



AN INTERVIEW WITH HARRIET MUNCASTER

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[243](#) [2]

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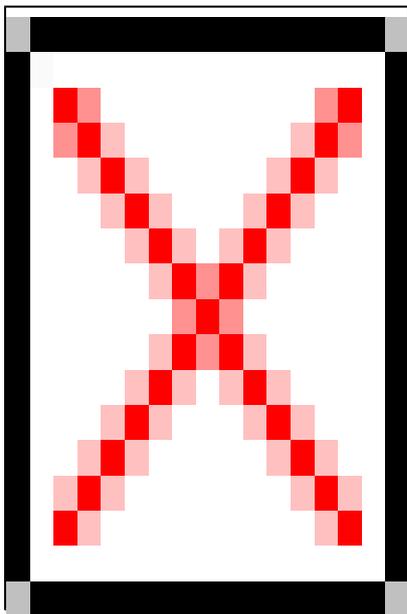
The creator of **Isadora Moon** introduces her new character, **Mirabelle**.

Behind every successful fairy is a talented author and in the case of Isadora Moon, half fairy, half vampire, it's

Harriet Muncaster. The first **Isadora Moon**

*book was published in 2016 and there are now eleven in the series and an army of young fans who love Isadora and no doubt wish they could live her life with friends, magical pet, loving family - and the ability to fly. Muncaster writes and illustrates the books and talked to **Books for Keeps***

on the eve of the launch of a brand new series starring Isadora's cheeky cousin Mirabelle.

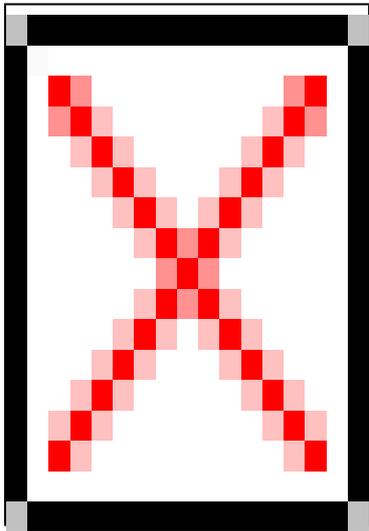


?I always loved creating worlds and stories. But I didn't actually realise you could do it as a job until I was about 15 or 16.? It was an author visit from James Mayhew no less to Harriet's school that set her on the path to be a children's author and illustrator. In a further piece of serendipity, he then became her tutor when she enrolled on the MA course in children's illustration at **Anglia Ruskin University**. She studied illustration at **Norwich University College of Art** but it was the Cambridge course that really started her career: ?The MA was absolutely brilliant. Because it was so well linked to the industry, it was easier to get your work seen. They took our work out to the Bologna Children's Book Fair and I got spotted there by a publisher. My illustration course at Norwich was brilliant but it wasn't as focused on the sort of illustration I wanted to do.

I just remember finding it amazing [the MA course] being able to do exactly the sort of illustration that I wanted to do. I

felt like I was in the right place. If you wanted to draw cute, more child-like things you were in the right place for that whereas when I was on my course before I think you had to be a bit more gritty.? She was encouraged to do 3D illustration, perfect for her ?because I love creating worlds. The thing I?m most passionate about is creating a world that I can get lost in and get obsessed with, and with characters in it that I can really love. And I love miniatures, so it always has to be a miniature world.?

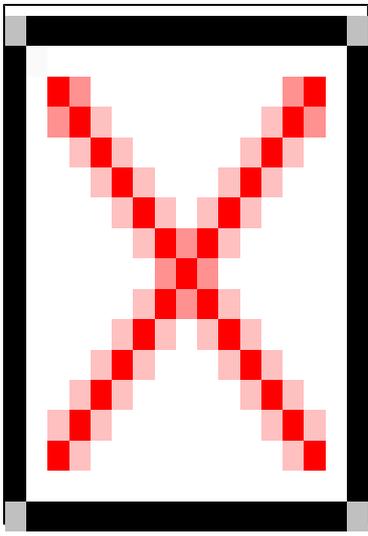
Miniature worlds depicted in 3D scenes make up the spreads in her first two books, picture books published by HarperCollins in the US. The [Isadora Moon](#) [3] books are quite different though; chapter books with two colour illustrations for newly independent readers. How did they come about?



