



# AN INTERVIEW WITH KATIE AND KEVIN TSANG

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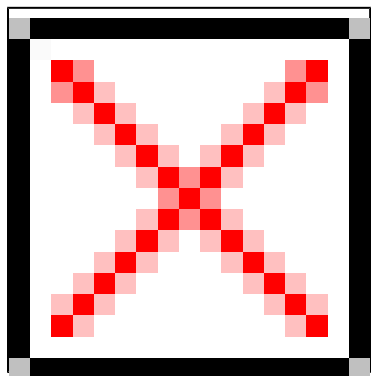
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An interview with the authors of **Dragon Mountain**

Here be dragons: **Dr Rebecca Butler** interviews **Katie and Kevin Tsang** about their new book.

Katie and Kevin Tsang are the joint authors of [Dragon Mountain](#) [3], the first book in a trilogy about a mythical Dragon Realm. This first book has just been named as the **Waterstone's Children's Book of the Month** for September 2020, guaranteeing it many readers.

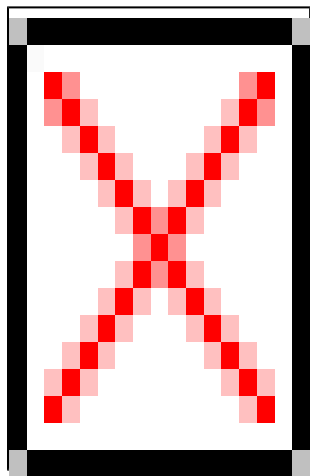


Chatting the Katie and Kevin, we first discussed those elements of Chinese culture they chose to incorporate in the book. Diet played a part. Kevin recalled his love of Chinese cuisine such as pork buns while he was growing up - the children in the book often eat pork buns. In Chinese mythology peaches represent immortality, therefore the trees in the Dragon Realm grow peaches. Both authors have always been fascinated by the Chinese Zodiac, so when the young protagonists of their book reach Camp Dragon, they are divided into teams under the signs of the Chinese Zodiac.

Each of the four children - Billy, Charlotte, Dylan and Ling-Fei - is bonded with a dragon in a ceremony known as the Bonding and they discover that they are to be bonded with dragons at the same time as they are entrusted with their mission to save Dragon Realm. Kevin thought it important that when each child was bonded with a dragon, both child and dragon gained extra powers. I asked the authors how they had devised the dragon bonding ceremony. It was a joint idea. Katie and Kevin would like readers young and old to speculate on what kind of dragon each person would acquire. There is an element of wish fulfilment. I would like my dragon to be?

How does co-authorship work? Is it enjoyable? How often do the authors disagree? How can one author indicate to the other that some space is needed? According to Katie she is bossy and Kevin is stubborn, which sounds like a recipe for conflict. But both insist that co authorship is a pleasant experience. Their personal relationship is not strained by the professional partnership; they often have energetic debates. In their kitchen they have a white board on which all ideas

are displayed, the rule being that nothing is deleted. They start work by creating a very strong outline chapter by chapter. Any ideas about which they are unsure gets stored on a computer known as the Sandbox. If one author writes a passage which the other feels isn't working, the passage in question is termed 'mushroom' because, after all, not everyone likes mushrooms. They refrain from saying that they don't like a passage. A polite euphemism serves a purpose. If one of them needs time alone or would like to be left in peace to write, that is termed 'sparkle time'.



Charlotte, one of the female characters in their book, is bossy and strong willed. She also likes dresses. It was important to Katie to write Charlotte, on whose development she played the lead role, in a particular way. In children's fiction young female characters tend to be depicted either as tomboys or as ultra girly girls. Charlotte is neither, she has a more diverse character.

Katie and Kevin have also worked on a series of books for younger readers called [Sam Wu](#) [4]. Sam is eight years old and scared of everything. How would Sam fare in Dragon Realm, I asked? He would of course be scared. He was scared in his own world. But he would survive as long as he had friends to look after him. The need for bravery is a theme shared both by the **Sam Wu** books and the **Dragon Realm** books, along with friendship and cooperation. Are there important difference between writing for younger children and writing for older readers? The younger the readers the more formulaic the text may be. There is fear ? and Sam overcomes it. He also has a more limited emotional range than the four characters in Dragon Mountain. Working out Billy's emotional reactions to changing circumstances was sometimes difficult, explains Katie.

I asked the authors whether they cut any passages from Dragon Mountain. Indeed they did. They wrote an account of Billy's journey to China - 15,000 words of it in fact ? and then cut it all. But that journey got Katie and Kevin to know Billy as a character. It was an essential part of composing the book, not of reading it. I was reminded of the massive handwritten back stories J.K.Rowling wrote for many of her **Harry Potter** characters. They allowed her to become completely familiar with her characters before they even set foot in public.

What will follow in the **Dragon Realm** series? The authors assure me that there will be twists and turns. Readers of the first book will already know that Katie and Kevin Tsang are skilful operators of the unexpected. They have a particular hope that children who are usually reluctant readers might become attracted to their books. My final question: would they like to see their books on film? Unsurprisingly the answer was resoundingly positive. Watch this space.

**Dr Rebecca Butler** writes and lectures on children's literature.

[Dragon Mountain](#) [3], by Katie and Kevin Tsang, is published by Simon and Schuster, 978-1471193071, £7.99 pbk.

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