



An interview with Andrew Peters

Article Author:

[Andrea Reece](#) [1]

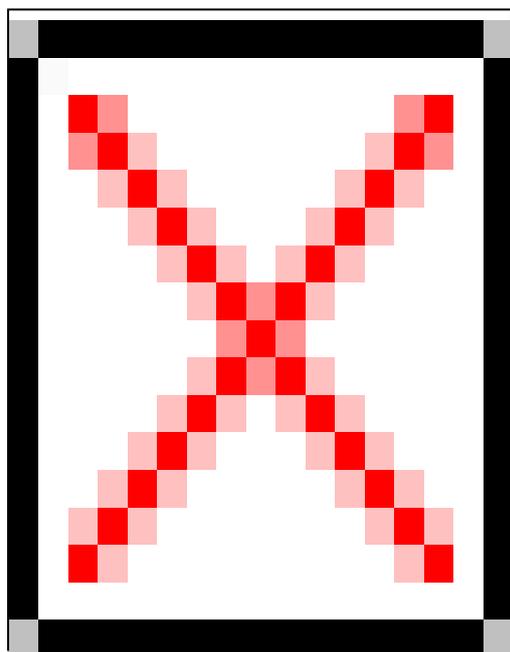
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Andrea Reece interviews **Andrew Peters** for **Books for Keeps**.



An action-packed adventure story set in the branches of giant trees; a meticulously imagined civilisation with its own religion and myths; political treachery and intrigue; heroism, and battles to the death: all are features of Andrew Peters' new novel **Ravenwood**. No wonder then that it is being described as an epic. ? Andrew Peters admits that this was absolutely his intention from the start,? says **Andrea Reece** who interviewed him exclusively for **Books for Keeps**.

Andrew Peters has over 75 books to his name including novels, picture books and plays, but is probably best known for his poetry, including the Carnegie short-listed teen collection **Poems with Attitude**. Why then this new fantasy novel, and why the epic scale? ?I feel very depressed about the state of poetry right now,? says Peters. ?The poetry market just seems to have gone. I met David Fickling and he told me that Philip Pullman had actually been ready to give up writing, and that he'd advised him to think big, think epic. That gave me the inspiration to start **Ravenwood**.?

Ravenwood tells the story of Ark, a poor apprentice whose life is changed when he overhears his country's senior politician plotting with representatives of a neighbouring country to topple the king and seize power. Soon Ark is plunged into danger and fighting for his life.

It opens with a heart-stopping chase across the branches of the giant trees of the land of Arborium. The tree-top setting for **Ravenwood** had been in Peters' mind for some time. ?We live in Shropshire deep in the countryside and at the top of our lane are some really beautiful trees. I've always felt a sense of wonder about trees, a feeling of there being something more to them, and I wanted to put them at the centre of this story. Or maybe it's being 6'8'? ? I just have a special affinity with trees!?

Beneath his fast-paced fantasy action, however, Peters has serious points to make about the real world, and here again the trees are all-important. The peace and security of Arborium are threatened by the neighbouring country of Maw. Maw is a land of glass and steel greedy to conquer Arborium for its trees, because wood is worth its weight in gold. 'In Maw, wood is just a commodity to be traded,' says Peters. '**Ravenwood** offers a comment on our grossly materialistic age, the insanity of the world we live in, and just what we are in danger of losing. Hedge funds are real of course, but I couldn't resist including stick-brokers, or the comment that 'the world is going conkers?!'

It is worth pointing out at this point that it is impossible to fully enjoy **Ravenwood** without an ability to appreciate puns. There are lots and lots of them. Peters is unashamed; after all, this is the man who named a collection of poetry **The Weather's Getting Verse!** 'The puns are there for the kids,' he explains. 'I've worked in schools for years and know how much they enjoy them.'

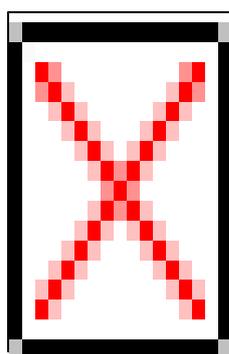
Certain adult readers might also balk at the excess of scatological humour. For all the genuine heroism and lofty ideals of the book, its hero is a plumber, who for much of the book is up to his knees, if not actually totally submerged, in shit.

Peters is unabashed. 'But the poo jokes are great!' he says. 'People who are sniffy about that tend to be those who haven't got kids. I've tried the book out on ten-year-olds, and it works. Don't forget too that there's an environmental message in the book: the poo has a crucial role to play!'

There's humour of all kinds throughout the book. 'There are funny bits in the battle scenes, but the Dendrans are actually dying. It's about getting the balance right.' Peters is half Czech and emphasises the importance of humour under the Communist regime. 'Humour offered an escape, it was a form of rebellion.' He adds thoughtfully, 'you just had to be careful who you told jokes to.' This is something the inhabitants of both Arborium and Maw would understand.

Initially, Peters claims, the book was a lot more serious. In fact, it's been through lots of changes, and Peters generously credits the influence of his editor at Chicken House, Imogen Cooper. 'It was very much a collaborative process,' he says, attributing the introduction of the character of Mucum (a kind of Sam to Ark's Frodo) to Cooper.

There's no doubt however that the vision was all Peters'. Already he is hard at work on the second **Ravenwood** story, which he says will explain more about the empire of Maw. Readers can look forward to another original, fast-paced, well-plotted novel 'as well as another hundred or so more puns!



Ravenwood is published by Chicken House (400pp, 978 1 906427 46 7) at £6.99 pbk.

Salt Publishing have also brought out a new poetry collection on the theme of trees, illustrated by Andrew's son Asa: **Leaves are Like Traffic Lights** (112pp, 978 1 844712 77 9) £6.99 pbk.

Andrea Reece is Marketing and Publicity Consultant for Piccadilly Press amongst other independent children's publishers.

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