

Interview with author Adam Rex about
The True Meaning of Smekday

The Teen Book Club read one of my all-time favorite books, *The True Meaning of Smekday* for our January meeting. In fact, the book is so well-liked that the group chose it even though most of them had already read it in December of the previous year. I decided since I recommend this book so regularly it was time to tell the author how much I love it, and what great feedback I've gotten from so many of the readers I've recommended it to. He replied to my email with a very generous offer to answer any questions our teen group might have about the book. So here is our Teen Book Club interview with Adam Rex.

- Catherine Baer, Youth Services Librarian

TBC: Where do you get the ideas for your characters? How do you establish them and what's your relationship with them?

AR: The ideas come from everywhere, so there's no single pat answer. Sometimes characters are based on people I know. Gratuity has sort of all the traits I wish I'd had more of when I was eleven, so in a way she's the anti-me. Most of my characters get shaped as I write-I don't figure out every last thing about them ahead of time. I just write, and the kind of person they are comes through in dialogue and their actions. That means a character might change during the course of writing a book, and that's okay-people like it when characters get changed a bit by the story. But if the character has changed TOO much I might have to go back and rewrite his early appearances to get them more in line with the way I wrote him later.

TBC: If you could (or had to) what would you change about the plot?

AR: I might trim a little fat out of the middle of the story. A lot of people thought it dragged a bit in the middle. So maybe less time in Roswell, or less time driving.

TBC: How did you type so many meows? Did you know there are 1020?

AR: I didn't know that! Luckily, I'm writing in the digital age, which meant that I could just type, say, ten meows. Then I could copy and paste those and have twenty. Then I could copy and paste those twenty and have forty. And so on. It was almost too easy, but I felt okay about it because I didn't expect my readers would actually take the time to read all of them individually anyway. I always feel guilty when I meet someone who tells me she read them all. Or a teacher who read the book aloud to her class and was forced by popular demand from her students to read every one.

TBC: What was your favorite part to write?

AR: Any time Gratuity and J.Lo were just getting to understand each other better, I loved it. But I also loved writing that bit where Gratuity discovers how the car works after all of J.Lo's modifications, and she accidentally sets the hood on fire.

TBC: Which authors inspire you?

AR: Too many to really list, but some of the ones you may have heard of include Mac Barnett, M.T. Anderson, Maryrose Wood, and Douglas Adams.

TBC: Favorite characters you've written?

AR: J.Lo, obviously, but my new favorite is Mick from my latest novel, COLD CEREAL.

TBC: How do you research for your books?

AR: So far I've managed to write the sorts of stories that don't require a ton of research. I could write pretty well about all the places in SMEKDAY, and about driving across the country, because I've been to all those places and I've done that. My current trilogy has required more research-I've read a number of versions of the Arthurian legends, and done a lot of light research via the internet.

TBC: Did you intend for the story to be a commentary on the plight of the Native Americans?

AR: Oh, definitely. But I'm glad you had to ask, because that tells me I made it funny and enjoyable enough that it didn't seem like a lecture. That's definitely what I was going for.

TBC: How did you write J.Lo's dialogue (everyone was very curious about how you came up with his wonderful voice and commentary).

AR: J.Lo's way of talking came about kind of organically over a long time. Maybe you guys have a certain way you speak to family or really close friends that you wouldn't use with "regular" people? Couples in particular are famous for speaking to each other with a kind of gross baby-talk. J.Lo's speech is kind of an exaggeration of the way I used to talk to my wife when I was feeling really comfortable and there was no one else around.

TBC: Can you write more related comics, like the "10 reasons to read "The True Meaning of Smekday", on your website.

I hope I find time to do this soon. I'm so wrapped up in a new, unrelated trilogy right now that it's hard to concentrate on anything else. But I do want to return to Gratuity and J.Lo.

AR: Can you write more books please? (I'll let them know you are doing so now. Is it another YA novel?)

I just released a new middle grade novel called COLD CEREAL, the first of a trilogy about an evil breakfast cereal company and the kids and their friends trying to bring it down. Imagine that all those cereal mascots like Lucky the leprechaun and the Trix rabbit and Snap, Crackle, and Pop, were based on actual folktale creatures, and that these creatures are captives of the cereal company, who is draining them of their magic so that they can put it in cereals and feed it to unwitting children. Eventually these children will

become sugar zombie soldiers in an invading army. That's basically what it's about.

For more information about Adam Rex visit his website:

<http://www.adamrex.com/>