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Puck of
Pook's Hill

Read by **Peter Kenny**

RUDYARD KIPLING



= Downloads (M4B chapters or MP3 files)



= CDs (disc-track)



1	1-1	Puck of Pook's Hill	1:48
2	1-2	Weland's Sword	6:31
3	1-3	He looked at the children, and the children looked at him...	7:19
4	1-4	The children shut their eyes, but nothing happened.	7:49
5	1-5	'He called me names and rolled his eyes, and I went away...'	7:51
6	1-6	'The farmer wouldn't tell him at first, because the priests...'	8:05
7	1-7	A Tree Song	1:44
8	1-8	Young Men at the Manor	9:32
9	1-9	'When we came to his house here we had almost forgotten...'	8:14
10	1-10	'That, then, was our first work together...'	8:16
11	1-11	'Look, children, what that man had done...'	6:55
12	1-12	Sir Richard's Song	1:45
13	1-13	The Knights of the Joyous Venture	1:36



14	2-1	The Knights of the Joyous Venture	6:57
15	2-2	'My Lady being dead, I cared nothing for signs and omens...'	7:46
16	2-3	Sir Richard looked relieved.	8:30
17	2-4	'After many weeks we came on the great Shoal...'	8:13
18	2-5	Sir Richard turned the sword again that the children...	5:29
19	2-6	""Now find ye Pevensey yourselves," said Wittá.'	5:07
20	2-7	Thorkild's Song	1:10
21	2-8	Old Men at Pevensey	9:03
22	2-9	'One foul night came word that a messenger...'	8:49
23	2-10	'At this De Aquila whistled. "A man who can plot ..."'	8:07
24	2-11	'Then Fulke sat up and looked long and cunningly at De Aquila.'	7:18



25	3-1	'Of a sudden we heard Jehan at the stairway wake...'	6:07
26	3-2	'It was dawn then, and they stirred in the Great Hall below.'	3:37
27	3-3	The Runes on Weland's Sword	0:52
28	3-4	A Centurion of the Thirtieth	7:23
29	3-5	The young man laughed again – a proper understanding laugh.	8:03
30	3-6	""No matter for the clothes," said the Pater.'	7:01
31	3-7	'He said nothing for some time, only looked, with his eyes...'	6:30
32	3-8	A British–Roman Song	1:03
33	3-9	On the Great Wall	8:09
34	3-10	Parnesius held up his broad shield with its three X's...	7:44
35	3-11	He joined his hands across his knees, and leaned his head...	7:51
36	3-12	'Allo passed round the fire with the sizzling deer's meat.'	6:01
37	3-13	""Oh, Roma Dea!" said Maximus, half aloud.'	3:03
38	3-14	A Song to Mithras	1:21



39	4-1	The Winged Hats	7:13
40	4-2	'The men took the news well; but when Maximus went away...'	8:24
41	4-3	'Said Pertinax: "It is finished with Maximus."'	6:48
42	4-4	Parnesius drew from his neck a folded and spotted piece of...	5:28
43	4-5	'By the end of the second month...'	5:15
44	4-6	A Pict Song	1:40
45	4-7	Hal o' the Draft	7:39
46	4-8	'Hops. New since your day,' said Puck.	7:11
47	4-9	"They'd sure never dare to do it," I said...	5:52
48	4-10	"'I fear I have requited him very scurvily," says Sebastian...'	6:40
49	4-11	A Smugglers' Song	1:49



50	5-1	'Dymchurch Flit'	8:30
51	5-2	'There you be!' said Hobden, pointing at him.	6:28
52	5-3	'My woman used to say that too,' said Hobden...	5:47
53	5-4	Tom Shoemith threw back his head and half shut his eyes.	5:42
54	5-5	A Three-Part Song	2:48
55	5-6	The Treasure and the Law	6:14
56	5-7	Kadmiel understood the look and smiled bitterly.	7:26
57	5-8	'A great gathering of Barons (to most of whom we had lent...)'	8:29
58	5-9	'A Christian physician, seeing that I was a Jew and a stranger...'	7:39
59	5-10	The Children's Song	1:36

Total running time: 5:53:45 • 5 CDs

Puck of Pook's Hill

RUDYARD KIPLING

*I'm like you. I say nothin'. But I'll tell you a tale,
an' you can fit it as how you please.*

Dymchurch Flit

One peaceful evening in a Sussex meadow, two ordinary children – Una and Dan – are rehearsing their version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when they accidentally conjure up one of the characters. His name is Puck, and he is 'the oldest Old Thing in England'. It turns out that the meadow, Pook's Hill, is a very special place. As Puck puts it: 'Pook's Hill – Puck's Hill – Puck's Hill – Pook's Hill! It's as plain as the nose on my face'. Over the next few days he

and his friends, other 'Old Things', tell the children a series of stories, each one accompanied by a poem that comments on or enhances it. Together they comprise a very alternative history of England, one which weaves together history, fantasy and enchantment.

