



Goodbye Ruby Redfort: an interview with Lauren Child

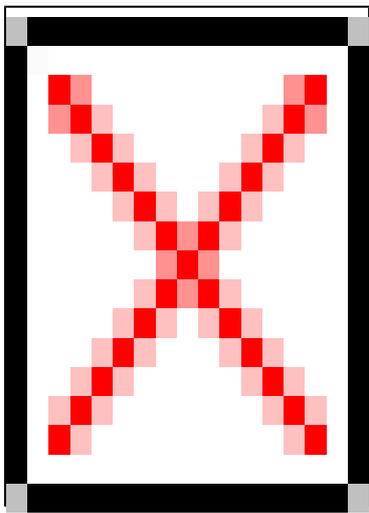
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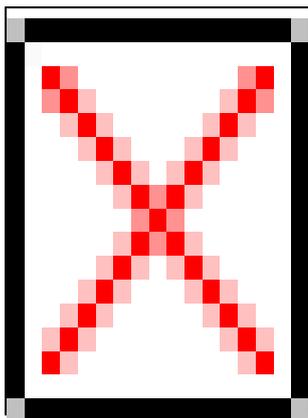
Lauren Child on the conclusion to her girl detective series



After keeping readers on the edge of their seats throughout six books, **Ruby Redfort's** adventures, as told by **Lauren Child**, conclude with **Blink and You Die**. **Nicholas Tucker** spoke to **Lauren** about Ruby, James Bond, and mushrooms!

*I am interviewing Lauren on a sunny day in her pretty London house, crammed with pictures and arty bits and pieces. She is wearing a fabulous dress made from material bought in America ? just the sort of fabric she sometimes works into her collages. Lauren is looking fabulous too; sun-tanned from a recent holiday spent relaxing after coming to the end of her six part **Ruby Redfort** adventure series. The last of these, **Blink and You Die** ran to 565 pages. Is it a great weight off her shoulders to have finished with Ruby altogether or more a sense of loss?*

It's a great weight off my shoulders! I know I'm not meant to say that and I'm sure I will miss it too. The thing about



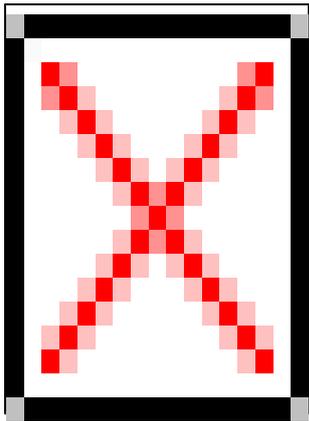
inter connected stories is that when you have finished one there is never any real sigh of relief because you have deliberately kept some loose ends going for the next instalment. But at the moment it does feel is nice

to have finally completed the whole thing once and for all.

But the wicked Count is still around! You haven't killed him off for good, making him fall off a high building like some of Ruby's other evil opponents.

Well, I hope there are not going to be too many letters picking me up on any detail left unfinished, including anything about the Count himself. As for falling off high buildings, I am probably not supposed to say this either, but the American market hates any mention of guns in stories. So falling off a high building is one alternative way of getting rid of a truly obnoxious character. I grew up on a diet of quite violent films which I used to watch with my Dad on television because when I was little there weren't that many children's programmes. So I quickly became immune to most violence, which could be why there is a touch of it in **Ruby Redfort**, but never any guns!

Mushrooms also play a large part into this last story. What's that all about?



I never plot in advance and they just happened. I was thinking about something that might give you a long life if you ate it. I also talked to a friend who is obsessed with the idea that meteorites could have brought mushroom spores with them when they first crashed into earth. These, according to him, could have been the origin of life itself, so it seemed like a good idea to bring them into my story too. And mushrooms are such weird things anyhow; they can be so nice and also so poisonous. A perfect metaphor for not always knowing what is good or bad.

When Ian Fleming started writing he asked a friend for suggestions about how he could vary 'He said' and 'She said' in passages of dialogue. You sometimes include pages of pure dialogue in these stories as if from a script rather than a novel. Was this because you too got weary of 'He said' and 'She said'?

I think it sometimes works better, whether it's funny or dramatic, when you insert a section of a script with voices pinging straight back to each other. It also brings in pace, when there is a lot of information to impart and this way you can do it really quickly.

You also do two things that don't normally happen in children's adventure stories; you keep parents in and you make your main character go to school. How did you manage to stop either parents or school from ruining any decent adventures by always insisting that their own daily demands come first?

Well, rather than remove Ruby's parents I simply removed their brains, so they never have any idea of what's really going on. They are lovely and good fun, but mostly provide comic backdrop. As for school, when I watch James Bond I always feel I know so little about his other day to day world. This means that at least for me he soon becomes little more than a two-dimensional bore. We never see him simply at home or having any sort of enduring relationships. So with Ruby I wanted to write about someone who experiences extraordinary events but also has a normal life going at the same time.

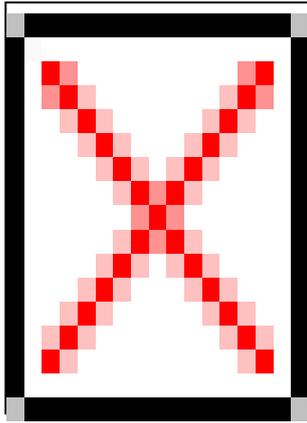
You talk about Ruby as if she is a real person. Is this how you think about her?

Yes, I suppose I do think of her as a real person with real relationships.

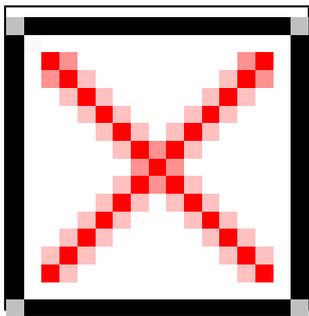
But although she is nearly fourteen she still has no growing interest in boys.

I was in fact going to put that in but it felt as if it might take the story off into a different direction. As it is, all six books take place in one year of Ruby's life and there is already so much plot to juggle with.

You have said you want your readers to form their own visual impressions of what your characters look like, but then



you add your own illustrations of them at the end of the book. Why?



I tried on the whole not to give too many verbal descriptions of my characters' appearances.

This meant I never had to be specific about where exactly they all came from at birth and the problems that might sometimes arise for them as a result. But I thought it might be interesting for readers to finally see how I actually pictured them once we got to the end of the series.

So what's next?

I'm going to do some more **Charlie and Lola** picture books that I wrote years ago but never got round to illustrating. Doing them now will work very well with having a young child in the house coming in to chat to me from time to time while I am doing them. That wasn't possible with writing about the **Ruby** books, where I really had to concentrate. I also want to do some more **Clarice Bean** books, because I feel I know much more now about how best to pace myself in fiction. Clarice is younger than Ruby, and her stories are much shorter. I had to find out how to write long in the **Ruby Redfort** books. Now I will have to work out how to write short again, and I am looking forward to it.

And with that, our interview, often punctuated with hoots of laughter, came to an end. Evidence of the huge enjoyment Lauren Child derives from writing and illustrating her many books is always there on the page, even in moments of high excitement. It is hard to come away from them not smiling; the same could also be said about departing from Lauren herself after this interview.

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

The **Ruby Redfort** books, including **Blink and You Die** (978-0-0073-3428-5, £12.99 hbk) are published by HarperCollins Children's Books.

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