



# AN INTERVIEW WITH DANNY WALLACE

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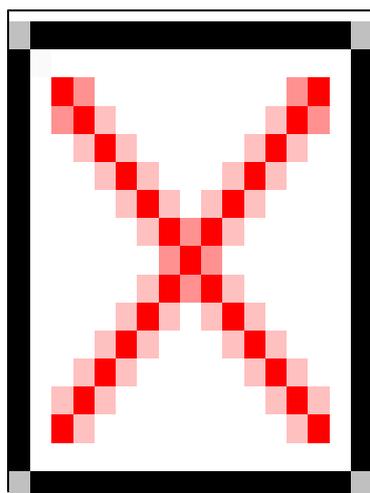
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Comedian **Danny Wallace** explains why Brexit helped inspire the ultimate threat in his brand new book.

## The Wallace Collection

*Hamish Ellerby is back in his latest adventure, **Hamish and the Monster Patrol**. Danny Wallace explains why Brexit helped inspire the ultimate threat in his brand new book.*

**Damian Kelleher** talked to **Danny Wallace** for **Books for Keeps**.



Not all celebrity authors take to the business of writing children's books like ducks to water. But journalist, radio presenter and comedian Danny Wallace isn't like most celebrity authors. For a start, the quirky and original **Hamish Ellerby** stories (all his own work, apart from Jamie Littler's Manga inspired pitch-perfect illustrations, that is) have a charm and appeal that kids love. Clearly, Danny is having a ball writing them.

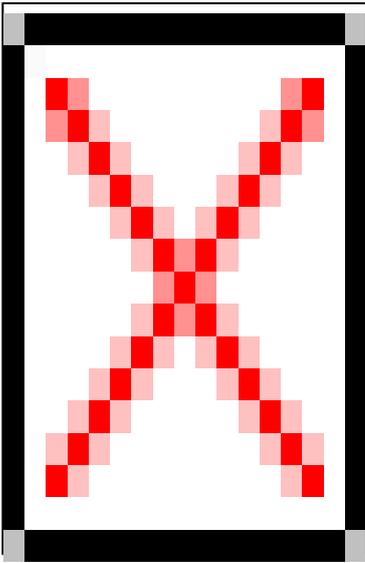
'I'm enjoying it, it's good fun,' he admits. 'The great thing about writing for kids is that you can let your imagination run riot, and be informed by the readers, all at the same time. You go out there and meet these kids who really get into Hamish's world and that inspires you to keep going.'

And keep going he certainly has. Whereas others may fall by the wayside after a book or two, Wallace's **World of Hamish** series is already up to book six and shows no signs of slowing up. In fact, with his wacky new adventure **Hamish and the Monster Patrol**, Danny Wallace is clearly hitting his stride, inspired to a large extent by the readers themselves.

'The kids are pretty opinionated, and they find little details and unusual questions all the time. It keeps you on your toes because you're thinking, I hope I've thought this through properly. I try and take their feedback on board and put in little surprises for them. Sometimes when Jamie [Littler] and I are doing an event we'll try and create a character and

sneak them in to the books ? I did that with **Monster Patrol**. I like to be quite nimble with the writing and bring the kids' ideas in whenever I can. It shows them that books don't have to be intimidating. I tell them it's only words you write on a computer ? and you can do that, too.?

Since we first met Hamish Ellerby in 2015, this middle grade series has gained a dedicated band of fans. As Hamish and



his sidekicks in the PDF ? Pause Defence Force ? have settled into their roles as saviours of the universe, the audience has expanded, and Wallace clearly loves the writing process.

?I hope so,? Danny admits ?I try and have fun with it. That's what I do with all elements of my career ? you go where the fun is. But you have to do it well so that you get asked to keep having fun. You know, I'd written all these books for grown-ups, so when I started writing Hamish it felt like writing my first adult book ? I was just so happy and complete, sitting in front of a keyboard and coming up with stuff that you're just so excited to share. I'm hardly at Walliams level, but so long as I can keep telling Hamish's story, I'm happy.?

Hamish adventures all begin in a dull little town called Starkley, the fourth most boring town in the country, ?twinned with Blandling Ohio?.

?That makes it even more boring because even the most boring place can at least say they're the most boring place,? explains Danny, ?but if you're the fourth most boring place you can't even say that?. With book six, most of Starkely's inhabitants have fled or gone into lockdown with the news that out in the ocean something big is on the move ? and it's heading right for them. The book has its fair share of scary stuff, sure, but there are plenty of laughs along the way as Wallace explores some running jokes including Hamish's tedious geography teacher Mr Longblather. Six books later, he is still droning on about soil erosion.

?Maybe I'm settling old scores! There were some similarities between my own geography teacher and Mr Longblather. My geography teacher was a lovely fellow but you could derail any lesson just by asking what trains used to be like. Yes, I put the soil erosion jokes in because it's the longest call back in children's literature ? you've got to put in the hours to get the benefit!?

You know things are bad in Starkley when chips are off the menu, and such is the level of panic in town that local chippie Lord of the Fries has had to shut up shop. These monsters must pose a serious threat?

?As a kid I would have had chips with every meal if I could,? explains Danny, himself a father of three. ?The food shortage in Starkley is telling because, on top of the doom and paranoia, the lack of chips would really worry the kids. It's quite symbolic.?

Of course, as things stand right now and we lurch from one Brexit crisis to the next, there are some detectable parallels between **Hamish and the Monster Patrol** and the current UK political fiasco. Starkley stands on the brink of a terrible disaster ? think the Cuban Missile Crisis and then some ? and the threat of the unknown is almost tangible. The inhabitants teeter on the brink of imminent disaster.

‘Exactly! You’re absolutely right – it’s my Hamish Brexit book,’ says Danny. ‘In the last few books, I have tried to include something that sums up the feeling of the country a little bit. My kids know a bit about that – we lived in LA when Trump got elected – so they grew up with CNN in the background the whole time. My son watches **Newsround** and reads **The Week Junior** so he’s aware of these things going on – loads and loads of kids are. It’s going on in the background and it’s so weirdly detailed that even the grown-ups don’t understand it, and that’s kind of unsettling. Something is happening, something is coming, something is on its way. The grown-ups are worried but no-one can really put their finger on it. There’s a monster you can’t stop, and you know it is coming and you can’t even deal with it until it arrives. That’s something in the background right now that some kids will be feeling.’

Of course, in **Hamish and the Monster Patrol**, it’s a collaboration of three teams working together – Monster Patrol, the PDF and top secret organization Belasko – that finally brings about a solution. Everyone pulling together for the common good; that’s a timely message for the UK, right?

Danny laughs. ‘Perhaps we’re looking for some magic team to come in and save us at the last minute. We may be disappointed, but if we put our heads together and work hard at it then maybe we can pull something out of the bag. Like Hamish says, we have to believe, don’t we?’

Damian Kelleher is a writer and journalist specialising in children's books.

***Hamish and the Monster Patrol* is published by Simon & Schuster, £6.99**

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**Source URL (retrieved on Jul '19):** <http://xn--www-rp0a.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/235/childrens-books/articles/featured-author/an-interview-with-danny-wallace>

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