Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Armageddon Outta Here – the World of Skulduggery Pleasant

Written by

Derek Landy

Published by

HarperCollins Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in hardback in Great Britain by HarperCollins *Children's Books* 2014*
HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of
HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd
77-85 Fulham Palace Road, Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

Visit us on the web at www.harpercollins.co.uk

Visit Skulduggery Pleasant at
www.skulduggerypleasant.co.uk

Derek Landy blogs under duress at
www.dereklandy.blogspot.com

1

Copyright © Derek Landy 2014

Derek Landy asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work

Illuminated letters © Tom Percival 2014
Skulduggery Pleasant™ Derek Landy
SP Logo™ HarperCollins*Publishers*

HB ISBN: 978-0-00-755953-4
TPB ISBN: 978-0-00-756211-4

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Conditions of Sale
This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser. All rights reserved.

FSC www.fsc.org
MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C007454

FSC™ is a non-profit international organisation established to promote the responsible management of the world's forests. Products carrying the FSC label are independently certified to assure consumers that they come from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and ecological needs of present and future generations, and other controlled sources.

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at
www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

* *The Lost Art of World Domination*, first published in *Skulduggery Pleasant*, 2012 Down-under Tour Edition; *Gold, Babies and the Brothers Muldoon*, first published in *Playing with Fire*, 2012 Down-under Tour Edition; *The Slightly Ignominious End to the Legend of Black Annis*, first published in *The Faceless Ones*, 2012 Down-under Tour Edition; *Myosotis Terra*, first published in *Mortal Coil*, 2012 Down-under Tour Edition; *The Wonderful Adventures of Geoffrey Scrutinous*, first published in *Mortal Coil*, 2012 Down-under Tour Edition; *Just Another Friday Night*, first published in *The End of the World*, 2012 Australian Edition; *The End of the World*, first published in 2012; *Trick or Treat* and *The Button*, first published on www.dereklandy.blogspot.com

This book is dedicated to my brand new nephew, Cameron.

Cameron, I'm sure you'll grow taller as you get older, but right now you're simply way too short. You also can't talk or stand up, and I have yet to see you read a book. None of this is entirely your own fault, however – I blame the parents – so I hope my words don't upset you too much.

The problem is, you're surrounded by a formidable sister and some formidable cousins, so you're going to have to grow up to be an exceptional person. I'll do what I can to help, but the rest is up to you.

INTRODUCTION

I've always loved Introductions.

They remind me of when I was a kid, wandering through second-hand bookstores, pulling battered old horror paperbacks from the shelves. Those wrinkled covers, those dog-eared pages, that wonderful, slightly stale smell of stories... Those books pulled you into their own history, made you a part of it, and if you were lucky – like, *really* lucky – right before the story started you'd find the Author's Introduction.

This, to a kid who wanted nothing more than to be a writer, was a portal into imagination. I couldn't Google a writer's name and read his blog or watch every interview he'd ever done on YouTube (and I hereby wave to some reader way off in the future who's just read that and is now getting information about "Google" "Blog"

and "Youtube" downloaded directly into his brain), so I had to make do with what brief glimpses I was afforded. It was in the Introductions that authors talked about their work and their process, and I scoured these words, searching for the secret to writing, hunting for the Big Clue that would lead me to Where Stories Come From.

I found glimpses of the Big Clue in the words of Stephen King and other masters of the genre, but nothing definite. Still, in many ways it was enough. These glimpses brought with them their own kind of inspiration, and when I was a kid, when I was a teenager, that's all I needed. My early stories dripped with blood. They were soaked in it. Drenched. I had yet to learn concepts such as subtlety or restraint, and there is definitely a place for subtlety and restraint – but it was not a place that held any interest for me. I was all about the blood, the rawness, the viscera. I was reading King and Clive Barker and James Herbert and Michael Slade and Skipp and Spector and Shaun Hutson and dear GOD the list goes on. My life was blood-soaked books, horror movies and heavy metal.

Ah, youth...

And yet, dig a little deeper and you reveal a love of film noir and craggy detectives in rumpled suits and cool hats. Dig a little more and you uncover a love of westerns inherited from a father, a love of screwball comedies inherited from a mother (and for a kid who has stammered all of his life, to find these movies where everyone talks really really fast was beyond exhilarating), and a love of science fiction and adventure that blossomed in the eighties

because of people like Spielberg and Lucas and shows like *Knight Rider* and *Airwolf* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*...

Taking all this into account, I am the sum of my obsessions. I am every movie I've ever seen and every book I've ever read. I am every song I've ever listened to. I am every comic I've ever bought. I am entire collections by Joseph Wambaugh and Elmore Leonard and Joe R Lansdale and I am *His Dark Materials* and I am *Harry Potter*.

And in all of these things, I have glimpsed the Big Clue. And these glimpses were enough to open my eyes to the ideas swimming naturally through the soup of my mind. It was from that soup that I plucked Skulduggery Pleasant himself, back in the summer of 2005, and he brought with him every genre I've ever loved.

He is a detective (crime) who is also a skeleton (horror) who takes on a partner (screwball) and they fight monsters (fantasy) and they save the world (adventure). With a little bit of sci-fi thrown in, to stop things from getting boring.

The stories in this collection – arranged here in chronological order for your reading pleasure – are but fragments of the world that Skulduggery has opened up for me. It is because of him that I am able to write a western and sit it comfortably beside a novella about a middle-aged man revisiting the horrors of his childhood. It is because of him that the tones of these stories shift so radically between one and the next. It is because of him that I have the freedom to write the kind of stories I loved, and continue to love, to read.

And if there is a fledgling writer out there who is searching through this Introduction in an effort to find the Big Clue – the secret to writing that I, along with all the other writers, share only amongst ourselves – I am afraid I must disappoint you. This is something you must find out for yourself, fledgling writer, as the Author's Code expressly forbids me from speaking of it in public.

I may already have said too much...

Derek Landy,
Dublin
Saint Patrick's Day, 2014

ACROSS A DARK PLAIN



It was the year of Our Lord eighteen hundred and sixty-one, and it was up west of the Missouri River in South Dakota, and the Dead Men were riding again.

This was still years before that damn fool Custer stumbled across all that gold in the Black Hills, years before Wounded Knee and the massacre that took place there. This was back before the territory was admitted into the union, back before Deadwood, back even before that pitiful Treaty of Laramie promised the region to the Lakota people, a treaty that, if ever that was one, was drawn up just to be burned.

It was a time of gunfighters and outlaws and hard living and easy dying and, of course, it was a time of mean-spirited, blood-slicked magic.