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# THE GLORIUMPTIOUS WORLDS OF ROALD DAHL

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WELBECK



IT ALL BEGAN HERE...

# Roald's Writing Hut

Clever Mr Fox, eccentric Willy Wonka and the wicked Grand High Witch first came to life in a hut in Roald Dahl's garden. This was no ordinary shed, though. Instead, it was filled with photographs, pictures, extraordinary objects and personal mementoes that sparked Roald's imagination.



## ROALD'S ROUTINE

Roald described the peaceful space he created in his hut as his "little nest". He kept a strict routine, working for two hours each morning, and two more in the afternoon. His chair – which had once belonged to his mother – had a hole cut in its back to stop it pressing on his painful spine, and an old suitcase served as a leg rest. Roald liked to write with the curtains drawn to block out any distractions.



A rather gruesome object in the writing hut was Roald's very own hip bone! When he had an operation to replace it, the doctor said it was the largest he had ever seen.

## TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Roald never learned to type, but instead wrote all his stories in pencil on yellow lined paper. He always used the same brand of pencil, and kept exactly six by his side – five in a jug, and one to work with.



## WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

A table in the writing hut held all sorts of curious objects from Roald's own life. These mementoes included a model grasshopper given to him by a fan of *James and the Giant Peach*, a jar of spinal shavings, and fragments from an ancient vase he found in Greece.



# Childhood Memories

Roald's colourful childhood provided the inspiration for many of the characters he later created and the stories he wrote. In his autobiography *Boy*, Roald said of these memories: "Some are funny. Some are painful... I suppose that is why I have always remembered them so vividly."



Roald, c1920



Repton School, which Roald attended from the age of 13

## SCHOOLDAYS

When Roald turned nine, he was sent away to boarding school. In his first term at St Peters he was desperately homesick. He even pretended he was very ill with appendicitis so that he could be sent home for a few days. Roald hated the bullying and harsh punishments that were part of school life. No prizes for guessing where he got all his ideas for *Crunchem Hall* and the ghastly *Miss Trunchbull*!

## FANTASTIC FAMILY

Roald was born in Wales to Norwegian parents. When he was three, his seven-year-old sister, Astri, died. Several weeks later, his father also died. Following these tragedies, Roald's "dauntless" mother raised Roald and his four siblings alone. He adored her, claiming she was the greatest influence on his life.

Roald's older half-brother, Louis, once invented a boomerang called a "Skilly Wonka". It later provided Roald with just the inspiration he needed in choosing the perfect name for the fantastic factory owner in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* - Willy Wonka!

'She told us stories about Norwegian trolls and all the other mythical Norwegian creatures that lived in the dark pine forests, for she was  
**A GREAT TELLER OF TALES.'**

Roald describing his mother, or "Mama"



## SWEETS!

In *Boy*, Roald tells of how he and his friends lived for the local sweet shop. There was one problem, though - its owner, Mrs Pratchett, was a mean, grimy and loathsome woman! Roald and four friends got their own back by placing a dead mouse in one of her jars of sweets. It's easy to see how Mrs Pratchett may have been the inspiration for two of Roald's most beastly creations, the *Twits*.

Roald's sweet tooth stayed with him all his life. One of the objects in his writing hut was a solid silver ball, like a small cannonball. The author treated himself to a daily lunchtime chocolate bar, and crunched its silver wrapper into the ball each day.



# Exciting Adventures

After finishing school, Roald's thirst for adventure took him to faraway places. For a while, he worked in East Africa, calling it the "land of palm trees and coconuts... and lions and elephants and deadly snakes". His accounts of this time tell of wonderful experiences, and encounters with a host of exotic animals.

## FIGHTER PILOT

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Roald joined the Royal Air Force to train as a pilot. Flying high above the clouds was a delight for adventurous Roald, who described it as "marvellous fun". In 1940, he crashed his plane in the North African desert and spent six months in hospital. Roald's first published writing was a newspaper account of his crash.

Roald kept a model Hurricane plane in his writing hut, like those he flew in the Second World War.



Roald enjoyed writing about all sorts of creatures, from huge giants to tiny tortoises. That might explain why he kept a tiny wooden tortoise in a jam jar on his desk.

'It was truly the most breathless and in a way **THE MOST EXHILARATING TIME** I have ever had in my life.'

Roald describing his time as a fighter pilot



Like Mr Fox, Roald adored his family.

## FAMILY LIFE

Roald loved to tell his five children magical stories – tales that turned into his books. He hung shimmering "witch's balls" from their bedroom ceilings to keep bad witches away, and at bedtime gave them "witch's potions" made out of canned peaches, milk and food colouring. He told them wonderful tales of a fantastic fox or a dream-catching giant, and even stood outside their windows pretending to blow in sweet dreams!



## GIPSY CARAVAN

In *Danny the Champion of the World*, Danny and his beloved father live in an old gipsy caravan. Roald installed one in the garden of his family home, "Gipsy House", for his children to play inside.



# JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH



James Henry Trotter,  
Age 7

After James loses his loving parents to a hungry rhinoceros, he is forced to live with his beastly aunts Spiker and Sponge. However, events take a peculiar – and magical – turn...

## ■ EVENING STAR RUNAWAY RHINO DEVOURS SHOPPERS

Staff reporter Bill Hyde

Two people were killed by a rhinoceros after it escaped from London Zoo yesterday afternoon.

The enraged animal galloped along busy streets, charging startled pedestrians and ramming vehicles.

Witnesses described how the rhino gored and consumed its victims – named by police as Mr and Mrs Trotter – in less than 35 seconds: "Fortunately, their ordeal was over in a jiffy," said shop-owner Mr McGraw.



Roald Dahl trained as a fighter pilot during the Second World War, and loved the strange, magical world he discovered above the clouds. It's very likely that this experience inspired his ideas for James and the Giant Peach.

## SPIKER AND SPONGE

Could any child have two more loathsome aunts than tall and bony Spiker or her enormous sister, Sponge? These repulsive sisters treat poor James like a slave, forcing him to do all the housework and never allowing him to see other children.

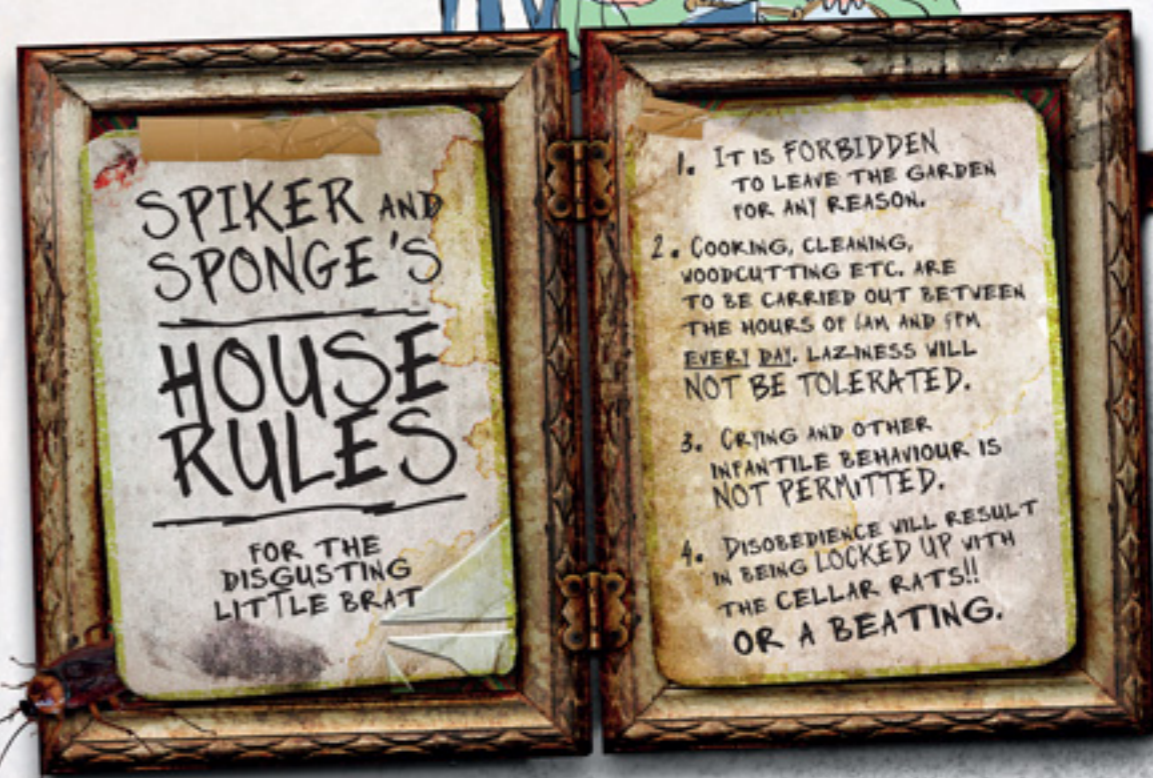
'Behold MY gorgeous curvy shape, my teeth, MY CHARMING GRIN! Oh beauteous me! How I adore my radiant looks! And please ignore the pimple on my chin.'

- Aunt Spiker -



'I look and smell,' Aunt Sponge declared, 'AS LOVELY AS A ROSE! Just feast your eyes upon my face, observe my shapely nose!'

- Aunt Sponge -



## THE MAGIC CRYSTALS

When James encounters the strange old man in his aunts' garden, it seems his troubles are over. Given a bag of sparkling green crystals, he is told that "fabulous, unbelievable things" will happen if he swallows them. As he runs off, however, James trips beneath an old peach tree - and can only watch as the precious crystals wriggle away into the soil...

'Something is about to happen,' he told himself.  
**'SOMETHING PECULIAR**  
is about to happen  
at any moment.'

