

Fletcher alum's novel unites fantasy and family

By Marissa Carberry

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Since the publication of the "Harry Potter" (1997-2007) and "Twilight" (2005-2008) novels and the release of the "Lord of the Rings" (2001-2003) movies, increased attention has focused on fantasy, which is traditionally a niche genre. However, interest in fantasy is nothing new for Daniel Rabuzzi (F '84), a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, who has been a self-professed fantasy "geek" since childhood.

While other nine-year-old boys played dodgeball and baseball, Rabuzzi remembers sitting hunched over the little table in his bedroom, finishing the best fantasy story he had yet written. He wrote the final version of the story in pen, bound it in his best yarn and sent it to publishing company Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Though he received a polite rejection letter some time later, Rabuzzi was not deterred. His love for fantasy reading and writing developed into a life-long passion that culminated in the Sept. 2009 release of his first novel, "The Choir Boats: Volume One of Longing for Yount."

The book was published by ChiZine Publications and was named one of the top ten books of 2009 for children by January Magazine, a literary Web site.

Rabuzzi says that he inherited his love for folklore from his mother, who has a doctorate in feminist theology and enjoys critiquing his work.

"My mother is one of my toughest critics," Rabuzzi said. "She really rips me up and down, and that's good. If I get stuff by my mother, I know it's at least reasonably decent."

During his childhood, Rabuzzi's mother also encouraged his interest in reading by introducing him to books like J.R.R. Tolkien's classic "The Hobbit" (1937), which he vividly remembers reading for the first time in 1969.

"I got it for Christmas when I was ten," Rabuzzi said. "I stayed in bed for two days, burning my eyeballs out, trying to finish it."

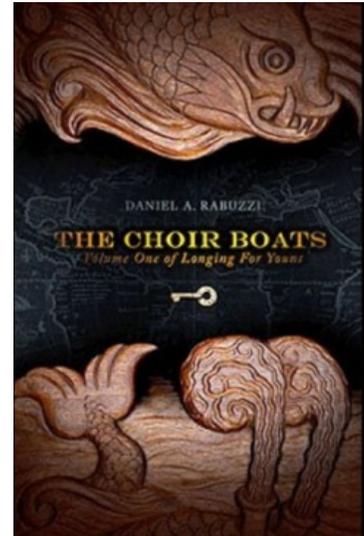
Because Rabuzzi's two brothers also developed an interest in fantasy reading, the hobby became a family pastime, with the brothers regularly discussing and swapping books and stories. In hindsight, Rabuzzi believes that his brothers' influence on his writing was so profound that he dedicated "The Choir Boats" to his two brothers and five nephews.

About eight years ago, Rabuzzi sat down to write a letter to his brother and ended up drafting the first chapter of what would become "The Choir Boats."

"I don't quite know where [the story] came from," Rabuzzi said.

The novel is set both in early 19th century London and the world of Yount, which Rabuzzi describes as "a little mini pocket universe" that is one technological generation ahead of London. The universe is essentially a set of several islands surrounded by a dark mass.

"The people of Yount were perhaps pulled off this other world, stuck in this desolation. They're not sure why," Rabuzzi said. "They've been imprisoned for some sort of crime or punishment, they're imprisoned by some sort of fallen angels. The question is, 'what did they do?' It's tied up in the question of slavery. I'm partly glossing over the struggles of our own world."



Courtesy Daniel Rabuzzi

"The Choir Boats" is Rabuzzi's first novel.

The plot of the book centers on the young Sally McLeish, the daughter of a merchant family whose brother has been kidnapped and taken to Yount because their uncle offended a citizen of Yount. Sally heads to the wizard world to try to save her brother, encountering adventure and romance on her voyage.

Rabuzzi said his wife and creative partner, Deborah Mills, was key in the creation of Yount. Mills also created the art for the book's cover and its interior illustrations.

Rabuzzi says that he is more interested in depicting love and romance than in warfare and calamity.

"Family and romantic stuff, that's most of what life is, not war," he said. "Part of what I'm trying to do as an author is to try and unite those two [within fantasy.] I don't think we're fully whole until we wrap those two together."

He believes that his book is a hybrid of classic 19th century British literature and more modern fantasy.

"I do think [that] if Jane Austen and J.R.R. Tolkien had had an affair, my novel would be their bastard child," Rabuzzi said.

Besides Austen and Tolkien, Rabuzzi lists as examples of his various influences classic authors like Charles Dickens, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Franz Kafka and Karen Hesse, as well as poets Emily Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Rabuzzi pursued his zeal for fantasy in his academic studies. He attended Harvard University, where he received his degree in folklore and fairytales. He continued his study of storytelling at the University of Oslo's Institute for Folklore Studies, where he researched Norwegian and British oral histories.

At Fletcher, Rabuzzi was a student in the first class of the International Business Program before earning his Ph.D in early modern German gender and cultural history at Johns Hopkins University. Today, Rabuzzi lives with his wife in New York City, where he is an executive for Year Up, a non-profit organization.

He spends his free time reading fantasy and other genres, updating his blog, *Lobster and Canary*, and writing the second volume of the Yount series, which he plans to dedicate to his wife.

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