

Josh Lacey

ventures into the land of dragons

In 2012 the publication of Josh Lacey's *The Dragonsitter* launched the brilliant series of books recounting, via email exchanges, the adventures of a young Eddie Smith-Pickle as he looks after his eccentric Uncle Morton's pet dragon. In February 2019 Josh celebrated the publication of the tenth book in this series, *The Dragonsitter in the Land of Dragons*.

Josh was first interviewed in *Carousel* soon after he had completed the fourth book in the series, *The Dragonsitter's Island*. Preferring to write a series, rather than a single novel, he explained the trickiest part was to find a character who was sufficiently interesting and adventures that would raise the reader's curiosity. Having reached the tenth in the series, it is apparent that he has been successful in achieving both. When Josh agreed to meet me in London, I took the opportunity to ask him why he thinks *The Dragonsitter* continues to be such a popular series and what has enticed him to write ten books.

"I think it is very satisfying for readers to read a book that is the same but somehow different, especially younger children. They are also very short books. For me, the one thing that is still a surprise is how the characters turned out to have so many stories to tell. I wasn't expecting that at all, and it certainly wasn't intentional. I wanted to know not only the consequences of having a dragon, but 'What happens to Mum and Dad?', 'What is Dad like?' and then 'What happens when Mum meets someone else?' The answers evolved as I wrote. I became more and more interested in the family. Eddie's character is very much to do with the fact he is a kid, but also the man of the house. He must take on the adult role, or *feels* he must take on that role and the responsibility for sorting things. That aspect of the story has got more and more interesting."



Integral to the appeal of the books are the distinctive black and white illustrations by Garry Parsons, something that Josh happily acknowledges, "It is fun working with him. Garry is good visually whereas I'm not. I'm a word person, so I am amazed by what he does. The illustrations have sparked lots of ideas in me and made writing more interesting."



What characterises Josh's books is how they are packed with adventure. As a child he longed for adventure but describes himself as being a cautious, nervous child. The adventures he had were only in his imagination. "I grew up in the city and desperately envied children who lived in the countryside. I would have loved to have been Robinson Crusoe, but I was stuck in an urban environment unable to leave the house on my own."

Josh grew up in a house full of books and with the encouragement from his family he read and enjoyed stories such as *Danny Champion of the World* and *The Silver Sword*, reading his favourite books again and again. "I loved books that described an adventure. Stories had to have a definite plot." This is still important as he undertakes his own writing. He becomes frustrated if he thinks he has written a book without one.

Although already having written several action-packed stories for children, including his successful *Grk* series, when Josh first had the idea for *The Dragonsitter*, it was a challenge to find a way to tell the story. He jotted down notes and started writing it several times, but never got further than the first few lines. "I wrote the first email in the book as a letter, but then got completely stuck. It was a letter from a kid complaining to his uncle about his pet and I couldn't decide on the pet. It took

me literally years to decide that it was going to be a dragon. By the time I got to that decision I realised that no one wrote letters any more, particularly not kids, so it just seemed logical to write it as an email because that is what people did."

The Dragonsitter in the Land of Dragons opens with Eddie informing his mother, via email, that he is not in Glasgow, as Mum believes, but is, in fact, 4,329 miles further away, accompanying Uncle Morton to Mongolia to witness the legendary Great Dragon Battle ceremony. Faced with inhospitable mountains and not so friendly wild dragons, it isn't an ideal situation in which to find themselves, when all they have to help is a pile of chocolate bars. Once again, the story is told through the exchange of emails, this time between Eddie and his mum, who becomes increasingly exasperated as she is left with the difficult task of dragon-sitting. It is another example of his sophisticated storytelling, full of humour and wit, written in a way that is perfect for young readers, especially those gaining confidence in their independent reading.

Anyone who looks forward to reading about the adventures and predicaments of Eddie as he tries to manage Ziggy, the wayward dragon, will be disappointed because, when I asked what the future held for Eddie and Ziggy, Josh revealed that it isn't certain whether there will be any more books in *The Dragonsitter* series. "I have other ideas, but also I think ten is a great number. The ten really work well together, like a complete, whole story. I feel that if I write an eleventh, I would have to come at it from a new angle and do something different."

But don't despair as Josh is working on other writing projects - although he was reluctant to reveal what these might be. "I am writing a new series for Andersen that will be published next year, but I don't want to talk about it. I have recently discovered that if I talk about things too much, I begin to go off the idea. I once had a brilliant idea for a book, but I talked about it so much I couldn't write it."

For now, we must wait patiently for an update on his next series. It will be fascinating to see what adventures Josh Lacey takes us on in the future.

Debbie Wiggett



Bibliography:

Published by Andersen:

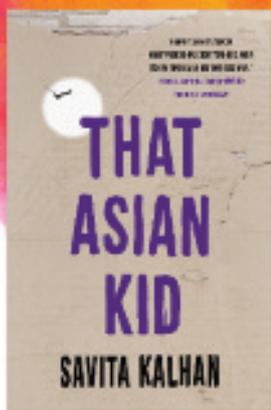
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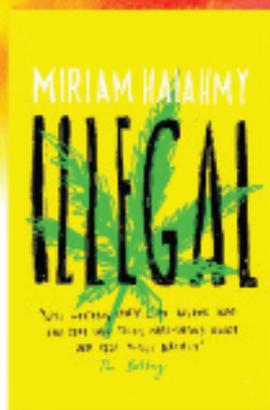
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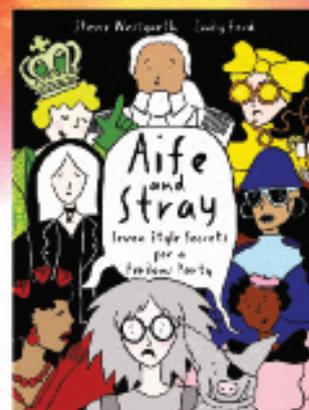
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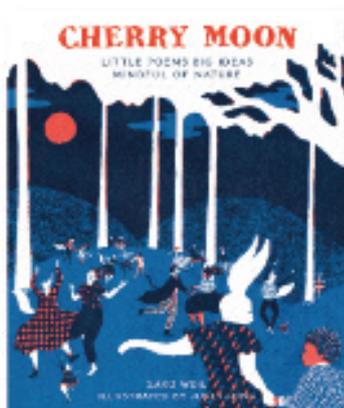
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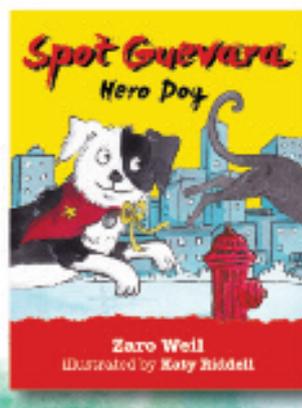
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