Wednesday 23rd March 2022
LO: To generate questions about a story.



Today, the author of Varjak Paw, S.F. Said, joined our class for a discussion about his book. We generated questions then posed them to the author.

Do you have any advice for writers?

Write what you are interested in. I am interested in cats and martial arts so I wrote about that. I like space so my new book is based on a different type of martial arts, but set in space.

How easy was it to write a book?

Varjak's first draft was rejected 40 times by publishers and I had to do 17 versions of it before I got it published. It took 5 years for me to get Varjak published from start to finish, but each edit it improved the story. The black cats were not in it until draft number 17 so each draft it gets better and better every time. You need to have a lot of perseverance in order to write a book.

What inspired you to write?

I loved reading stories and I wanted to share them so I wrote some too. Watership Down was my favourite book as a child and I loved reading it. I wanted to write a book that was just as good as that.

What are you working on now?

For the last eight years, I have been working on a book, well, two books that are connected. The first one is called Tyger. I have called it that after my favourite poem, *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright,* I'm on edit 17e. I gave the edits a letter because I thought it sounded better than to keep adding numbers each time! Editing is really important. As I said, the black cats didn't exist in Varjak until the last version, so you never know what might be discovered in each edit!

How old were you when you started writing?

That depends what you mean by writing. I wrote Varjak between the ages of 30-35 years old, but previously I started writing just after university, about 23. I wrote lots of short stories for a while. I started to think as a reader. *If I was a reader and could read any book in the world, what story would I like to read?* I then wrote my first draft. And if you are writing, on the first draft, just have fun! Get all of your ideas down on paper and write it just for you. Put it away for a bit and do other things then when you get it back out again, you'll notice things that you want to change. If you had paid for that story, how would you feel? What would you want to be different?

Edit, improve then reread it again. You always feel so much better when you know it is the best that it can be.

Do you have any others that you look up to or inspire you or your stories?

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I love Watership Down, that's my favourite book. Phillip Pullman and Mallory Blackman are also great writers. I like anything that takes our normal world and makes it different in some way. Read the books that you love reading and write about the books that you love reading too. Aim high. *Read as much as you can and as widely as you can until you find something that you love.*

Finally, whatever you want to do, whether it is writing or something completely different, persevere, keep going. If I can succeed after 40 rejections for my first book, you can do anything if you keep going.