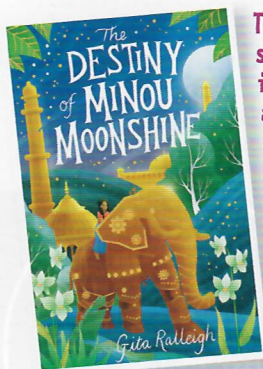


WHO: GITA RALLEIGH

WHAT: *THE DESTINY OF MINOU MOONSHINE* (Zephyr, £14.99)

Congratulations on your first children's book. Where did the spark of initial inspiration for *The Destiny of Minou Moonshine* come from?

The first spark was a picture in my mind of a ramshackle houseboat, anchored beside rusted palace gates. I knew an orphan named Minou Moonshine lived there with her adopted grandma. But who was she? And how was she connected with the palace? I had to write her story to find out.



The landscape setting is so lush and vivid, almost like a character in its own right, is it inspired by any actual places?

I have spent lots of time in India, where my parents are from. The beautiful beaches, lagoons and green hills of Kerala were a huge inspiration.

Do you have a favourite character or scene?

I loved the scene where Minou and Jay scramble off the train roof at an elephant crossing to rescue a baby elephant. We saw

Elephant Crossing signs in Kerala, though we didn't meet any wild elephants, only tame ones!

Are any of the characters based on yourself or people that you know?

I have two kids whose personalities influenced my characters – I won't say which ones! Minou's grandma is based on my great grandmother, who I never met but heard lots of stories about. She was a fierce and independent lady who raised her sons alone.

What books did you love as a child?

As a child I read every book in our local library – I had to move on to the adult section by the time I was 11 or 12 because I'd run out! My favourite authors were Roald Dahl and Diana Wynne Jones.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on another fantasy adventure, this time set on an island off the coast of India. The book has a different hero but his world overlaps with that of *The Destiny of Minou Moonshine*.



WHO: HIBA NOOR KHAN WHAT: *SAFIYYAH'S WAR* (Andersen Press, £7.99)

Congratulations on *Safiyyah's War*. How does it feel to hold a finished copy in your hands?

Thank you so much! It's still very surreal. The way this world that just last year existed only in my head and heart is now a real-life physical book with pages and a cover, is both utterly wonderful and strange.

How would you sum up the story in three words?

Gripping. Inspiring. Heart-wrenching (does that count as two words?).

Where did the spark of initial idea for *Safiyyah's War* come from?

My editor was in an underground Parisian car park when she learnt about the souterrain that lies deep beneath the city, and I was awed and moved to tears when I read about the mosque's resistance work.

We discussed the importance of honouring their forgotten history, and my story flowed from there.

WHO: DAVINA TIJANI

WHAT: *YOMI AND THE FURY OF NINKI NANKA* (Little Tiger, £6.99)

Congratulations on *Yomi and the Fury of Ninki Nanka*. How does it feel to hold a finished copy in your hands?

Thank you! When I got my hands on a copy of *Yomi*, it felt like all of my dreams had come true. Holding the book is like holding several years of hard work in my hands, it was a wonderful feeling!



Where did the inspiration for the story come from?

The inspiration for *Yomi* was sparked from an initial idea of a young Black girl on a fantastical adventure, and then the inspiration just grew from there. I had a picture in my mind of her running through The Gambia trying to save a dragon – the entire story and series then just wrote itself!

How would you sum up the story in three words?

Adventurous, Magical and Entertaining.

Do you have a favourite character or scene?

My favourite scene is when *Yomi* and Kayode journey down the River Gambia and meet some very unexpected creatures...

Are any of the characters based on yourself or people that you know?

Madame Binta is based on my grandma and my aunt that raised my sister and me.

What was it like seeing Adam's illustrations for the story?

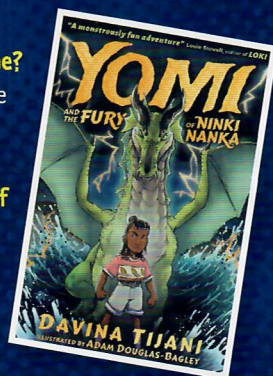
The first time I saw some of Adam's early illustrations for the book, I squealed and screamed in excitement and had to call my sister for support! He has done such a wonderful job in illustrating the book and I am so happy that we're able to work together to build this world.

What books did you love as a child?

Fantastic Mr Fox by Roald Dahl, *Horrible Histories* series and the *Usborne Puzzle Adventure Series* were some of my favourites growing up.

What are you writing now?

I'm currently working on more *Yomi* books, as I'm editing book 3 and 4 of the series, in addition to some adult projects that will hopefully be seen by the world soon!



Do you have a favourite character or scene?

A tough one... I adore Setti and Hana (and *Safiyyah*!), but if I had to pick a favourite I'd say Monsieur Cassin. I'd so love to explore a jungle with him! I love the final scenes of the story, their tension had me at the end of my seat while writing. I didn't actually know how the story would end, but I woke up in the middle of the night and suddenly could see it all play out in my head as clear as day!

What kind of research did you do into the period of history the story is set in?

I read old newspapers and archive material, picking out people, moments, and details to weave through the book. I was also lucky enough to visit the Grand Paris mosque and spoke to staff there about the history, as well as wandering through the courtyards and halls with cups of mint tea! I watched the moon rise beside the minaret one evening, which inspired the rooftop scene.

