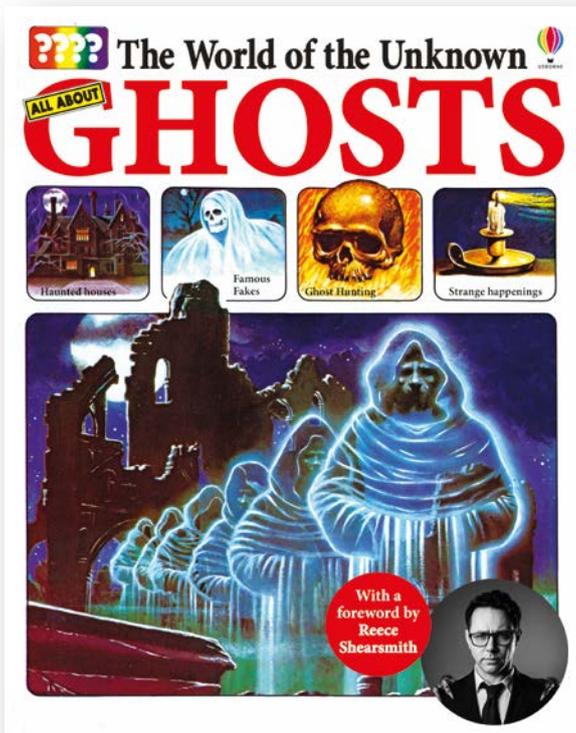


## Back from the dead – Usborne’s *The World of the Unknown: Ghosts*



- A cult classic, first published in 1977
- Back due to popular demand
- With a new foreword by Reece Shearsmith
- Thousands of fans petitioned for a new edition
- Released to thrill a new generation this Halloween

*The World of the Unknown: Ghosts*, by Christopher Maynard  
ISBN 9781474976688, £7.99 paperback, out 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019

### The first days of Usborne

*The World of the Unknown: Ghosts* was one of the very first books from Usborne, then a brand new children's publisher that set out to revolutionise the world of children's books. Founder and MD Peter Usborne set up *Private Eye* magazine before he moved into books, and wanted to bring the same lively, magazine-style format to kids' books. Then, books for children were mainly readers and classics, with some non-fiction for the educational market, but very little for the general trade. Usborne changed all that. Peter set out to combine high quality writing, design and production with popular subjects – never speaking down to children, and presenting them with information that would spark their imagination and curiosity.

### The World of the Unknown and a haunted generation

Published just two years after the very first Usborne books came out in 1975, *The World of the Unknown* series was classic early Usborne: magazine-sized paperbacks with picture-strip layouts borrowed from comics; vivid illustrations designed to compete with TV; the dead-pan tone of voice that spoke directly to children and the topics – *Ghosts*, *Monsters* and *UFOs* – that captured their imagination. At least 30,000 copies of each of those books were printed in the first year, and they stayed in print for twenty years before they were retired in the '90s.

***“Its macabre contents stayed with me my whole life. Shaped it, even.” – Reece Shearsmith, writer, actor, comedian***

We now know, thanks to social media, that these books left a big impression. They lived on bookshelves in bedrooms and libraries, thrilling their young readers, many of whom reported hardly daring to open the books. Readers remember – vividly – reading and re-reading these books, taking them out of the library so many times that eventually a librarian gave them a well-read copy, or putting their names on waiting lists to get hold of one.

***“A seminal work of ground-breaking genius” – David Nicholls, author and screenwriter***

The great nineteenth century ghost story writer M.R. James talked about the ‘pleasing terror’ of ghost stories – the joy of feeling a little bit scared, but safely within the pages of a book. A great children's book should be gripping, full of atmosphere and tension, and open up a world to explore. *The World of the Unknown: Ghosts* had these qualities in spades.

