



In conversation with **ROB CAMERON**, author of *DAYDREAMER*

DAYDREAMER IS YOUR DEBUT MIDDLE-GRADE NOVEL. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE A STORY FOR MIDDLE-GRADE READERS?

I didn't know I was writing middle-grade. Sometimes a story just wants to be told. But before revisions, and on the advice of my agent Barry Goldblatt, I took a deep dive into middle-grade fantasy: *The Golden Compass* by Philip Pullman, *Riverland* by Fran Wilde, *Tiger Rising* by Kate DiCamillo, and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman, among others. That's when I realized how powerful middle-grade could be and that there was room for *Daydreamer*. A perfect fit, actually.

DAYDREAMER BLENDS A CONTEMPORARY WORLD WITH A FANTASY ONE. WHAT FANTASTICAL WORLDS DID YOU LOOK TO FOR INSPIRATION FOR THE SANCTUARY?

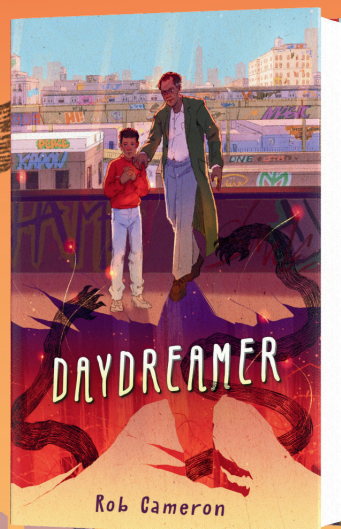
From many sources: *The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Jorge Luis Borges, *Faeries* by Alan Lee and Brian Froud, *Legends of Belize* by Dismas and GrissyG, *Pan's Labyrinth* directed by Guillermo del Toro, and Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*, plus my interpretation of boundaries between the real and imagined. Charles's Sanctuary is very Muppetey. Still, much is completely made up. When I was a child, I drew hundreds of magical creatures. Then I would put them on my bedroom floor all around me, sit down, and imagine.

WHEN YOU'RE NOT WRITING, YOU'RE A TEACHER. DO YOU SEE YOUR STUDENTS IN CHARLES?

Yes. My students, my children, and myself. Charles is a helpful reminder that a child is bigger on the inside than out. They (we) are mysteries, but *not* the kind that necessarily need to be cracked open and solved. Charles is a universe and there's a little Charles in everyone.

YOU'VE SAID THAT CHILDREN DEAL WITH DRAGONS EVERY DAY, AND THAT THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF DAYDREAMER. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

Remember when everything in the world was so much bigger than you? Just about any problem or person, real or imagined, could be a dragon, uncontrollable and dangerous. Despite what the stories recommend, slaying dragons is not always an option or even a good idea. Destroying things rarely is. So children must find other ways to thrive. How they do it, if they can do it, sometimes that's the story of their lives.



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