

Winner of the Joan Aiken Future Classics Prize Goes to Usborne in Three-Way Auction

Author-illustrator Tim Ellis's debut novel went to Usborne Publishing after a passionate three-way auction. *Harklights* was acquired in a two-book deal by Fiction Director Rebecca Hill for World English Rights from agent Julia Churchill at A. M. Heath Literary agency. It is the first author-illustrator acquired by Rebecca Hill in what is an exciting new step for Usborne's burgeoning fiction list.

The Joan Aiken Future Classics Prize was founded in 2017 by A.M. Heath and Lizza Aiken, daughter of Joan Aiken and curator of her Estate, to find a standout new voice in middle grade children's fiction. Tim Ellis' magical novel for ages 8+ was the joyfully inventive winner.

Our hero, Wick, lives in a brutal mechanised world at the Harklights Match Factory and Orphanage, until he rescues a tiny baby, small enough to fit inside an acorn. This act of kindness leads to his amazing discovery of the Hobs, a miniature race who are the caretakers of the forest. The Hobs take Wick in and he learns to live in harmony with nature. But not all of them are welcoming, and there seems to be trouble at the furthest corners of the forest. Can Wick defeat the mechanical monster that roams the forest-edge? And can he save the orphans left behind in the match factory?

Joan Aiken wrote that *"children's books need to have everything that is in adult writing but squeezed into smaller compass"* and so the central theme of *Harklights* is a fitting tribute. As Tim's agent, Julia Churchill says, *"Lizza Aiken and I ran the Future Classics Prize to find an enduring talent, and we think we've done that with Tim. Usborne's list is one that everybody is watching and admiring and I'm thrilled to be putting the two together."*

Tim Ellis is a talented author-illustrator who studied Illustration at Anglia Ruskin University and Central Saint Martins, and is now a freelance illustrator and teaches the Children's Book Illustration course at City Lit in London. Winning the inaugural Joan Aiken Future Classics Prize and being represented by Julia Churchill was *"a dream come true"* for Tim, and he is *"thrilled that Wick has found a home at Usborne. I grew up with their Spotter's Guide series, which I loved poring over after nature walks."*

Tim's editor, Rebecca Hill, fell in love with this miniature, magical world, commenting that *"With stunning writing and beautiful illustrations, Tim has created an adventure that thrums with an otherworldly magic all of its own. Harklights is a thought-provoking read about finding your place in the world and about protecting the things you love, which will resonate with readers both young and old."*

This big story told in miniature will come alive in a beautifully illustrated package for ages 8+ in 2020.

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