

WILLIAM RITTER

on writing

JACKABY

Jackaby is the result of a life spent drawing magic and mythology to myself like a pied piper—only not quite so creepy. My mother started it all, reading stories aloud to me like spells, casting me into deep jungles or to the ends of the universe. The sorcery was subtle, but the characters became real, and they all became a part of me. I was raised by my parents and my sisters—but I was also raised by Bagheera and Baba Yaga. They gave me stories, and stories are the strongest magic.

When I attended the University of Oregon, I took every literature class as an excuse to escape into stories. I spent four years meeting new characters and exploring new worlds. I created my own in poetry, prose, and pictures, and began to feel out the balance between the whimsical and dramatic that would become my storytelling voice.

After I had earned a degree in English, I doggedly returned for my masters in education. I quickly found a job teaching language arts in a quirky little high school in Salem. The school's unique staff and student body meshed well with my love of the odd. While I was there, I taught reading, creative writing, and mythology. I was designing my own curriculum and helping my students fill the classroom with marvelous stories and timeless characters. At the end of the day I would return home to cheerfully read aloud to my newborn son while my wife gently rocked him to sleep.



Katrina Santoro

WILLIAM RITTER began writing *Jackaby* in the middle of the night when his son was still an infant. After getting up to care for him, Will would lie awake, his mind creating rich worlds and fantasies—such as the one in New Fiddleham. Will lives and teaches in Springfield, Oregon. *Jackaby* is his first novel.

“*I've read that phoenix eggs must be engulfed in flames to hatch. Jackaby, it seems, needed to be surrounded by magic and adventure.***”**



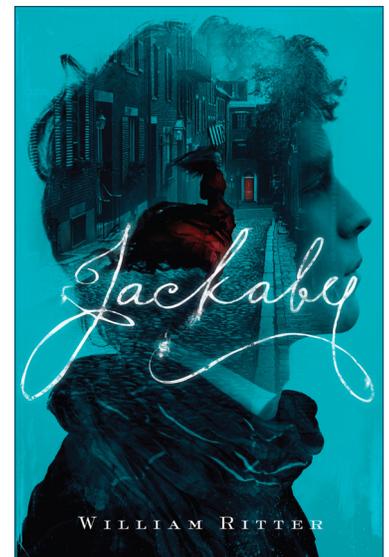
That summer, with the manic energy of researching subjects and planning lessons behind me, I would often find myself awake long after the house had fallen silent. When reading failed to settle my thoughts, I would let my mind whir along, spinning tapestries of magic and mystery and impossible worlds while I stared up at the ceiling. On one such night, I encountered a most peculiar character, one I knew I wanted to create. He was strange and exciting, and perhaps a bit mad, and I gave him my son's nickname. The first words of his story were keyed into a cellphone notepad at some ungodly hour of the night, and they continued to come together on scraps of paper and in emails to myself for several days until I realized that, completely independent of my own ambitions, Jackaby had decided to become a novel.

The book grew. I built an outline, but it leapt at every chance down unexpected paths, ducking into unmarked alleyways and emerging with strange characters I'd never met before. I followed willingly, and the story I discovered was made of all of the things I loved to read. It wove through obscure folktales and classic myths, leapt into irreverent comedies, and slunk into a dark, occult mysteries. The manuscript was nearing completion when I found myself abruptly whisked into a new chapter of my own life.

I suddenly had an opportunity to spend a year across the world in Okinawa, Japan. Unexpected though the adventure was, my new home could not have been a more fitting venue to complete the story. My family rented a run-down house in a cramped neighborhood with all the curb appeal of a cement brick, but we lived with the supernatural all around us. A noble pair of Shisa spirit guardians stood vigil at our rusty front gate, and nearly every room of our new home had delicately penned protection charms papered to the walls. We lived a block from the local park, and along the way we passed a statue of the Hopi trickster Kokopelli, a pair of buildings named for the Greek twins Castor and Pollux, and a small but elegant local shrine. At dusk, a public loudspeaker would chime and a gentle Japanese voice would instruct all children to return home so that the spirits could come out to play.

This is the venue in which I finished my book. From there, it survived typhoons in the east and hurricanes in the west. It grew and evolved, becoming a better piece of writing for every obstacle it clambered over. I've read that phoenix eggs must be engulfed in flames to hatch. Jackaby, it seems, needed to be surrounded by magic and adventure. Fed from legends and lore, and fostered into maturity through honest to goodness dark and stormy nights, *Jackaby* is a tale that celebrates stories.

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