



Authorgraph No.195 Angie Sage

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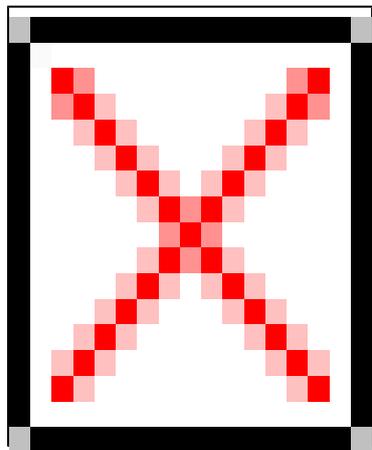
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Angie Sage interviewed by **Nicholas Tucker**.

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It's all happening for Angie Sage. Born in 1952, she originally studied medicine before training as an illustrator at Art School and she has never been busier. The star of numerous school visits, an active blogger and twitter and now busy with negotiating possible film rights, it's amazing she still has time to write so many of the original, lively and fun stories that have made her popular with thousands of children and not a few adults. Next year sees the publication of **Fyre**, the seventh and last book in her best-selling **Septimus Heap** series starring the eponymous apprentice wizard. But for those who cannot get enough of this character and the battles he and his faithful friends have to wage against various deadly enemies, **The Darke Toad** is also to be published in 2013. Described as a digital original novella, this aims to fill in some of the gaps in the **Septimus Heap** sequence with yet more stories.

Gentle in manner and quietly spoken, Angie could easily be over-looked in any concourse of over-weening literary egos. Giving the impression of still being slightly bewildered by her success ? she had no idea when writing the first **Septimus Heap** book that this was going to be the start of a series ? she also radiates personal enjoyment at what has happened so far and what should still be to come. So why, when her **Septimus** books are currently so successful, is she cutting the series off after the next volume?

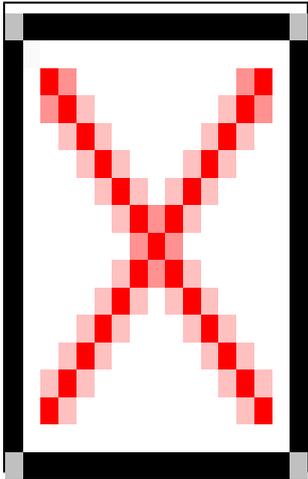
?I do have an idea for a separate trilogy of slightly shorter books where some new characters can visit the Castle and meet **Septimus**, who will now be aged twenty-one. But I have always thought that seven was a good number. **Septimus** himself is the seventh son of a seventh son and must study for seven years and a day before his apprenticeship can end. And I don't want my characters to get too old for their youngest reader. So I have decided to stop while the oldest child character is still thirteen, which is still something of a cut-off point in real life between childhood and adolescence. But I do have older readers too, and I write for everybody ? me included. I like to think that readers re-visiting my books when they are older may then spot things possibly missed before.?

Is she referring here to the politics of her **Septimus Heap** series, where there is the constant threat of good people

losing their liberty to ruthless tyranny?

?I am very against any sort of unjust hierarchy. I know the wizards in my novels have some sort of hierarchy, but that is more of a career structure. And I do have a sort of Queen, but she is not given any particular privileges ? it's just a job. I think I got this anti-hierarchical feeling principally from my father. He worked in publishing and made many visits to communist East Europe in order to buy paper. He used to tell me of the bad things he saw over there, which I knew upset him a lot. He eventually got me reading Solzhenitsyn's unforgettable **One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich**. He never took me on any of these travels ? I don't think my mother would have allowed it! But I did learn from him never to take any of our liberties for granted.?

What about magic? Once it is there in a novel, how important is it to erect boundaries between what now remains possible and what still is not?



