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CBC COLUMN

Luke Pearson

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Luke Pearson is the creator of the *Hilda* comic series. He is also a writer and co-executive producer of the Bafta award-winning animated series of the same name.

Outside of his work on Hilda, Luke has been an illustrator, and a storyboard artist and has drawn a range of other comics

Hilda: Community Spirit in Comics

I've been writing the Hilda stories for a very long time now, so long that I recently met someone (who appeared to be an adult) who told me they'd been reading Hilda since they were a child. Which made me wonder... How long have I been doing this for? Not only did that make me feel far too old, but it also highlighted that Hilda has been a part of people's lives for much longer than I generally really think about.

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED MAKING COMICS, telling stories and inventing new characters and places with which to tell those storie—not just for me and my readers, but now for my own kids, too. My newest book is due to come out in November, and it's taking a slightly new approach for me, designed as an easier entry point for younger kids to venture into the world of comics and graphic novels. I had to find a way to stay true to the ideals of Hilda when I embarked on this project, and that really made me think—what does Hilda stand for?

Hilda is part of the Sparrow Scouts, a group of kids who were really fleshed out in the Netflix TV show. They have their own oath, closely inspired by the original real-life Scout Promise, which goes:

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I hereby promise to be trustworthy, useful, and helpful to others,

To be a friend to all people, animals, and spirits,

To never be a snob,

To be courageous,

To do a good thing every day,

To smile and whistle,

And to keep the Sparrow Scout Law.

I'll be honest, I don't think that Hilda follows all of these rules, and I think that's okay. Kids are allowed to make mistakes, to not always be courageous (I'm certainly not), to not be made to smile all the time (I certainly don't). Hilda can definitely be a snob—if something isn't adventurous enough for her, she's probably going to turn her nose up at it! But something that I think this really taps into is Hilda being a part of a wider community, who care for their surroundings and those who live alongside them—and they see it as their duty to be as bold and open-minded as they can as they head into the world.

In today's world, this is a basic skill that I think is a civic duty. Hilda embodies a willingness to engage with communities outside of her realms of knowledge, and she actively ventures out with courage to explore nature and understand the creatures that she lives alongside, even if they're hundreds of feet tall or made of stone. They may not look like her or think like her, but they've each got stories to tell and are worth a conversation.

Hilda is an absolute nature-lover. Being out and about, camping, exploring... She's the sort of person who likes getting lost, preferably in a mysterious woodland or a place where the

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chances of being eaten might be slightly higher than zero percent. The world she exists in, and her relationship with her mother, allows Hilda a latchkey freedom that previous generations have enjoyed and that a lot of kids are missing out on today.

As we disconnect more and more from nature in the real world, Hilda and the Sparrow Scouts collectively and proactively peruse the natural world in Trolberg. In my new book, *Hilda and Twig: Hide from the Rain,* Hilda and Twig (her pet and protective sidekick) shelter from a storm in a mysterious ancient mound, encountering a rain-weary gaggle of animals that she can't communicate with. Far from finding this frustrating, she instinctively tries to talk to them, and when that fails, they all simply share the space together—hiding from the rain. It's not intended to be a big metaphor, but there's something sweet and aspirational about simply sharing a small space with nature and animals that feels peaceful and something that could be more actively encouraged today. We all share the same wildernesses, and it's our job to explore and co-exist with nature and the world around us peacefully, without interrupting it too much. This is something that Hilda embodies for me—she cares deeply for her environment and the creatures within it. Her sense of justice is something that I think the stories nurture, and there's nothing she feels more passionately about than having an adventure in the name of protecting the natural world she loves so much.

The sense of community that Hilda has with both her peers and the fantastical world around her is something that really seems to speak to any readers and viewers I'm lucky enough to meet and chat with. After years of reading rich but simple, well-paced picture books to my kids, I wanted to create a Hilda story that would work as a successful bedtime story. I've pared back on some of the busy pages of my previous comics in favour of a simpler layout that I think will allow parents to really sit and savour the visuals and dialogue with their little ones. Twig plays a much larger role in this book than he previously has, and just like Hilda, he's going to find that things in the wilderness aren't as black and white as they may at first seem. I hope that Hilda's community spirit, her sense of justice for nature and the folks around her, and her love of adventure and new experiences resonate with young and older readers alike for years to come.

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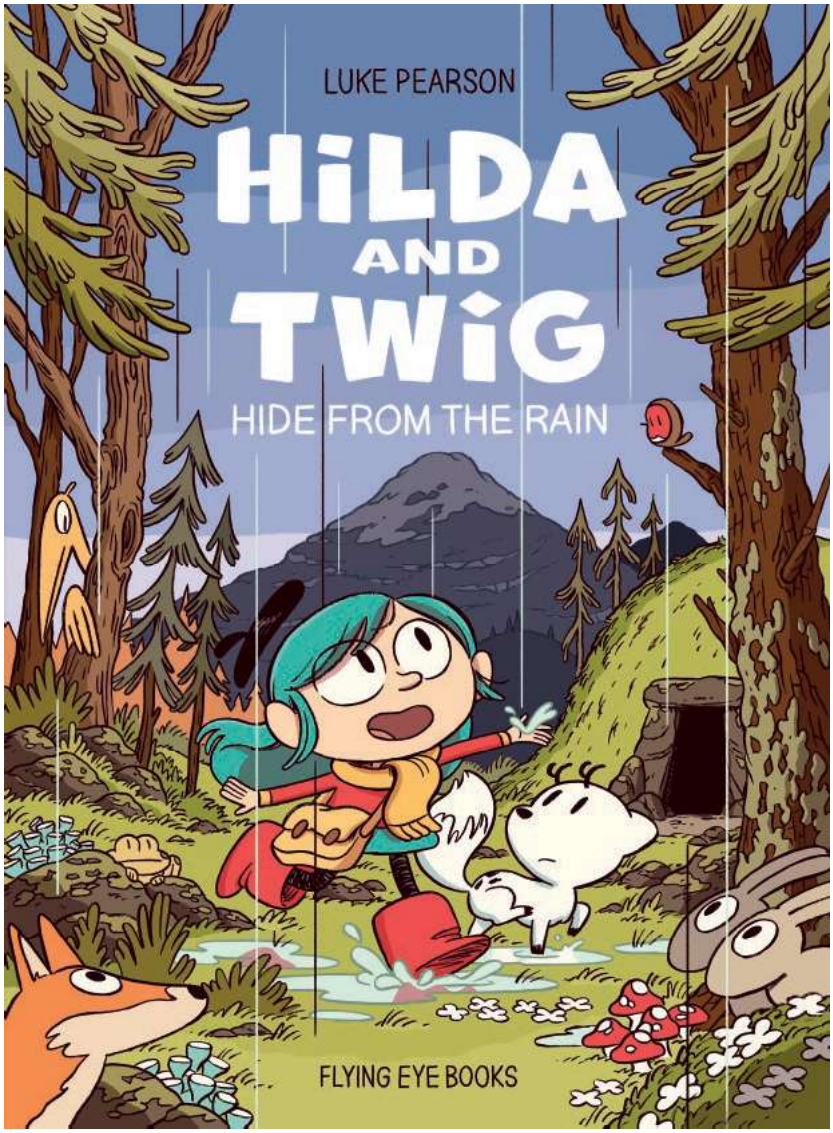
COMING SOON!

Hilda and Twig: Hide from the Rain **(Ages 5+) by Luke Pearson will be published on 5th November 2024 by Flying Eye Books.**



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