have broken open. Snug inside the tent's orange belly Hilda can hear the rain pattering on the protective tarpaulin and towel-wraps her soggy pet, Twig: half-Arctic Fox, half-deer.

Hilda lives with her mother, a professional artist, out in the wilds of the most majestic countryside with craggy peaks that rise into crystal-blue skies, their snow-capped summits enticing you ever upwards to explore! Hilda loves to dash out, to document and to draw! Armed with a rucksack full of pens, pencils, paper and nature books, Hilda could spend an entire dreamy day...

... sitting bored indoors, looking mournfully out of her bedroom window onto the deadly-dull streets of a city suburb she is forbidden to set foot in. Oh dear: by the third book, they've moved. To her mother's mind these city streets are infinitely more dangerous than the Troll-troubled hills they once frequented. With no discernible vantage points you could get so easily lost in the maze. Alternatively: it's a brand-new environment to explore, with denizens no less funny, bothersome or bizarre!



Hilda's Mum is no control freak (she gives her a lot of leeway) but worries about her daughter's safety because that's what Mums do. I'm afraid things come to a head when Mum denies her a night away and Hilda goes mental. Complete temper-tantrum meltdown, and she says some terrible things that made me vicariously ashamed. Her Mum finally puts her foot down, but Hilda's never been good with the lure of a quest, and it's a tug of war which has radical ramifications for them both. The stakes will be raised when it comes to the level of danger, but it will serve to prove that Hilda and her Mum are very much cut from the same cloth in their resilience, resourcefulness and their indefatigability.

Hilda's overriding instinct to help, even when she's advised against it or the odds are all stacked against her. Not everything goes to plan, and there are quietly affecting moments of silent contemplation staring out of windows, but then in the morning resolve is renewed and Hilda will try once again! As a parent I would be proud of that sort of determined compassion in any of my children, and I beam to see it portrayed in the pluckiest of young people here!

I love Hilda's mouth when she goes "Oooh!" I'm making that face as I type: a projection to a small, rounded mouth to one side that lets out a well-rounded "Oooh!" It's infectious – the sort of art that encourages you to enact what's happening and so makes for the very best bed-time reading.