

An interview with Haseley Hinton

by Laura Smith



Haseley Hinton's debut novel, *Shadow of the Seacrow*, is the first in an extraordinary sci-fi series published by Second Born Books. It is a compelling coming of age story that weaves together irresistible characters, believable dialogue and fantastic adventure. In this first exclusive interview, Haseley talks to Laura Smith about the enchanting imaginary world she has created and some of the inspiration behind it.

Q

This is your debut novel but I'm told it has been a lifelong ambition of yours to write a book. Why haven't you written one earlier?

I wrote one when I was a teenager, and I sent it off to two publishers and I got two rejection slips so I gave up and decided it was rubbish. It was about a girl who runs away from home and meets a guy who she then walks out on. She falls in with a bunch of bad guys and I think there are drugs involved, and then she comes back to the nice guy. At the time I had lost somebody so I was probably feeling quite emotional. Writing is an escape for me; if I feel lonely or anxious I can go into my own world – it's certainly cathartic in that sense.

Q

How long did it take you to write *Shadow of the Seacrow*?

I was ages getting started. The first twelve chapters took me years. The rest I wrote in one year, one month actually. In total about three years.

Q

***Shadow of the Seacrow* is an unusual blend of sci-fi and fantasy. What would you say were the major influences on this?**

I always wanted it to be sci-fi. I'm a big fan of sci-fi; I loved Star Trek and some more recent TV shows like Flash Forward have been very engaging. The fantasy style

of the story wasn't intentional, I thought I was outside the genre because the book has no magic in it - but in retrospect I must have been influenced by a greater range of literature than I first thought.

Q **The seacrow of the title is both a narrative device and a character in himself. Where did this idea come from?**

I do quite like crows; they're intelligent and fun to watch. I think you could have a special relationship with a bird of that intelligence. A lot of it was to do with language. The main characters have two mother tongues but one sacred tongue, which they both speak, and that way they can communicate with each other. There is a moment when Maina comes across a man in the woods and she is afraid until she finds a way to talk to him. I wanted the seacrow to be something that was able to communicate with everyone without the need for language. If there is something supernatural in the book, it is that the seacrow always manages to turn up at the right moment.

Q **The story is based around an epic journey that is both physically and emotionally demanding of the characters. Does this reflect on your own life experience?**

I go back to the scenario when Maina meets the man in the woods. After my Dad died we had the funeral in

Greece where he had lived. I was taking a walk when a guy on a tractor pulled up, and I remember being afraid that I couldn't speak the language and wouldn't be able to talk to him. He was actually one of my Dad's friends, who wanted to pay his condolences, but it is a moment that has stayed with me. It is connected to other times when I have been in Europe – my Dad was Italian – riding alone on the bus for example and being very aware of my vulnerability in the sense that I lacked the means to communicate with people around me. These small things have permeated the book as I have tried to write about the challenges of going on a journey and taking yourself out of your comfort zone.

Q I understand that you've just finished writing the second book in the seacrow series. Will it answer all of the lingering questions from the first? Will the importance of the seacrow grow?

It will. The next book will explain the significance of the seacrow a bit more, but I haven't got it entirely planned out. I like to make some of it up as I go along!

Q Was it always intended to be a trilogy?

I knew the material was going to stretch to more than one, so maybe a 'duology'. I reached a stage where I wanted some feedback and, as I wasn't a member of a writer's group back then, I lacked an objective source of

constructive criticism or outsider perspective. Feedback from people who read the first book gave me the confidence to begin writing the sequel.

Q **The book seems to be targeted at younger readers, yet a lot of your fans are actually their parents. Who did you intend as the target audience for the book? Are you surprised that it is so universally appealing?**

It was meant to be for younger readers. I was a teacher and I always liked teenagers and talking to teenagers. So, yes, I am surprised that it is more universally appealing. Ladies tend to be my majority readership, I suppose because it is women who read novels more, but I did have had men of different ages getting in touch and saying they enjoyed it!

Q **There are undeniably many references to the real world in the book. Is the book's aim to teach its readers something?**

I suppose, having been a teacher, it's something that is hard to avoid but I hope it doesn't try to teach people – I wouldn't want it to have that kind of voice. There are issues in the book that I want people to think about, though.

Q In particular, the religious divide that catalyses the events of the book is something very familiar to us in modern times. Is this parallel intentional?

I did want to create something where I wasn't going to be taking sides, but I wanted the human character of Ship to be the one who stood back from it all – who wasn't involved. He's meant to be a sort of wise man and I tried to instill this by emphasising his age and maturity. Compared to the Xouthans and Mortherners, he has lived a long, long time.

Q One of the things that strikes me about the communities of the alien world is that, although they are very humanoid in most ways, they seem to be covered in hair. Is this something that will be explained later on?

Something that has always fascinated me is the fact that anthropologists find it quite hard to explain why man lost his hair. One idea seems to be that, because humans use sweating rather than panting to keep cool and because their hair would have made the sweating process less efficient, individuals with less hair might have had an evolutionary advantage. On the other hand, keeping warm at night might have been pretty important too, so I'm not altogether convinced that it was as simple as that. Our distant ancestors must have had hair but I didn't want my humanoids to look like they were from

the Planet of the Apes. I picture them as having smooth, velvety coats like that of a well groomed horse or like the hair on a cat's face.

Q

Did you suffer from writer's cramp at all?

No, I was doing it on a laptop so it was pretty easy going! I had a few techniques – I wrote a few hours a day, and I tried not to write after 6pm so that it wasn't racing through my head at night.

Q

Finally, what advice would you give to any aspiring young sci-fi writers?

Be brave and commit yourself to it. Don't listen to people who tell you that you're wasting your time!

Curio of the Seacrow

ISBN: 978-0-9561135-1-1

A short story published by Second Born Books

Shadow of the Seacrow

ISBN: 978-0-9561135-0-4

A novel published by Second Born Books

Available now online and through all good bookshops.
www.haseleyhinton.com



Shadow of the Seacrow

Music to accompany the novel by Haseley Hinton

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