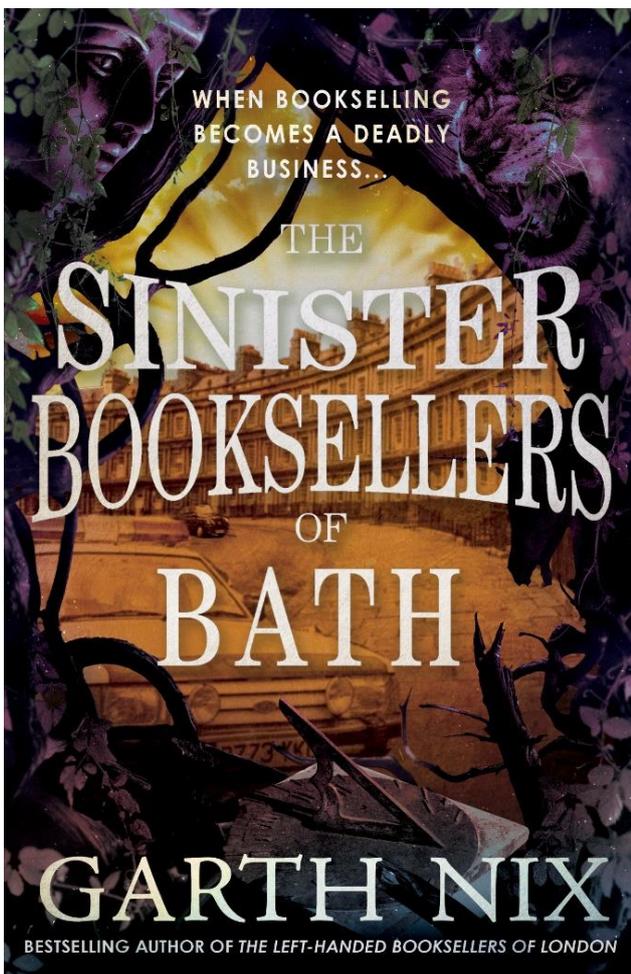


The Sinister Booksellers of Bath

By Garth Nix



Return to the enchanting world of ABIA winner *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London*, as a team of booksellers must fight to keep dangerous magic under cover before the stuff of legends destroys our world. From master world builder Garth Nix, this riveting fantasy adventure is set in an alternate 1980s London.

RECOMMENDED FOR

14+, Years 9-12

THEMES

Fantasy, thriller, adventure, 1980s London

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SYNOPSIS

There is often trouble of a mythical sort in Bath. The booksellers who police the Old World keep a careful watch there, particularly on the entity who inhabits the ancient hot spring. Yet this time it is not from Sulis Minerva that trouble starts. It comes from the discovery of a sorcerous map, leading left-handed bookseller Merlin into great danger. A desperate rescue is attempted by his sister, the right-handed bookseller Vivien, and their friend, art student Susan Arkshaw, who is still struggling to deal with her own recently discovered magical heritage.

The map takes the trio to a place separated from this world, maintained by deadly sorcery performed by an Ancient Sovereign and guarded by monstrous living statues of Purbeck marble. But this is only the beginning, as the booksellers investigate centuries of disappearances and deaths and try to unravel the secrets of the murderous Lady of Stone, a serial killer of awesome powers.

If they do not stop her, she will soon kill again. And this time, her target is not an ordinary mortal.

A wintry return to the somewhat alternate 1980s England of *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London*.

Q&A WITH GARTH NIX

Why did you choose a reimagined 1980s UK for this story, as well as *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London*?

When I started writing *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London* I experimented with setting the story in both the present day and the 1960s, but eventually I realised it worked best set in the time when I first went to London and spent the most time there, which was 1983.

You've described both books as thriller/fantasies. What drew you to that particular hybrid genre?

I love thrillers and I love fantasy, among many other genres, so I enjoyed combining the two. Basically I always write the kind of books I like to read, but for some reason even when I set out to write something intended to be pure 'realism', elements of the fantastic always creep in, so I might as well give in and plan it that way from the start.

What can books set in other worlds tell us about our own?

Stories in general help us explore the lives, emotions and thoughts of other people, to vicariously share experiences. Whether this occurs in a world based entirely on our own, or in some invented world, they always involve people and their problems which mirror our own in terms of their emotional impact, even if the detail is very different. This includes if the people are not actually human, we still identify with them, because if we couldn't, the story would not work.

