

A World of Their Own

A mother-and-daughter conversation about storytelling, neurodiversity, original characters and the worlds children make for themselves.

Inside Star Paradise, Natasha and Millie Bonner-Fomes are building a children's universe where difference is not corrected, imagination is taken seriously and technology becomes another doorway into story.



NATASHA & MILLIE BONNER-FOMES • STAR PARADISE

THE WORLD BUILDER

What if the world adapted to the child?

For Natasha Bonner-Fomes, the idea at the heart of Star Paradise is disarmingly simple: children do not all experience a story, a celebration or even an ending in the same way. The answer, she believes, is not to remove the magic - but to design it more thoughtfully.

Star Paradise is written for all children. But from the beginning, Natasha has deliberately considered children who think and process differently, including the neurodiverse. The aim is not simply to write stories about neurodiversity. It is to ask a more interesting question: how might a child who experiences the world differently actually experience the story itself?

The series moves between different kinds of adventures. A Star Child Is Born opens the fantasy strand; alongside that are festival stories, designed around moments such as Halloween and Christmas.

DESIGNING MAGIC DIFFERENTLY

Reimagining the familiar

Not every tradition that adults remember as magical feels that way to every child. Sometimes the most thoughtful thing a storyteller can do is look at the familiar from the child's point of view.

Santa is a perfect example. The idea of an unknown figure coming down the chimney and entering the house in the middle of the night can be enchanting to one child and

MAGIC WITHOUT THE CHAOS

Those festival books are being developed particularly intentionally. Halloween and Christmas can be among the most magical moments in a child's year, but they can also be among the most overwhelming - and some of the hardest for parents to navigate. A child does not necessarily experience these occasions in the same way an adult remembers them.

Natasha contrasts that with the Christmases of her own childhood: lots of cousins, lots of noise and an intense sense of excitement. In *Luna Saves Christmas*, the question becomes how to preserve that sense of wonder while making the experience less chaotic for a child who may find changes in routine, unfamiliar food, visitors, noise or anticipation difficult.

genuinely frightening to another. So, *Luna Saves Christmas* introduces drones instead: something children already see in the world around them, something visible, contemporary and understandable. The mythology changes; the wonder does not.

“The child doesn't always have to adapt. The environment can change too.”

PREDICTABILITY WITHOUT INSTRUCTION

The same philosophy shapes the structure of the festival stories. Some children benefit enormously from knowing what is going to happen next, so the books subtly build in what Natasha describes as an emotional and narrative schedule. The story can gently explain why things may be different, why food or routines might change, and what will happen next. It is woven into the narrative rather than presented as a lesson: reassurance and predictability without taking away the magic.

THE STAR SCREEN

On carefully selected pages, a Star Screen containing a QR code opens another route into the story through original music and video. Placement is deliberate. Sometimes the page contains an abstract idea that may become easier to understand when a child can see it, hear it and experience it. At other times, the Star Screen sits at a key emotional or narrative moment that matters to the meaning of the story.

The music and video are created specifically for each story rather than added as generic extras. Their role is to capture the emotion, atmosphere and sensory world of the particular moment - giving a child another way into the story beyond words and illustrations alone.

BEYOND THE PAGE

Turning an ending into a beginning

The final piece of Natasha's design philosophy appears at the moment most books simply stop.

At the end of every Star Paradise book is the Star Door. Its purpose is transition. For some children - particularly those who have become deeply emotionally invested in a story - reaching 'The End' can be unexpectedly difficult. Star Paradise stories can themselves be emotional, so rather than asking the child to stop abruptly, the Star Door offers a glimpse of where Luna is going next.

The idea is simple: instead of focusing on something loved being finished, the child is given something new to anticipate and look forward to.

“We turn an ending into a beginning.”

STORIES FOR ALL CHILDREN

None of these features is intended to make the books exclusive to neurodiverse children. They are stories for all children and families to enjoy together. The difference is that they have been designed from the beginning with an understanding that not every child experiences, processes or understands a story in exactly the same way.

