



# AN INTERVIEW WITH HOLLY BLACK

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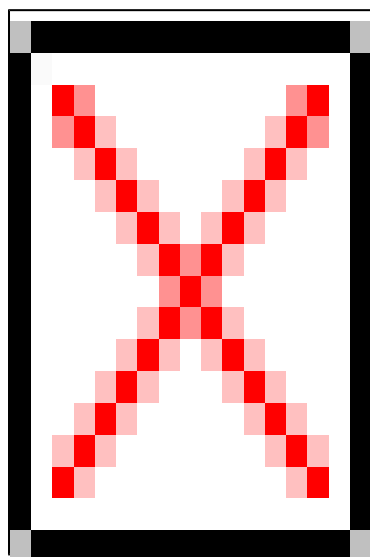
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The best-selling fantasy authors talks about her new series **The Folk of the Air**.

One of the most exciting authors of contemporary fantasy novels Holly Black is best-known as the co-author of the **Spiderwick Chronicles**, for her **Curse Worker** and **Modern Faeries Tale** series, and for the **Magisterium** books, written with Cassandra Clare. She launches a new Faerie-world set series, **The Folk of the Air** in 2018. **Philip Womack** interviewed Holly for **Books for Keeps**.



Holly Black, when I meet her, is sitting in the shadowy, music-filled bar of the St Martin's Lane Hotel, whilst on a brief visit to the United Kingdom from her home country, the United States (she was born in New Jersey). A writer of fantasy novels for a variety of age groups, she is a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic, and her **Spiderwick Chronicles** series was adapted into a successful film in 2008.

I'm with her to talk about her new novel, **Cruel Prince**, which sees two mortal children snatched away to the land of Faerie, where they are brought up by Madoc, a power hungry courtier. The palace of the Faeries is rife with intrigue, and Jude, our human fish-out-of-water heroine, must make some difficult decisions in order to survive. With green-rimmed glasses, brightly-coloured hair and long silver earrings, Black exudes geniality, seeming almost pixie-ish herself.

*?Yeah! I can make up any story I want!?*

After we've discussed what exactly a white coffee is (?milk on the side??), and whether or not it's normal to have potatoes for breakfast, I ask her when was the moment that she first felt she wanted to become a writer? Her reply brims with enthusiasm, something that generally characterises her responses: ?When I was writing I was like - yeah! I can make up any story I want! Anything I want! I also remember that when I was in fourth grade I had a best friend who liked to draw and who liked to write, and she got first place drawing; and I got first place writing and I was like - Well! I

guess no more drawing.?

She was always drawn to fantasy: ?when I was in 8th grade I was a huge Anne Rice **Interview with a Vampire** fan, and also a huge **Lord of the Rings** fan - so I wrote a terrible, terrible, terrible book called *Knights of the Silver Sun*.? Read out on a juvenilia panel at a convention, this early attempt ?was voted second worst, but I was really robbed - mine was the worst but they gave it to [Scott Westerfeld](#) [3], for a story about a demon in space who solved crimes. Which truly was amazing. Mine was worse.?

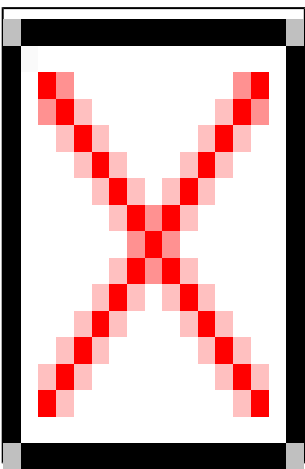
Black came to the world of faerie via Brian Froud and Alan Lee?s **Faeries**, ?It?s not for kids, it?s an art book, and it?s beautiful and kind of terrifying.? I concur that it?s important that the fey folk are frightening: ?There?s a lot of rich area for story there?, she says ?because there?s all of these really specific rules, and all these different types of fairies, and I think the fact that it?s an ecosystem with set hierarchies and different moralities makes it really intriguing, plus the fact that they look like us but have an alien quality.?

*?We want the world to be a little bigger and weirder?*

Why does she think we want to believe in other worlds? ?There?s a feeling that we want the world to be a little bigger and weirder.? She mentions the difference between the genres of dark fantasy and horror: ?The thing about dark fantasy is that no matter how bad the thing is there?s always this sense of awe. And that horror is an aberration, it?s the wrongness. Fantasy - even if something is about to eat you, you?re sort of glad it exists, because the world is bigger with it.?

I ask her if she?s ever met a fairy. ?No.? Would she like to? ?Sure! I love the idea - I love the idea that the world might be bigger and weirder.?

Turning to her book, **The Cruel Prince** was born with its prologue ?where you have these three kids, they?re home with



their parents, and a stranger comes to the door ? somebody who has come for his heir, right, and then the protagonist gets swept along with it. It?s not about her, but she?s drawn up into these circumstances. That was the idea, [and] with that the idea of growing up raised by someone that you can?t help loving but also hating.? In its shocking prologue, central character Jude?s parents are murdered in front of her and her sisters by Madoc, a lord of Faerie, who then, actually quite honourably, takes the sisters back to his own land to bring them up as his own.

The complexities of court machinations, plots and counter plots are dealt with very carefully by Black. How does she cope with it all? ?I really find that stuff very pleasurable. I think that it?s fun to work out, though it?s not always easy.? She loves being surprised in her reading, and what motivates her writing is also the pleasure of shaping a good surprise.

*?I love when people have one foot in two worlds?*

Her heroine, Jude, is a fascinating creation, stubborn and brave, neither at home in the mortal world, nor in Faerie: ?The thing that intrigues me about Jude is that I love when people have one foot in two worlds. I think that?s a really interesting problem ? How do you choose when you?re part and parcel of two things? When you?re neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring.?

Jude's nature is central to the novel, particularly her relationship with power: 'She's so powerless, she's been raised by a man who is deeply concerned with power, and who is willing to make some pretty brutal calculations, and when she has an opportunity for power she goes for it - how far she goes remains to be seen.'

So what next for Jude? 'There's two more books!' the question is who she's willing to become, is she willing to become like Madoc. He's her model in some way but what does that mean, what do you turn into in that situation? Do you wind up doing the things he's done? Or how bad do you get?? It looks like there's many more twists and turns to come in the forthcoming volumes.

Before we finish, I ask her about the political situation in US. Do fantasy writers have a duty to speak out, more than ever before? 'We all have to stand up and say something. If you're a citizen of the US, right now is the time to really make your voice heard.'

Philip Womack is an author and critic. His books include [The Double Axe](#) [4] and the [Darkening Path](#) [5] trilogy. He is crowdfunding his new novel [The Arrow of Apollo](#) [6] with Unbound.

**The Cruel Prince**, book one in **The Folk of the Air** series is published by Hot Key Books, 978-1-4714-0645-4 £12.99 hbk.

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