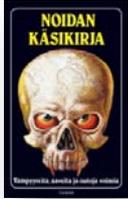
***“Blood-curdling, pillow-grabbing, sleep-depriving, imagination-firing wonderfulness” – Reader review***

The gothic is central to our culture - from film, to books and art. But for those kids of the '70s and '80s, these illustrated information books from Usborne were something entirely new, created just for them, and it's clear that Peter Usborne and his team stumbled on a rich vein when they started writing about the world of the paranormal. *The World of the Unknown* series led to Usborne books on vampires, werewolves, haunted houses and more.

## Bring it back! Resurrecting a classic

Despite being out of print for over twenty years, Usborne's *World of the Unknown* series lived on in the memories of a generation. And when the readers of the 1970s and '80s grew up, they wanted it back. Connected via social media in a way that they couldn't have dreamed of when *Ghosts* was first published in 1977, readers began to discover that they weren't alone in finding this book deliciously and addictively terrifying. They connected online, sharing stories of their childhood terror – and how discovering this book in those formative years influenced them. Many claimed that it had even had an impact on the careers they chose, with a handful of fans pursuing jobs directly linked to the paranormal world, but many more going into the creative industries, as writers and scriptwriters, working in books, TV and film.

***"I took this book out of my local library so many times they just gave it to me" – Laurence Rickard, screenwriter***



The first tangible result of this online groundswell was in Finland, where fans of Usborne's *Supernatural World* lobbied Finnish publisher Tammi – who'd licensed the Finnish language rights from Usborne in the '70s – to reissue their childhood favourite. A Facebook group dedicated to *Noidan Käsikirja* (the Finnish book title) gathered nearly 3,000 fans. The book was reprinted in August 2018 and instantly hit the children's book charts. The first print run sold out within a week, and a Helsinki nightclub owner offered his venue for a launch party. Total sales to date are well in excess of 18,000 copies.

***"These books are etched in the memories of an entire generation" – Read It Daddy, blogger***

Back in the UK, fans were still connecting online; the breakthrough came when Nucleus Films, the team behind Ashley Thorpe's animated feature film *Borley Rectory*, called Usborne requesting an interview with author Christopher Maynard. They were put through to Usborne's Anna Howorth, herself a huge fan of *The World of the Unknown* and keen to reprint the cult classic. "When I found out that Reece Shearsmith and I shared a love for this book, I tweeted about it. He replied to say he'd write a foreword if we reprinted, and it snowballed from there". Anna set up a petition on change.org which quickly gathered momentum, exceeding the target of 1,000 signatures. That, plus the promised foreword from Reece Shearsmith, convinced the publisher to reissue for Halloween 2019. When the Amazon pre-order went live, it went straight to number one in its category.

***"A wonderful book and ripe for a new generation to discover" – Ashley Thorpe, director***

Anna says "the response to the online petition, the announcement that we're bringing this book back, and all the other news that we've been able to share so far, has been phenomenal. So many people share a collective memory of this book, and it's been great to have played a part in resurrecting it. As a huge fan of this book, I'm thrilled. But from a professional point of view, it's also been fascinating to see how things haven't really changed from those early days at Usborne. Peter Usborne's passion and vision for the company is still the same; the way in-house writers and designers work together to make the very best books for children hasn't changed. The ethos of never speaking down to children, making knowledge irresistible and putting kids at the centre of everything we do at Usborne is just as it was when *The World of the Unknown: Ghosts* was first published in 1977. Usborne is still leading the way in creating books that spark children's imagination and curiosity – and for parents who grew up with Usborne books themselves, that's a really powerful message."

**Marketing and publicity around the relaunch of *The World of the Unknown: Ghosts* this Halloween will include bookshop events nationwide, innovative social media marketing, podcast appearances and press coverage with high-profile superfans.**

### **Notes to editors:**

Author Christopher Maynard is available for comment

The Guardian | *Ghosts shaped my life: out-of-print children's classic to be resurrected* <http://bit.ly/2XhxCpZ>  
Usborne.com | *The World of the Unknown: Ghosts* on [bit.ly/UsborneGhosts](http://bit.ly/UsborneGhosts)

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