?I suppose because I?d done illustration throughout my whole university life, I saw myself as an illustrator. I?d always loved writing stories but didn?t necessarily feel like an author. Once I started out as an illustrator however, very quickly the stories just started to weave in. Isadora Moon was inspired by another character I created called Victoria Stitch (of whom there is more to come ?). I created Victoria a long time ago, she was a big passion project of mine. She was gothic and spikey and when I showed the illustrations to a publisher they said ?we really like it but she?s a bit mean for a children?s book?. I went home and thought how I could make this into something that would work for young fiction. I didn?t want to use Victoria Stitch because she?s very much the character she is, so I thought I would take the pink and the black and the little pink rabbit, and I created a younger, friendlier character. She became Isadora Moon. I gave her fangs and then I worked out she must be a half vampire, half fairy because she?s got fangs and little bat wings.?

The rest is fairy history, and Isadora?s success has now given birth to the [Mirabelle](#) [4] series. It was her Spanish publisher who prompted the development. They wanted more Isadora books but Harriet?s workload meant that she didn?t have time to write and illustrate more. ?I didn?t think it would be right to do **Isadora Moon** with a different illustrator but that it would be OK for a spin off?. She is author of the **Mirabelle** books, but the illustrations have been carefully done in her style by a different illustrator. Harriet approves all of them.

Isadora Moon readers first met Mirabelle in the story **Isadora Moon Gets into Trouble** and she quickly got her own fans ? ?children had been coming to events dressed as Mirabelle?. She?s also very mischievous and impetuous. How much fun was it to write a character like this?



?I love writing naughty characters. Victoria Stitch was always really naughty, so it was great fun to write Mirabelle. And it was nice to see it in black and purple as well, not that I was illustrating it, but the whole thing was just very nice and refreshing to do?.

Like Isadora, Mirabelle is of mixed heritage: she?s half fairy, half witch. In a really lovely passage, her fairy father tells her how she needs to feel she can be completely herself, a message that will be important for lots of readers. How conscious was Harriet of this when writing the book?

?I always work on the visual aesthetic first, but it was definitely very important once I?d started writing. I feel that when I was young I was lucky in the way I was allowed to be who I wanted to be and I did often feel like I was a bit different, doing things that weren?t the mainstream way. I mean I think I took a long time to grow up, I was still playing with dolls and mascots when I was 15 and I know my parents were worried about it at the time but they still let me carry on which was great. It is important that children feel they don?t have to follow along or hide who they are to fit in, that?s where your best self and your best creations come out, when you?re allowed to really express who you really are.?

Children really connect with her stories, evident not just through sales but their reactions at festivals and book shop events where she is a big draw, and where children will come dressed up as their favourite characters. I wondered if she thinks her ?childish? fascination with little things and dolls contributes to this? ?I love doing events, it?s so nice to meet the children who really like the books and I love seeing how they really get into it. I do wonder if the books are popular because there?s something to do with Isadora that makes them identify with her, the fact that the stories are about everyday situations, never that wacky. With Mirabelle too, often her problems are ones that children would encounter every day; maybe that mix of real life with a dash of magic makes it work. Actually too though, I just want to say that I still make mascots and take them everywhere and photograph them. I feel like I never became really adult. I?m still very much in touch with that side of myself, I have my dolls house that I still spend a lot of time on.?

We chat a bit about **Victoria Stitch**, under wraps for now but who will be making her debut in September. ?She?s a wiskling, and all wisklings are miniature, no taller than 5 inches. They have little antennae, super long eyelashes, black tipped noses and pointy ears. They live in Wiskling Wood, though they can go out into the human world if they want to.? Her passion for little things and those miniature worlds is obvious ? she?s a big fan of Jill Barklem?s **Brambly Hedge** books. Why does she think the appeal of miniature worlds is so strong? ?I don?t know if it?s something to do with feeling you?ve got control over the people in a teeny tiny world. With the doll?s house or a miniature scene where you can see the whole thing in front of you, you can move it around and feel like you?re in control of it. It?s quite comforting. And even if your house is an absolute mess, you can keep it all perfect in amongst all the chaos!?

Miniature as her characters are, their impact on readers is huge, and everyone will find it?s worth spending time with Isadora and Mirabelle. We?re looking forward to meeting Victoria Stitch in October too.

[Mirabelle Gets up to Mischief](#) [4] is published by Oxford Children?s Book, 978-0192776495, £5.99 pbk.

The **Isadora Moon** books are also published by Oxford Children's Books, £5.99 pbk.

Page Number:

111

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[3] https://www.amazon.co.uk/Isadora-Moon-School-Harriet-Muncaster/dp/0192744313/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

[4] <http://cww.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/242/childrens-books/reviews/mirabelle-gets-up-to-mischief>