Though Puck, the 'shrewd and knavish sprite' of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was made famous by Shakespeare's play, he existed long before. He is a creature of old English folklore, a mercurial

woodland fairy known for his tricks and his mischief, who can either help people or lead them astray. Kipling's Puck is no twee, Disney-esque confection, however: 'the People of the Hills don't care to be confused with that painty-winged, wand-waving, sugar-and-shake-your-head set of impostors!' What he calls the 'People of the Hills' and the 'Old Things' are spirits brought by the successive waves of invaders and settlers who found their way to England in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. These creatures – 'giants, trolls, kelpies, brownies, goblins, imps; wood, tree, mound, and water spirits; heath-people, hill-watchers, treasure-guards, good people, little people, pishogues, leprechauns, night-riders, pixies, nixies, gnomes, and the rest' – have all gone, and Puck is the only one left.

The stories and poems draw on English, Norse, Roman and Germanic mythology as well as various periods of ancient and medieval history, and Puck is not the only figure to have a long folkloric pedigree. The cast of characters includes the Norse blacksmith Weland, who forged

a magical, dragon-killing sword; Magnus Maximus, the fourth-century Roman emperor who once ruled Britain; Mithras, ancient god of a mysterious cult; and Sebastian Cabot, the Venetian explorer born in Bristol who travelled to the New World. It makes reference to a number of important historical events and eras, among them the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215; the defence of Hadrian's Wall; and the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

All the tales are narrated either by Puck himself or by the figures he conjures for the children, many of whom recur – the Roman centurion Parnesius and the Norman knight Sir Richard, for instance – so that despite the episodic structure, narrative threads emerge between the different sections and are woven through the whole book. Broadly speaking, there are two main strands: Parnesius's stories are told against the backdrop of a decaying Roman Empire, while others trace the creation of 'modern' England, culminating in the signing of the Magna Carta. As Puck says, offering a succinct overview of the whole narrative, 'Weland

gave the Sword! The Sword gave the Treasure, and the Treasure gave the Law. It's as natural as an oak growing.' Despite this sense of progress, there is an elegiac tone to many of the tales. Puck laments that in the modern age, 'The People of the Hills have all left. I saw them come into Old England and I saw them go. ... I came into England with Oak, Ash and Thorn, and when Oak, Ash and Thorn are gone I shall go too.' After each story he casts a spell to make the children forget what they have been told, so that his world – the world of imagination and magic – is clearly demarked from theirs and, by extension, ours. In this sense the book is not so much about memory or history as about its loss.

Born in India in 1865, Kipling became one of the most famous and successful authors of his day. He was sent to school in England at the age of five, but left again some twelve years later to work at a newspaper in Lahore, the *Civil & Military Gazette*. It was here that he published some of his earliest short stories, steadily building his literary reputation, but after

being transferred to a different paper he decided to return to London. His journey took him via America and Canada, where he met Mark Twain. Kipling was an inveterate traveller, and would later visit Japan, Africa, Australia and New Zealand before settling temporarily in America, somehow finding time along the way to get married, have two children and play golf with Arthur Conan Doyle.

In 1896 Kipling and his family returned to England, eventually settling in Sussex, where Kipling lived until his death in 1936. He became extremely famous, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907. His life was marred by tragedy, however: his daughter Josephine died of pneumonia in 1899, and his son John was killed in the First World War. He continued to write and publish until his death at the age of seventy.

Published in 1906, *Puck of Pook's Hill* is almost Kipling's last work for children – after its sequel, *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), he never wrote another children's book. They are perhaps his most personal children's stories, set near Burwash in Sussex, where

Kipling himself lived in a seventeenth-century house called Bateman's. The fragmentary tales and poems inspired a number of artists, including the illustrator Arthur Rackham, a past master of the mercurial and strange, although the original illustrations were by H.R. Millar, who also contributed illustrations to the original serialisation of *Kim*.

Many scholars have read *Puck of Pook's Hill* as an allegory of British imperialism. Ultimately, however, the stories resist simplistic interpretations, remaining – like the folklore upon which they draw – enigmatic, enchanting and timeless.

Notes by Caroline Waight



Peter Kenny is an actor and musician. He has worked for A&BC Theatre Co., the Royal Shakespeare Company and the BBC Radio Drama Company. He is a member of the early music group Passamezzo. A prolific reader of audiobooks, he has recorded over fifty titles. Authors include Iain M. Banks and Paul O'Grady.

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