



A Q& A with Sara Crowe about her debut novel Bone Jack

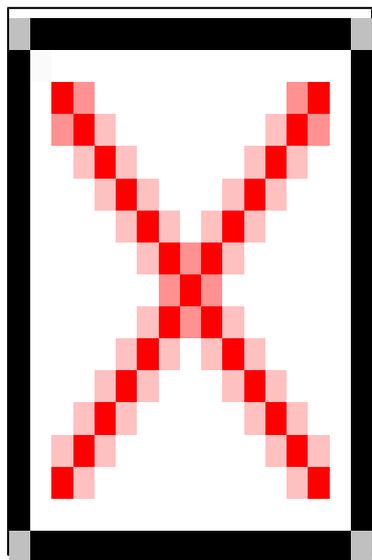
Article Author:

[Sara Crowe](#) [1]

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Byline:

Sara Crowe answers our questions



Q. The descriptions of the countryside in Bone Jack are wonderfully vivid. Tell us about your background.

A. My parents moved around a lot when I was a child so I was brought up all over England, almost always in the countryside. As a result, I don't know quite where I belong but I'm familiar with most types of British landscape, mountain and moorland, fenland, the coast, field and forest. I'm happy wandering in the wilds anywhere with my camera and my dog. Later, I studied and taught cinema and photography. Then, after a long period of recurring illness (from which I'm now fully recovered) my partner and I decided we wanted a different way of life. So in 2012 we sold up, bought a big camper van and set off on a great adventure, exploring all around Britain. We only recently stopped travelling and currently live in a caravan at the edge of a wood while we buy a patch of land with some little tumbledown farm buildings on it ? our next great adventure.

Q. You've said the stag chase is inspired by the Wild Hunt legends. What is it about the Wild Hunt that appeals so much to you?

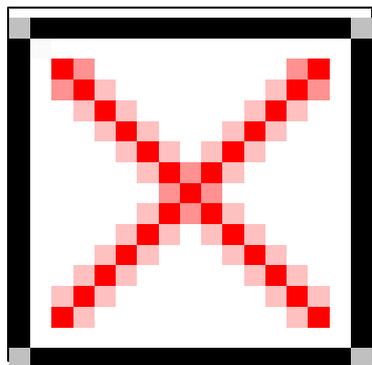
A. I love its wildness and visual drama. There's something very elemental about supernatural hounds and riders chasing across the night sky like a storm. Versions of the Wild Hunt legend occur in most northern and eastern European countries but there's never much of a story to it, which leaves it wide open to the imagination.

Q. Bone Jack is a very powerful story, given extra weight by the ancient stories it refers too - what is it about folklore and old stories that so appeals to you?

When we were travelling around Britain in our van, I searched for folktales at every stop. I found them in locally

published collections, leaflets and guidebooks, online archives, tiny folk museums, libraries and storytelling circles. Some were told to me by strangers I got chatting to while out with my dog. Folktales seem almost to emerge from the land itself. Many of them narrate stories that explain or relate to landscape features: great boulders hurled by battling giants, a spring that runs dry because someone has offended its resident boggart, a haunted tree.

Anywhere in the world that you find people, you'll find folktales. They tell of our darkest fears, offer supernatural explanations for natural phenomena, deliver life lessons, reflect or challenge social values, and they have a wonderful quality of being at once local and universal. They are strange and fantastical but also profoundly human. Although we usually think of them as archaic because their origins are ancient, they are living traditions, stories that are still told and retold in many variations.



Q. There are echoes of Alan Garner, Susan Cooper and other writers in Bone Jack - did you read those writers as a child? How conscious of other fantasy novels were you when writing your book?

A. I read Alan Garner's Alderley books and Susan Cooper's **The Dark Is Rising** sequence over and over as a child. I still reread them from time to time. Last year we made a sort of pilgrimage to Alderley Edge. I'd never been there before and it was profoundly affecting to explore a landscape I'd visited so often through Garner's novels, to see the Wizard's face in the rock, Thieves Hole, the Druid's Circle. I wasn't exactly conscious of these books as I wrote **Bone Jack** because I've loved them, lived and breathed them, for so long that they've become part of me. If something of that shines through in my own writing, I couldn't be happier about it.

Q. With references to foot and mouth and Ash's dad suffering PTSD, the book is firmly rooted in the present. Was that important to you?

Yes. As a child, the books I loved most were those that brought magic and mystery into our ordinary world. It seemed perfectly feasible to me then that this otherworld could be all around us, just out of sight, and that at any moment I might step through into it. I still feel like that a lot of the time.

Q. Do you believe in ghosts?

I believe in mystery, that there are things unknown and perhaps unknowable. Not the spirits of the dead as such but ghosts that are echoes of the past, land memories, yes, maybe.

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