?I like to think of it as a science. So there have to be some constants as in physics for example, where matter can't be created or destroyed. Magic in my stories is basically an apprenticeship system where you are learning the rules, and there are a lot of them. I see it as a new technology. I try hard to remember the rules myself and have actually written them down to remind me of what they are. Because there will always be readers who triumphantly remind me of any inconsistencies between a current book and any of its predecessors. The difference between my good and dark magic is that well intentioned practitioners always respect other people's autonomy. But the evil ones don't care what they do to people and never respect what they want.?

Does writing a novel set in the here and now necessarily mean taking on modern technology, which in a way is another sort of magic?

?This can be a real problem. Technology is changing so quickly that any fictional reference to its current state risks being out of date by the time of publication. As for magic again, Arthur C. Clarke once said, **?Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.?** If we were able to take a computer back three hundred years it would certainly be viewed as sorcery. And things that once seemed magic ? like amazing speeds or incredible ways of listening in to people from a distance ? we now take for granted. But in the imaginary worlds I create I remain in charge, so there is only the sort of magic ? or if you like technology ? that I personally approve of and can understand.?

What about research before writing? Does this have a role?

?My sort of research is based mostly on memories of books I have once read. I don't read fantasy now but in my teens I was very interested in sci-fi. I loved the idea of other worlds. Maybe some of these ideas are working back into my fiction now.?

When did the writing start?

?I began by illustrating other people's stories. Then I wrote a few little ones for younger readers just to see if I could. But writing for a very young audience is hard ? you have to concentrate so much on plot. And I discovered that I was more interested in telling stories more gradually through characters, which meant writing for slightly older readers.?

How do you come up with such an apparently effortless stream of jokes in your stories?

'I don't know where they come from. They just appear, and they usually arrive when characters are being a bit funny with each other. Sometimes they make me laugh as well!'

Do you like the Harry Potter books?

'I read the first two and liked the direct way Rowling wrote. And her books really opened up the market and led to a huge change about how people felt about writing for that age group. She certainly helped put the 'wow' factor back into children's books. And she also made me realise that writing a story about Septimus, whom I had been thinking about for ages, might now be a real possibility.'

The German author Cornelia Funke in her fantasy novels never kills off any of her villains, however horrible they are. Could the same be said of your books?

'I am with her on this. I would never have anyone killed in my stories as an act of retaliation. A few people do die, but that's always their own fault and it can often be in quite an ignominious way. So perhaps I am using humour here to defuse what might otherwise seem a more serious situation. But I do at times have to remove evil characters from the scene, and this can give me some problems. But I would rather all my characters were given the chance to think about what they had done and perhaps change than merely get dismissed when I have finished with them, which for me would be a bit of a cop out.'

Angie's 'Septimus Heap' novels are inventive, funny, expertly plotted and offer a gratifyingly long read. Devouring them is a happy as well as an exciting experience. Her other main sequence of stories revolves round young Araminta Spook and her ghost-filled Spook House. Written for younger readers, these too are great fun. Writing today as well as ever, this is an author who has already offered a lot and clearly has much more to give. Children are lucky to have her.

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

The 'Septimus Heap' series is published by Bloomsbury at £6.99 pbk:

Darke, 978 1 4088 0627 2

[Magyk](#) [3], 978 0 7475 7926 7

[Flyte](#) [4], 978 0 7475 8449 0

Physik, 978 0 7475 8763 7

Queste, 978 0 7475 9414 7

Syren, 978 0 7475 9886 2

Fyre will be published in April 2013

The Darke Toad will be published in February 2013

The 'Araminta Spook' series is published by Bloomsbury:

[My Haunted House](#) [5], 978 0 7475 8346 2, £5.99 hbk

[The Sword in the Grotto](#) [6], 978 0 7475 8347 9, £5.99 hbk

Frognapped, 978 0 7475 8348 6, £5.99 hbk

Vampire Brat, 978 0 7475 8349 3, £5.99, £5.99 hbk

Ghostsitters, 978 0 7475 9826 8, £6.99 hbk

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