



Usborne Books at Home



A Q&A with P. G. Bell

How do you keep thinking of new Impossible places? Where does your inspiration for them come from?

They spring from a whole mix of influences, really. Some of them have been rattling around in my head for years: settings in search of stories. I pluck them from my mental slush pile and press them into service. Others are homages to stories and genres that I enjoy; the Obsidian Tower is pure Tolkien, for instance, with a dash of the White Witch's palace from Narnia thrown in for good measure. And still others, like Trollville, are invented from scratch. I've had great fun exploring these places in my imagination over the course of two books (and the rough draft of a third, which I've just handed in!), and seeing them brought to life in Flavia Sorrentino's brilliant illustrations.

Do the characters revisit any of the places from the first novel?

Yes, they revisit a few, but I've made sure it's never quite the same experience that they had in book 1. We get to explore Trollville in more depth for example, and see whole new bits of it, from a crazy, multi-storey railway station, to Wilmot's bedroom, and beyond. We even get a little peek inside the Obsidian Tower!

Is the villain someone we have already met? Any clues on who it might be?

Suzy's got a brand new villain to contend with this time around. I don't want to give too much away as they're quite a mysterious figure, but they're a deliberate contrast to Lord Meridian from the first book. He was quite remote and manipulative, whereas this new figure is far more physical and impulsive. They're fast, they're strong and they're very, very dangerous! I thought it would be fun to see Suzy and the crew trying to deal with a very different type of threat.



The title of this book, and how the last ended, highlights children's ability to think critically and not be brainwashed! Do you write to make a riproaring story, or do you write to get wholesome messages across to children?

I think a good book lives and dies by its story. No child ever picked up a book because they want to hear what the author thinks about the world! But, of course, a story without theme or meaning is a very shallow, forgettable thing – luckily, I've found they tend to coalesce subconsciously while I'm working on the nuts and bolts of it all. The use and abuse of information, and issues of privacy, seem to be recurring themes in my books, although I certainly didn't set out with that in mind. I thought I was just writing a fun adventure story!

How does Suzy manage to get on in day to day life knowing there is a whole other world out there, waiting for her next adventure?

It's starting to cause her some problems, quite honestly! Her whole worldview was turned upside down by her adventures in book 1, and now that her mind's been opened to all these wonderful possibilities, she's waiting for the rest of the world (i.e. her teachers and her parents) to catch up. They can't, of course, and she can't tell them why she's suddenly losing patience with her everyday life. She's going to have to find some way to solve that if she's going to keep on living this double life.

Who was your favourite character in *The Train to Impossible Places* and are they still your favourite character in *The Great Brain Robbery*?

I have two favourites: Lady Crepuscula is always the most fun to write, because she's just so awful to everyone. But Wilmot was the character I most wanted to spend time with, and I think that's still true in *The Great Brain Robbery*, which is why I've given him more to do this time. Of course, *The Great Brain Robbery* also introduces some brand new characters, who are now all competing for my affections!

How big a role does Wilmot have in the second novel, does his friendship with Suzy face any challenges?

I've given Wilmot his very own adventure in this book! His home in Trollville is under threat, and he's determined to do everything he can to save it. Unfortunately for him, this means being separated from Suzy and the Express for a while. He's not alone though, and finds himself working with a quite unexpected partner.

Can you describe *The Great Brain Robbery* in five words or fewer?

A big, weird crime caper!

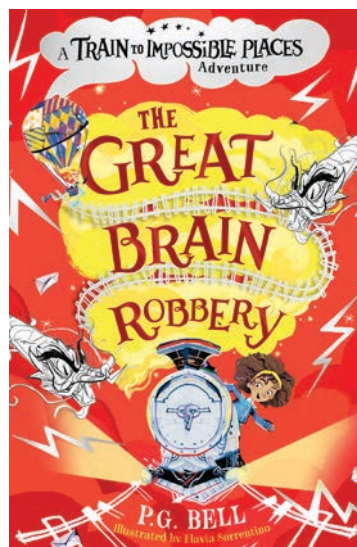


Who do you want the book to really speak to, and what do you want them to hear?

I hope it speaks to everyone in search of a fun adventure story. And I hope it leaves them feeling that perhaps the world is bigger, stranger and more wonderful than they'd dared hope.

Can we look forward to more adventures for Suzy after *The Great Brain Robbery*?

Absolutely! I've recently turned in the rough draft of Suzy's third adventure, and there may be more after that. I've got all sorts of ideas, but we'll have to see how it goes. Stay tuned!



The Great Brain Robbery
available to
Usborne Organisers from
20th October