



## Hal's Reading Diary - January 2009

Article Author:

[Roger Mills](#) [1]

[174](#) [2]

Article Category:

Hal's Diary and Baby Diary

Byline:

**Roger Mills** enjoys stories full of suspense with Hal.

Suggestions are needed from readers of **BfK** for books that will appeal to 7-year-old Hal. They should be easy to read and full of suspense. His father, psychodynamic counsellor **Roger Mills**, explains.

<!--break-->

If Hal were to compile a 'My favourite books' the top 10 list, I am pretty confident that at least two out of the first five titles would be from Cressida Cowell's wonderful Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III series. For anyone not familiar with these treasures, Hiccup is a Viking boy, the son of the chief of the Hooligan tribe, Stoick the Vast. Most Vikings in the tribe are large, thick and comprehensively boorish, and Hal has derived many an evening's merriment from their various grossnesses. Hiccup, on the other hand, is weedy and cerebral and a recurrent theme in the books is the attempts by his thuggish cousin Snotface Snotlout to usurp his position as heir, attempts that Hiccup's superior brainpower always frustrates.

Another great thing about the books is their cliff-hanger quality. Hiccup encounters lots of other perils beside Snotlout and many chapters end with Hiccup facing what appears to be inevitable extinction. This has its hazards when Hiccup is our evening read because the books are difficult to put down. Most chapters are 20 pages long, but often Hal begs to have the next one because he has to know what is going to happen. I'm often pretty keen to know what's going to happen myself and lights out on Hiccup nights is often rather later than it is supposed to be.

Contrast a Hiccup book, though, with the books that Hal is reading by himself. Recently this has been some of the 'Boys Rule' titles featuring the gentle adventures of Billy and Sam. Hal is moderately interested in these, and since they are written as small plays we can read them collaboratively which he likes. But there is nothing like the same thirst to find out what is going to happen next that you get with a Hiccup book. Lights out on time on 'Boys Rule' nights.

Pondering this contrast I went into my local Waterstone's recently and asked if there were any books which were both exciting and easy to read. My thinking was that it might be possible to harness Hal's love of suspenseful stories to give him a real appetite for reading on his own. I came away with one of H I Larry's 'Zac Power' books and we gave it a go that evening. Zac, the main character who is a boy secret agent, was quite appealing to Hal. But, sadly, the book was a little too difficult. Passages like 'Unknown hostiles are hacking into the computer system controlling WorldEye. WorldEye is GIB's satellite system' were heavy weather for Hal. Working out the words he slows right down and reading a page at that pace it becomes a struggle to hold on to the flow of the story.

So, we seem to be faced with a bit of a catch 22. Hal might read energetically if a story were exciting enough. But the exciting stories we have come across so far seem to involve language which is a bit too tricky for his current reading skills. Maybe it simply isn't possible to write suspensefully for readers who are at the 'Boys Rule' kind of level. But is it? Maybe there are simply written books, with easy vocabulary, which nevertheless offer gripping and compelling narratives. Once again any suggestions would be gratefully received.

Cressida Cowell's **How to Ride a Dragon's Storm** by Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III and other Hiccup books are published by Hodder. The 'Boys Rule!' series is published by Rising Stars and H I Larry's 'Zac Power' series by Egmont.

 [Hal - Summer Holiday 2008 008.jpg](#) [3]

Hal on his summer holiday 2008

Page Number:

11

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Apr '20):** <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/174/childrens-books/articles/hals-diary-and-baby-diary/hal%E2%80%99s-reading-diary-january-2009>

**Links:**

[1] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/roger-mills>

[2] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/174>

[3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/Hal - Summer Holiday 2008 008.jpg>