For Natasha, that is the heart of the series. The Star Screens, original music, videos and Star Doors are not decorative extras. They are there for a reason: to make the stories magical for every child, while offering children who think differently a few additional ways to experience and understand that magic.



Natasha and Millie in their creative environment, surrounded by the visual world of Star Paradise.

THE CHARACTER CREATOR

More than 200 characters - and counting



MILLIE BONNER-FOMES • ORIGINAL CHARACTER CREATOR

Millie Bonner-Fomes has been creating original characters since she was young. Asked why, she returns first to creativity: she wanted a way to show what she could imagine, and character-making became a passion. Many of her characters are neurodiverse, although not all of them are. The reason for including difference is characteristically direct: she wants to inspire children around the world.

Her archive now runs to more than 200 original characters. Despite that scale, her process is remarkably consistent. Appearance comes first. “I always customise the character design first,” she explains. A name follows; then she develops the personality; then the story. Those personalities and stories are not fixed. As she gets to know a character, they can change.

DESIGN → NAME → PERSONALITY → STORY

Meet Heidi Mushroom

Of more than 200 OCs (Original Characters in Anime parlance), one character holds a particular place in Millie's creative history. Heidi Mushroom, she says, was the character who “kick-started my OC-making dreams.”

Heidi has not remained frozen in time. In fact, Millie says almost her entire appearance has changed. The earliest version had short hair; today, Heidi has long hair. The reason for the redesign is refreshingly unsentimental. Looking back, Millie simply did not like the old version anymore: “She looked bland.”

That willingness to redraw rather than protect an early idea says something about how Millie sees creative development. Comparing the characters she made when she was younger with those she creates now, the biggest difference, she says, is that her OC design has improved.

And what makes a genuinely good original character?

There is no secret formula in Millie's answer: “Lots of hard work.” The details that demand the greatest attention are the eyes and the accessories - the small visual choices that give a character identity.

There is an appealing lack of preciousness to the way Millie talks about her work. Characters are designed, reconsidered and improved. An idea does not have to arrive perfectly formed to be worth pursuing; it can become better because the creator keeps working on it. A never-ending improvement in their development.

“Lots of hard work.”

THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER

When characters become worlds



MILLIE BONNER-FOMES • STAR PARADISE

THE WORLD AHEAD

A shared imagination

Natasha and Millie approach Star Paradise from different directions. Natasha thinks about the architecture around the story - how a child enters it, experiences it and moves safely from one emotional moment to the next. Millie begins with the character: how they look, what they are called, who they become and how their story grows.

Together, those perspectives create something broader than a conventional children's series. One asks how storytelling can adapt to different minds; the other demonstrates what can happen when a young creator is given the freedom to keep imagining.

Millie's ambition for her characters is enormous and simple at the same time. She would love them to become known around the world - but the more important part of the

Technology, for Millie, is not the opposite of creativity. It is another place in which characters can exist.

Across various gaming devices, she has built four different character worlds. The adventures are often deliberately ordinary: her characters “just hang around and chat with each other.” It is a revealing answer. World-building does not always require a grand quest. Sometimes the pleasure is simply seeing invented personalities coexist, interact and develop.

Millie is equally uncomplicated about whether children should embrace technology. Yes, she says, because it helps them learn - and it has helped her too. In her own creative process, digital tools and imagined worlds sit naturally alongside drawing, character design and storytelling.

That relationship between imagination and technology echoes the wider Star Paradise philosophy: technology is most interesting when it expands the ways a child can create, understand or participate, rather than replacing the imagination that came first.

“You just need to try your best!”

dream is what happens next: that other children see them and feel inspired to create characters of their own.

Asked what she would say to a child who has lots of ideas but is frightened that what they create will not be good enough, she does not overcomplicate it. “*You just need to try your best!*”

ABOUT STAR PARADISE

Star Paradise is a children's story universe combining illustrated books with original characters, music, video and interactive story elements. Its creative philosophy is rooted in the idea that magical experiences can be designed to include different ways of thinking, processing and participating.