Who's your favourite character in the story?

I don't have favourite characters, or at least not throughout a whole book. Sometimes I am very pleased with what I have done with a character for a particular scene or passage, but then I will be happy about how I have written a different character a few pages later, and so on.



Photo by Wendy McDougall

Are you planning further instalments?

I do have notes for a third book 😊

IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- **Prologue:**

Read the prologue of *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath* and consider the following:

- a) What tone did the prologue create?
- b) Were you hooked to continue reading the story?
- c) How did the prologue help you understand the world in which the events of the story take place?

- **Epigraphs at the Beginning of Each Chapter:**

The Left-Handed Booksellers of London featured poetry, while *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath* opens each chapter with an excerpt from the 1907 edition of *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*.

What role do the epigraphs play in the story and did they enhance your reading of the novel? If so, how? If not, why not?

The most recent edition of *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* is 2018 so do you think it is relevant that Garth Nix used a 1907 edition?

- **Characterisation:**

Garth Nix very effectively creates a character's personality – quirks and all – by detailing the clothes they wear. Choose a character, other than Susan or Merlin, and describe what their clothes told you about them.

- **Reality vs Fantasy:**

"'Evangeline's out of the reckoning for now, anyway,' said Vivien.

She had to go to Scotland this morning. Something stirring in the waters.'

'Loch Ness?' asked Susan curiously.

'Oh no, there's nothing much there,' said Vivien. 'She's headed for Loch Maree...'" (P 285)

Garth Nix masterfully combines the world that we know with the fantastical world of *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath*. Do you agree that fantasy can only make sense to readers if there is some degree of reality in it? Does the setting of a slightly alternate 1980s London change the sense of realism here? Compare the worlds of *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath* and *The Hobbit* in terms of how close to our world they are. Do you think that fantasy novels teach us about the real world? If so, what do you think you learned from reading *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath*?

- **Vocabulary:**

The word *demesne* is used throughout *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath*. What is its literal meaning, and in what context does it appear in the novel? Why do you think Garth Nix chose to use this word rather than the more modern word, *domain*? Can you find other words in the novel that serve a similar purpose?

- **Genre:**

Would you agree with the author's description of *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London* and *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath* as a 'thriller/fantasy hybrid'? Detail the core elements of both genres and find examples of those elements within the latter novel to support or discount this description.

- **Epilogue**

"... 'Was it you or Vivien who told me that Ancient Sovereigns do not consider time as mortals do? I asked for a delay, and he granted it, as if we were deciding to do something tomorrow instead of today.'" (P 330)

Albert Einstein famously said that 'Time is an illusion.' How does Garth Nix explore this idea in *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath*? In your answer consider the Alphabet House and its gardens, Frances Gibbons, Susan's visits to WWII and Great Fire of London, and the *bargain* she makes with her father at the end of the novel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Nix has been a full-time writer since 2001, but has also worked as a literary agent, marketing consultant, book editor, book publicist, book sales representative, bookseller, and as a part-time soldier in the Australian Army Reserve.

Garth's books include the Old Kingdom fantasy series *Sabriel*, *Lirael*, *Abhorsen*, *Clariel*, *Goldenhand* and *Terciel and Elinor*; SF novels *Shade's Children* and *A Confusion of Princes*; fantasy novels *Angel Mage*; *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London* and sequel *The Sinister Booksellers of Bath*; and a Regency romance with magic, *Newt's Emerald*. His novels for children include *The Ragwitch*; the six books of The Seventh Tower sequence; The Keys to the Kingdom series; and *Frogkisser!* His short fiction includes more than 60 published stories, some of them collected in *Across the Wall* and *To Hold the Bridge*.

He has co-written several books with Sean Williams, including the Troubletwisters series; *Spirit Animals Book Three: Blood Ties*; *Have Sword, Will Travel*; and *Let Sleeping Dragons Lie*.

More than six million copies of Garth's books have been sold around the world, they have appeared on the bestseller lists of *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, *The Bookseller* and others, and his work has been translated into 42 languages. He has won multiple Aurealis Awards, the ABIA Award, Ditmar Award, the Mythopoeic Award, CBCA Honour Book, and has been shortlisted for the Locus Awards, the Shirley Jackson Award and others.