



Holly Black and **Tony DiTerlizzi**, creators of the best-selling children's book series *The Spiderwick Chronicles* (now a major motion picture), didn't set out to capture the hearts of reluctant readers. It was a creepy coincidence that their faerie-based fantasies ended up mesmerizing non-book lovers, especially boys. Perhaps the appeal lies in the faeries themselves, who are not the typical girly, wand-carrying

Living a fantasy

The creators of The Spiderwick Chronicles share their views on reluctant readers, working out real-life issues through fantasy, and more
by *Rachael Taaffe*

wish-granters. They are natural, earthy, and sometimes scary creatures reminiscent of real-life insects, plants, and animals. At about 100 pages each, the five books, written by Black, move briskly and jump to life thanks to DiTerlizzi's wonderfully whimsical pen-and-ink drawings. Find out how the pair struck reader gold, and why fantasy books appeal so much to kids, in this exclusive interview with *Parent & Child*.



Hobgoblin

Boggart

Brounie

Pixie

The Sprites ...



Mulgarath



Parent & Child: Parents, librarians, and teachers say *The Spiderwick Chronicles* have turned many reluctant readers onto reading. Have you had similar feedback?

Holly Black: When kids come up to us or we get letters saying that this is the first book they read on their own or this is the book that they really took to, it's the most incredible feeling. It really is. Because reading is so much a part of what I consider to be my life—so many of the experiences I remember as being formative were books I read. The idea that we can have any part of that is overwhelming.

Tony DiTerlizzi: My own experience was that I loved reading books, but around fifth grade, I started having trouble with comprehension, and because I'm artistic, I relied on pictures and visuals to help me understand what was happening in the story. We thought, "What if we applied the same sort of rules one would use to create a picture book, where it's very reliant on visuals?" That did two things: It afforded Holly to be able to write a brisk, fast-moving text, but it also allowed windows for me to create pictures and visuals to help the reader become immersed in the world and understand what's happening in the story.

P&C: What do you think makes a great book for boys?

HB: Boys probably like a lot more things than we think they do. I think they're often pigeonholed as having a certain range of tastes, but they probably have a much wider range than we necessarily

think of. If we put books in their hands and say, "This is OK for you to read," they're going to like things that would surprise us.

TD: I always thought a good story was a good story, and it didn't so much matter if it was boy-themed or girl-themed; in fact, Holly and I often kid that some of the stuff I like the most in *Spiderwick* is the girly stuff. I'm the sensitive, artsy guy, so sports and things like that are not really in my nature. My wife was very active in sports when she was younger, so I think forcing those types of points on characters doesn't really work.

P&C: What benefits does the fantasy genre provide to young readers?

HB: A lot of people think of fantasy as escapist, but to me the strength of fantasy is that it allows you to take something that's going on—something that you're feeling or experiencing—and look at it from a different direction. For instance, we all have anger—anger that makes us worry, "Maybe I'll do something that will make someone I care about really

upset." But look at something like the folklore of the werewolf: Here's a creature that once a month becomes a monster and hurts, kills, and devours people it loves. It's such a great metaphor, because it pushes aside the question of, "Is it OK to be angry?" and says, "OK, you turned into this monster, what now?"

TD: One of the things that's also important to the *Spiderwick* books is that the kids are dealing with something very real—Jared's anger over his parents' divorce. In some ways what he does in the fantasy world, facing an evil ogre like Mulgarath—learning to control his anger and use his reason and cleverness to get out of the situation—reflects him using his abilities to come to terms with his father leaving the family.

P&C: How do you think parents can encourage their kids to read for fun?

TD: Read to them. It's such a great, precious thing—I grew up in a household where my mom read to us kids.

HB: And be readers. Have books in the house. I have a very vivid memory of demanding that my parents teach me how to read, because I was so frustrated that they were always reading. It felt like they were doing this secret thing that was shutting me out! If I hadn't seen that, I would never have had that need to do what they were doing.

TD: Sadly, I think in our ever-busy world of two-income households and all the diversions we have, reading often isn't one of them. We've got great movies, neat stuff on the Internet, cool video games—and I know 'cause I love doing all that stuff, too. Reading has to be interwoven into a child's upbringing from the get-go—it's a lot harder to approach it later in life. **P&C**

Rachael Taaffe is the copy editor for *Parent & Child*.

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by Jon Scieszka [Ages 5 to 8]

Captain Underpants

by Dav Pilkey [Ages 5 to 9]

Snarf Attack, Underfoodle, and the Secret Life: The Riot Brothers Tell All and other Riot Brothers books

by Mary Amato [Ages 8 to 12]

Wayside School books

by Louis Sachar [Ages 9 and up]

Diary of a Wimpy Kid and Rodrick Rules

by Jeff Kinney [Ages 9 and up]

Bone

by Jeff Smith [Ages 9 and up]