

2008/Feb MARTIN CHATTERTON - Publishing News

Martin Chatterton's distinctive art style fairly leaps off the page at you - it's comic, in the very best DC Thompson tradition, and it's funny, too - a skill recognised not just by the publishing industry but also by advertising agencies. But Chatterton is more than just an illustrator, he's a writer as well, with titles like *The Brain Finds a Leg* (Little Hare) to his name, and right now he's promoting his latest creation, *Stunt Monkeys* (Stripes), which is probably best described as *Jackass* (FYI, a quite insane 'mad exploits' TV show and movie) for kids; to be on the safe side, the book does come with a 'Don't Try This At Home!' disclaimer.

Chatterton's relationship with Stripes' Associate Publisher, Jane Harris, began at Scholastic, where she was his editor on a series called *Bad Dogs*, and she contacted him about doing this new project for her. "The idea goes back a long, long way," says Chatterton. "I was brought up in a place called Maghull, near Liverpool, which was a horrible, horrible, soulless, grisly, grey, depressing suburb and anyone who's got anything about them leaves immediately; I thought it would be good to write a story about kids who live in a town like that, which I called Sludgeville, where the main industry is creating sludge. The kids become obsessed with a disguised version of a well-known *Book of World Records* and start trying to get into it by doing things like Speed Penguin Greasing and stunts along those lines."

Any excuse for nonsense and rubbish, says Chatterton, with absolutely nothing wholesome in it at all. The perfect recipe for boys then? "I do seem to get asked to do stuff like this, and boys appear to respond well to my books because there's no moral message in there!" Originally this project was planned as a number of self-contained books, of which *Stunt Monkeys* was but one, and then Kurtis, Stench, Einstein and Grunt, the book's stars, just took over the proceedings (they will also be taking over the *Blue Peter* website, featured as one of the top reads for February) and have their second outing, *Stunt Mania*, due out in April.

"He is just brilliant to work with," Harris enthuses, "and great at getting into the minds of 8-12 year-old boys and giving them exactly what they want

- and, as a boy, he always wins any arguments we have over how many mentions of poo and farting there need to be.” The fact that Chatterton emigrated a few years ago (he tried Florida first, he says, but they wouldn’t let him stay) and now lives in Byron Bay, which sounds like a TV soap opera but is in fact the most easterly point in Australia, just south of Brisbane, has only one drawback: he can only do promotional work when he’s here in the UK, as he has just been this Christmas. The next best thing is a visit to the hyperactive worldofchatterton.com, a site which gives every impression of needing a good dose of Ritalin. “I will be back for the next *Stunt Monkeys* because you have to promote your books - I’ve flogged mine to death in Australia, and it’s worked!”