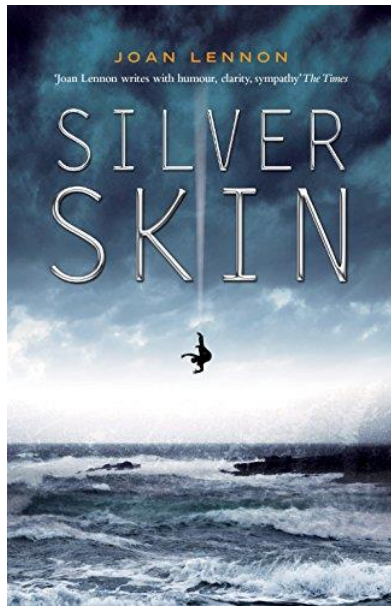


Silver Skin
by Joan Lennon



Birlinn Press (BC Books)
ISBN: 9781780272849

Skara Brae, Orkney, the end of the Stone Age. The sun is dying, storms batter the coast and the world is in decline. When Rab crawls out of the sea, wearing the remains of his Silver Skin, he throws the islanders into confusion. Who is he? Why has he come? The answers could decide the future.

Sci-fi meets prehistory in this extraordinary story of a time-traveller from the far future who accidentally ends up in ancient Scotland.

'It's original. It's interesting. It's imaginative. It's beautifully written ... Highly recommended.'
Jill Murphy *The Bookbag*

'A love story that is also a time-travel adventure set in the Neolithic settlement of Skara Brae on Orkney, it has that twist of genre-bending originality that marks out the best teen fiction.'
Watson North

'Joan Lennon spins a damn good yarn'
Karen Bush *Eclectic Electric*

'A weird but wonderful fantasy book'
The Guardian

Shortlisted for The Scottish Teenage Book Prize 2017
The Bookbag's Top Ten Books for Teens 2015

Silver Skin by Joan Lennon Teachers' Notes

Some topics for class discussion or individual written work:

1. In *Silver Skin*, climate change is steadily eroding a way of life. What other periods of history have been affected by weather changes? What can we learn from them about our own time?
2. In different ways, all of the main characters in *Silver Skin* are outsiders. What other books have your students read that featured people who don't quite fit in?
3. The idea of time travel has intrigued us since stories began. Which historical period would be the most fun to visit? What would the down sides be?

Cross-curricular activities:

Silver Skin is an adventure story and a love story, a historical/science fiction/speculative story, a story about the clash of cultures, the effects of climate change, the nature of time - all themes that could inspire students to produce their own creative work in a variety of disciplines. For example -

History: In *Silver Skin*, young Mrs Trevelyan is one of the first people to see the uncovered village of Skara Brae. With modern technology, we have been able to discover more and more about the past. How has technology affected how we interpret history? Will this continue to change?

Art: The *Silver Skin* website (www.silver-skin.co.uk) includes a section of readers' art. I'd love to build this section, and visual responses to the story would be welcomed.

Music: With the Victorian Age, the Stone Age and the Far Future all being part of the novel, there are opportunities for composition drawing on different styles and experimenting with new ones.

Further resources can be found on the *Silver Skin* website: www.silver-skin.co.uk

There are also links to author interviews, articles and writing blogs for students interested in learning more about how novels evolve.

Silver Skin

Joan Lennon Author Interview

Do you have a favourite character in the book?

I do have a soft spot for feisty old women, so it'd have to be Voy. She's not me - when things get tough, she gets mad, whereas I get sad - and I admire her a lot!

What was your inspiration to write this story? / Was there a particular moment of inspiration that pushed you to write this?

I can't remember the time when I first heard about Skara Brae - I think I've been excited about it my entire life! It's so irresistibly shiver-down-the-spine-inducing and evocative: an entire Neolithic village mysteriously buried in sand - completely lost and forgotten - and then, thousands of years later, dramatically revealed by a massive storm. And the structures are so intimate and show us so much about the way the people lived - but with still so many questions to be answered! It just begs to have stories told about it. I've visited the site several times, but the final push to write *Silver Skin* came when I was doing a Live Literature visit to primary schools on Mainland. During a Q&A, one of the pupils asked me why didn't I write a book about Orkney? So I did.

What is your favourite scene or moment in the book?

I think because it was the first scene I wrote, I have a special fondness for the first time we meet Cait, with her gathering bag leaking cold and wet down her back and the marram grass scratching her legs.

What inspired you to become a writer?

I'm crazy about stories, and there a large number of people who live in my head, so a job that combined the two was always going to be perfect for me. Oh, and words. I'm crazy about words.

What keeps you motivated as a writer?

The joy of getting the words and the people and the stories out of my head and onto the page. There's no other satisfaction like it!

What's your favourite book, and why?

I am rubbish at favourites. As soon as I choose one, seven others start clamouring for pride of place. No. Just can't do it.

Do you have a routine when you're writing (i.e. silence, a particular genre of music, only working in the morning, only working in your underpants?)

I work every day, unless I'm sick or doing an event. Or, you know, it's Christmas or something. I like quiet, and a lovely view. And coffee.

What advice would you give to anyone who wants to be a writer?

Write. Don't talk about what you're going to write, or how much you want to be a writer, or what you're going to do some day when you have time. Stop talking and do it.

How easy was it for you to find a publisher?

I was fortunate to find my agent, Lindsey Fraser, early on. Now she does all that hard stuff.

What's the best experience you've had while writing a book?

I love the moments when the answer to some plot problem that's been plaguing me for weeks just appears, out of nowhere. Such a feeling of weight lifting!

Who are you generally writing for?

Different story ideas just come with different genres, sizes, voices and audiences. They pretty much can only be what they are.

If you weren't a writer, what would you be?

Unhappy.

What one thing would improve your life?

More opportunities to escape to quiet places to write in. I love being able to be alone and completely immerse into a book I'm working on.

Where would you like to be right now, anywhere in the world?

Venice. Or Orkney.

Are any of your characters based on yourself or people you know?

Characters come out of bits and pieces of everyone I've ever met, heard of or read about. And bits and pieces of me. But so jumbled together I wouldn't be able to say which parts were which.

If you could swop lives with one of your characters, who would you choose and why?

No, see, I put my characters through awful things. Having said that, I wouldn't mind having Voy's power over people!

Have you ever regretted how you ended a story and wish you could change it?

Not so far.

If you weren't a writer, what would your 'dream' occupation be?

No, sorry, writing is my dream occupation.

If your book was a film, who would you cast for the lead character?

That's a hard one. Benedict Cumberbatch wouldn't really fit anywhere, but could he just come for a chat anyway?

Why are books important in your opinion?

There are loads of wonderful quotes about why books are so important, about how they teach us empathy and set us free from small-mindedness and other bad stuff. I guess they're just basically essential.

What are you reading right now?

The Little Warrior by P.G. Wodehouse

Which authors do you particularly admire?

Again, so hard to choose. But let's go for Rosemary Sutcliffe, P. G. Wodehouse and Terry Pratchett.

If you had a superpower what would it be?

I quite fancy shape-shifting.