

The Selfies - questions for children's fiction winner Jemma Hatt

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News - Interviews Monday, 6th April 2020

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Last week Jemma Hatt was announced as the first ever winner of the Selfies Awards for children's fiction, for her novel *The Adventurers and the Cursed Castle*. We asked her about her writing, her inspirations, and why she decided to self-publish...

Where did you find inspiration for the Adventurers series?

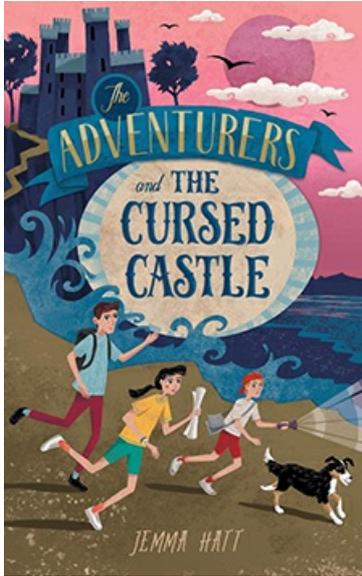
My inspiration came from two places - Cornwall and Egypt. When I was young my family went on holiday to the West Country almost every year; it is a magical place with its beaches and caves. I've always been fascinated by Ancient Egyptian history, and visited Cairo in 2009. So *The Adventurers and the Cursed Castle*, about ancient Egyptian treasure in Cornwall, was a combination of two of my long-standing interests. I guess I was writing a story that my younger self would have wanted to read.

Can you tell us about your writing process?

I try to write a little every day, but unlike some writers I don't plan in great detail what I'm going to write in a first draft. I find I'm more excited about writing a story if I'm not entirely sure what's going to happen all the way through!

What do you enjoy about writing for children?

I enjoy creating adventures that are lighthearted and fun; it's the perfect escapism from the pressures of everyday life.



What drew you towards self-publishing?

I read books by Adam Croft and Karen Inglis on independent publishing, and the more I learned about it, the more attractive it was to me. I like being able to run my own business: choosing the professionals that I work with on the cover and editing, managing my own marketing, and being able to release books quickly. There are certainly pros and cons to both traditional and independent publishing.

I have encountered some snobbery from a small minority of people about self-publishing, but I think the industry is changing for the better. Readers, especially young readers, really don't care who publishes a book as long as it looks appealing and they enjoy reading it. I turned down one offer from a publisher because it did not quite align with my professional goals, and I can wholeheartedly say that indie publishing is one of the best things I have ever done.

As a self-published author, how do you find balancing marketing and publicity with writing?

There's always quite a lot to do with both marketing and writing - I write lists to keep myself organised. I also listen to a lot of podcasts and read a lot of advice from others in the industry to stay up-to-date with current marketing and advertising trends.

What have you found to be the most effective way of marketing your books?

Definitely advertising; for me the most effective marketing has been through Amazon ads and Bookbub featured deals.

Have you visited many schools? What did you think of the experience?

I have visited a few schools and libraries to run creative writing workshops. Children are so naturally creative, and I have a lot of fun working with them on their stories.

How did you find the digital awards ceremony?

After a week or so of social distancing measures it was great seeing everyone's faces and some of the outside world! I wasn't expecting to win and had no speech prepared; it was a lovely surprise and gave me a real boost! I'm very grateful to everyone who has been involved in the awards and would encourage all indie fiction authors to take the opportunity to enter.

What are your future plans for your writing?

I'm about to release the third book in *The Adventurers* series - *The Adventurers and the City of Secrets*. I'm also working with an audio production company to have the series turned into audiobooks. The narrator, Ciaran Saward, is very funny, and I think kids will find his narration very entertaining! I'm going to keep on writing and releasing books and I'm excited to see what the future holds!

Have you got any advice for parents who would like to inspire creativity in their children at home during the pandemic?

I think now is the perfect time for kids to get creative - through reading and writing they can travel anywhere in the world, or create their own world! I've set up a free virtual writing workshop in the blog section of my website to help children create an adventure story - check it out at www.jemmahatt.com.



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