



Andrew Smith Q&A interview

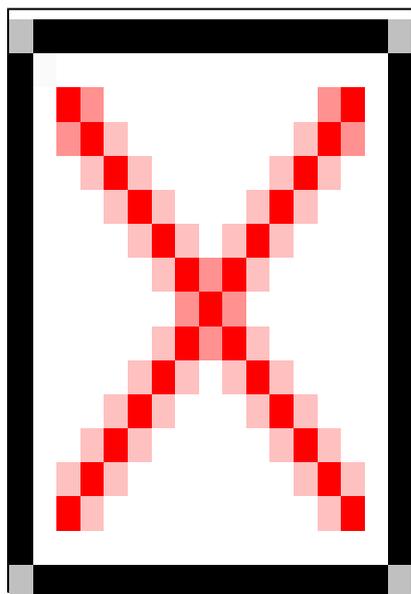
Article Author:

[Andrew Smith](#) [1]

[211](#) [2]

Byline:

The author of **Grasshopper Jungle** talks about his new book **The Alex Crow**

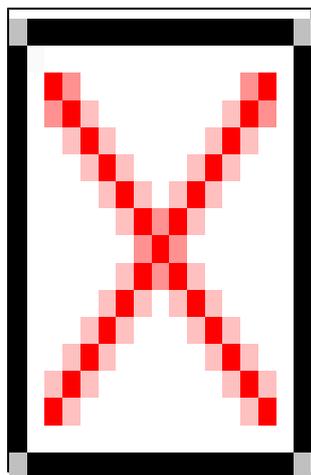


Q1. We described *Grasshopper Jungle* as one of the most original novels of the year. How would you sum it up for readers who don't know the book?

As Austin Szerba, the novel's protagonist and historian, says, the book is about everything, including Paleolithic cave painters, medieval Polish saints, volcanoes, genetically modified corn, and giant, horny, man-eating praying mantises.

Q2. Describe *The Alex Crow* in your own words. What was the inspiration for this story

The Alex Crow, in the broadest sense, explores the notion of rescuing things and the way humans are so prone



to muddling compassion with selfishness. Elementally, it tells the story of a refugee boy named Ariel and the strangeness of his experiences when he arrives in America and ends up in a summer camp for boys who are addicted to technology. There's also a story thread about an insane (and melting) bomber, a failed expedition to discover an open seaway to the North Pole, and a resurrected, formerly extinct, suicidal crow named Alex. The novel

was largely inspired by immigrant teens I work with in school.

Q3. Grasshopper Jungle was on the longlist for the Carnegie Medal. Last year's winner The Bunker Diary was the subject of some controversy because of its perceived 'dark' nature and themes. Have you had similar reactions to your writing? What do you think about this response to teen novels?

I have had more than my share of controversy surrounding content that makes some people uncomfortable. Usually, I think the most vocal critics of darkness in young adult literature are those few (and loud) adults who would rather not have discussions with young people on some of the more difficult realities of life. I'm not afraid of engaging in those conversations, but I wish people on all sides of controversial issues would attempt to treat one another with a bit more civility.

Q4. You've said that you don't pre-plot, but both Grasshopper Jungle and The Alex Crow weave together different plotlines really skilfully. How do you handle plotting?

I do not pre-plot, and I also do not outline my work ahead of time. That's just how my brain works?it's very much like my office: stuff is stacked in great heaping piles all over the place, but I know where everything is. So when I write, even when I'm doing something as directionally complex as **Grasshopper Jungle** or **The Alex Crow**, I just sit down and go.

Q5. The out-of-control sexuality of teenage boys is a recurring theme in both books. Tell us a bit about that.

I wouldn't call it 'out-of-control' sexuality. I think sexuality is very much in control of adolescents in most cases, though. I'm only trying to be honest and not hung up on obscuring what is one of the most elementally powerful forces that shape choice and internal conflict during adolescence.

Q6. You've said that boys repress themselves because of the pressure on them to conform to the stereotype of what boys should be. How do you counter that in your writing?

I think this is particularly true in America, that society establishes a very predictable and confining 'box' into which ALL THINGS BOY must conform. In my books, a recurring element is the idea of the somewhat reticent boy who recognizes that he does not fit very well into the 'boy box.' In fact, I think most boys, when you get down to it, feel this way, yet they are constantly rewarded or praised for outwardly exhibiting all those constraining characteristics.

Q7. Do you intend your books to offer some sort of escapism for kids from their problems

I do see books as entertainment, but not just for kids. I can only hope that my readers lose themselves inside my stories. That's why we writers write, after all.

Q8. What do you find so satisfying about writing YA literature?

I often distance myself from anyone who views YA as an age level, as opposed to a genre. By approaching YA as a genre of fiction which examines essential adolescent experiences through a more distanced lens, a writer is able to examine what is fundamentally the most important, life-shaping stage in human existence. What could possibly be better?and more challenging?than that?

Q9. Do you think the human race is destined for extinction?

I have no doubt about this whatsoever.

Q10. Are you working on a book now? Can you tell us anything about it?

I am working on a book at the moment. There's little I can say about it beyond that it is for Dutton/Penguin, my

American publishers of **Grasshopper Jungle** and **The Alex Crow**, and it is scheduled to publish in 2016. I will also say that it sits well on the shelf alongside those other two titles, because it's funny and it's very, very weird.

Page Number:

33

Source URL (retrieved on Jan '20): <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/211/childrens-books/articles/andrew-smith-qa-interview>

Links:

[1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/andrew-smith>

[2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/211>