



A Q&A INTERVIEW WITH SIBÉAL POUNDER

Article Author:

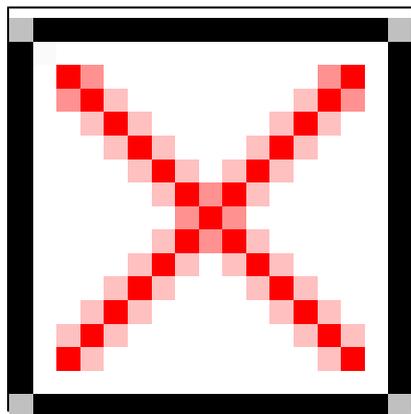
[Sibéal Pounder](#)[1]

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Byline:

Sibéal Pounder is inspired by an **Eva Ibbotson** classic.

Best known for her hugely popular **Witch Wars** and **Bad Mermaids** books, Sibéal Pounder claims to also be Eva Ibbotson's biggest fan. On the 25th anniversary [The Secret of Platform 13](#) [3], Eva Ibbotson's classic story, she has written a sequel. Sibéal tells us all about going [Beyond Platform 13](#) [4].

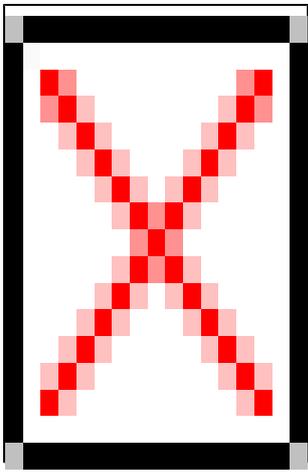


How did the suggestion of writing a sequel to *The Secret of Platform 13* come about, and what were your first thoughts on the idea?

Eva Ibbotson's editor Lucy Pearse and her Estate (which is made up of her children) approached me about writing the sequel. I was so honoured to be asked ? and it was so surreal to think I could return to a world I loved so much as a child and spend time with the characters as part of my job.

Was the first reading experience important to you when you began the sequel?

Yes! The first character that popped into my head was Odge Gribble. She was my favourite ? she's a hag but looks like a normal girl. She dreams of being warty with impressive ear hair like her sisters, instead the most hag-like thing about her is she has a blue molar. My own experience and the things I remembered and loved about the book did help steer my initial thoughts about where to take the sequel, but I didn't want to focus only on just what I loved. When I was having lunch with Lucy and discussing what I wanted to do with it, she kept saying ?And Hans? What happens to Hans?? He was her favourite growing up! Everyone has their favourite character so it was important to me that I deliver for everyone, not just 9 year old me.



When you were planning the sequel, what was your starting point, and why?

I started with the research and I hunted down every interview – printed and audio – with Eva that I could find. I wanted to first see if I could find clues as to where she would take the story. The most important thing to me was that the heart of the book felt like an Eva book, and I didn't want to take the characters or the world in a direction she wouldn't. I found some useful things that helped guide me. For example, in the book she mentions that every country has a gump (a portal to the secret island), yet we only visit the one on Platform 13 at Kings Cross. That seemed like a solid world building mechanism – a way of establishing a larger framework so if she were to return to the world there would be more to see.

I also went backwards to go forwards and looked at what could've inspired various elements and characters – from her life experiences to the people she knew. My favourite find was the similarities between the way she described the character Ben and how she described her husband, Alan Ibbotson – kind, sweet, someone who cared for animals and was fascinated by the natural world. In the book Ben makes a den for the mistmaker (a strange magical creature in the story) and hides it under his bed. In an interview she says, when they first met, her husband made an ant farm and kept it hidden under his bed. I loved that parallel, and things like that were enough for me to believe that she would see Ben as a good-to-his-bones character, and that helped steer how I developed him. Ben was interesting because he is a prince with power on the island so he could be someone to potentially corrupt, but the similarities with Alan Ibbotson gave me enough reason to believe Eva would never do that. So that was how I tried to work, to keep the heart of it hers as much as possible.

What do you admire most about Eva Ibbotson's writing? Has she been an influence on your own writing, and if so, how?

I love everything about her work, but especially the humour! I love the play on Odge's character and the twisting of the hag stereotype – it's something that greatly inspired my **Witch Wars** and **Bad Mermaids** series. Another of her books **Dial A Ghost** has one of the funniest, simplest and most satisfying set ups I've ever read (a boy calls to order a haunting only to be sent a very nice family of ghosts). I also love the inclusivity and kindness in her work, particularly in **The Secret of Platform 13**. It's about a magical island and anyone who finds it can call it home. I love that the royal family on the island are humans – it's such a nice mix of characters, all welcome, which I think is quite unusual for a magical world, normally non-magical beings are very much an 'other'.

What is your favourite scene in *Beyond Platform 13* and why?

I have a couple – I love the moment when Odge returns to Platform 13 and meets up with the ghosts of Kings Cross Station, Mrs Partridge and Ernie Hobbs and all the memories of her first adventure, Eva's adventure, come flooding back to her. And I loved writing the scenes with the Pearly Mermaids. Eva set up mermaids in the sewers of London in the first book and I loved expanding that idea and making them like Pearly Queens. Finding the statue and the entrance to their lair was so much fun to write – and hiding it in the River Fleet under London and researching that history was a lot of fun.

[Beyond Platform 13](#) [4], and [The Secret of Platform 13](#) are both published by Macmillan Children's Books.

Elizabeth Hammill [remembered Eva Ibbotson](#) [5] and also interviewed her for [our Authorgraph](#) [6] feature.

Thanks to Sibéal for answering our questions.

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