- James Henry Trotter -

Roald had a cherry tree in the grounds of his home. One day he got to thinking about what might happen if a cherry, or an apple or a pear just kept on growing... and growing. That thought turned into a peach of an ideal



**'IT'S GROWING!'** Aunt Spiker cried.  
**'It's getting bigger and bigger!'**

The greedy aunts soon spot an opportunity to make some quick cash.



**EXTRAORDINARY,  
ENORMOUS PEACH!**

**MUST BE SEEN TO BE BELIEVED!**

ADMITTANCE  
JUST ONE  
SHILLING!

HALF PRICE  
FOR CHILDREN  
UNDER SIX WEEKS OLD!!



\*PAY DOUBLE  
TO BRING CAMERA



News of the giant peach brings swarms of reporters to the house.

Miraculous sight! - mammoth peach just touching ground, nearly as tall as tree, perhaps wide as house...

Skin very beautiful, butter yellow, pink & white patches. Perfectly ripe.

Swarms of people vying for a glimpse, journalists everywhere plus helicopters etc.

(Strange set-up, two old ladies in charge. Spooky house on top of a hill, barred windows! Sure I saw a child peeking out.)

## Spell No. 41 CROCODILE CRYSTALS

\* USE WITH CAUTION \*  
*- will cause rapid enlargement in all living things!*

Boil one thousand long slimy crocodile tongues in the skull of a dead witch for twenty days and nights with the eyeballs of a lizard.

*Now add the following:*

The fingers of a young monkey  
The gizzard of a pig  
The beak of a green parrot  
The juice of a porcupine  
Three spoonfuls of sugar

*Stew for a week and leave the moon to do the rest.*

## THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

James discovers a hole in the side of the peach, and can't resist crawling through the squishy tunnel. Inside, several gigantic insects have been waiting for him – and soon he and his new companions are rolling away from the ghastly hill on a marvellous and magical journey.

Cunard Line



R.M.S.  
"The Queen Mary"

### REPORT FROM THE SHIP'S DOCTOR

I was called to the bridge at around 3 p.m. The First Officer informed me that a round ball had been witnessed hovering overhead and the men speculated it might be a weapon. At this point, the captain appeared to start hallucinating. On examining the ball through his telescope, he told the assembled officers that he could see "a little boy in short trousers" moving on top of it. He then became visibly distressed, screaming that he could also see monstrous insects including a "giant ladybird", "a colossal green grasshopper" and an "enormous centipede". At this point, the ball disappeared behind a cloud and was seen no more.

It is my medical opinion that the captain is suffering from nervous exhaustion, and he has been sedated and removed from duty until further notice.

L. Wallace

Signed: Dr Lionel Wallace,  
4 September, 8:30 p.m.

The sight of the flying peach and its unusual passengers causes much alarm down below.



## THE PEACH'S CREW

When James first crawls into the peach, it is to find several enormous insects waiting for him – and each of them at least as large as James himself! However, he soon discovers that his new friends are nothing like as terrifying as they look.



### Miss Spider

Poor Miss Spider has suffered in life after witnessing Aunt Sponge killing both her father and her grandmother. Despite her "murderous-looking head", she is a gentle soul and her spinning skills are essential to the peach's survival.

### The Glow-worm

Hanging quietly from the peach ceiling, the Glow-worm provides lighting. She ends up becoming the light inside New York's Statue of Liberty (and saving the city from a big electricity bill).

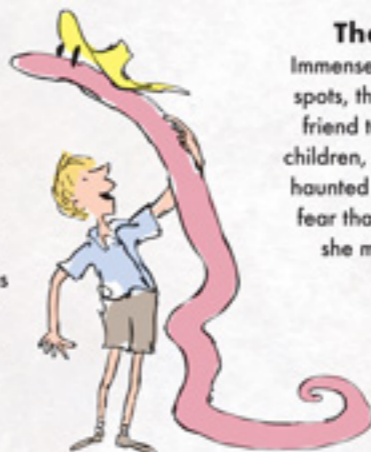
### The Ladybird

Immensely proud of her nine spots, the Ladybird is a kind friend to James. With 400 children, she has always been haunted by a fear of fire – a fear that is put to rest when she marries a fireman.



### The Earthworm

With his gloomy outlook on life, the Earthworm often speaks of how the peach is doomed. But his bravery when he is used as bait to entice the seagulls helps to save the peach.



### The Centipede

James soon learns to like the boastful Centipede. A bit of a rascal, he loves taunting the Earthworm and singing. The Centipede is extremely proud of his "100 feet" (and boots) although it turns out he only has 42!



### The Silkworm

Although she is very quiet, the Silkworm and her silk are essential to James's rescue plan when sharks attack. Both she and Miss Spider end up running a factory that produces ropes for tightrope walkers.



### The Old-Green-Grasshopper

As the eldest peach passenger, the Old-Green-Grasshopper is a wise and calming presence. He skilfully "plays" his body like a violin – and eventually becomes a member of the New York Symphony Orchestra.