

CHASE

FEATURE

If you need to write, then do it

LEIGH DE VRIES of Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR) meets two men who have dedicated themselves to the art of writing.

In a world where everyday demands often overshadow dreams, the stories of Tair Rafiq and Sean Webster serve as powerful reminders of the resilience and determination required to pursue creative passions.

These two individuals, despite their different backgrounds, share a common thread — their unwavering dedication to the art of writing.

Through their narratives, they illuminate the path of bravery and tenacity, inspiring others to never give up on their dreams.

Tair Rafiq

TAIR Rafiq was born in Birmingham at the end of the 1960s, but he has lived most of his life in Rotherham, growing up in the Eastwood area.

During his childhood, he had few friends and resorted to creating imaginary companions. His closest companion was a toy rabbit named Benjamin, whom he acquired on a school trip to Filey.

Benjamin, with the ability to grow to immense proportions, served as Tair's protector. However, Benjamin is now retired due to loose stitching.

Tair has since grown both physically and emotionally, becoming self-assured and capable of looking after himself. His interests include boxercise and daydreaming.

Two significant events influenced Tair's early fascination with storytelling.

At the age of eight, he discovered a book called *The Little Witch* by Otfried Preussler, and at 10 he watched *Star Wars*. In those moments, he realised his lifelong ambition — to become a storyteller and weave magic with words.

Consequently writing consumed all his spare time, gradually becoming his sole focus.

Despite enduring bullying during his school years and being told by a university admissions interviewer that he lacked academic potential, Tair secluded himself from the world for over a decade. Writing became his solace, as he taught himself the craft of storytelling and world-building.

With no one to critique his stories, he had the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them.



Eventually, emerging from isolation, Tair discovered his own voice, one worthy of being heard.

In March, Tair received a grant from the Arts Council England Lottery, fulfilling his dream and allowing him to leave his day job at a call centre to pursue his storytelling aspirations. Although he felt some apprehension about quitting his day job, the moment he received the confirmation email from the Arts Council, he promptly contacted his manager to tender his resignation. Writing demanded his undivided attention.

The transition hasn't posed any challenges for Tair. While he still maintains a day job, it no longer feels like work since he is doing what he loves. Every morning, he wakes up with joy, eager to engage in more writing. This opportunity feels like a key to a chocolate factory, a world full of possibilities.

Now, Tair has more breathing room and the luxury of time. Freed from the mental constraints imposed by his previous job, he can think more deeply and allow his imagination to thrive.

Tair believes writing is an inherent part of his being and struggles to comprehend a world without storytellers. To him, imagination is a vast toy box, gifted to every individual at birth. Regrettably, society often suppresses and diminishes this innate talent as people grow older.

Tair considers himself fortunate that his imagination has only grown more extraordinary over time.

Influential authors during his formative years included Edgar Allan Poe, H P Lovecraft, Harry Harrison's *The Stainless Steel Rat* series, Frank Herbert's *Dune* saga, J R R Tolkien, and the *Asterix* books by Goscinny and Uderzo.

Tair's mind is always engaged in the art of storytelling. If he appears distracted, it is likely because he is contemplating the adventures of vampires and werewolves venturing into outer space aboard a rocket ship. He possesses an abundance of ideas that he may never have the opportunity to fully explore in his lifetime.

Tair doesn't approach writing as a mere task to be completed but rather as a guiding light through the mundane realities of life. He is deeply in love with writing and devoted to it.

As someone who has never experienced writer's block, Tair finds it difficult to provide

advice on overcoming creative obstacles. However, if pressed, he would suggest sitting down and writing, regardless of the content. Even if it seems like nothing, even the act of writing 'nothing' holds value. Moreover, Tair emphasises the importance of taking the time to think — a greatly underestimated practice. In a world that constantly demands productivity and busyness, humans are not meant to function like machines. Sometimes, they simply need a moment to pause and relax.

Tair's storytelling often exhibits themes that are eccentric, mischievous, and surreal. He attributes this unique style to his lack of formal training as a writer.

When readers encounter his work, they can immediately identify his distinctive voice.

Tair finds himself naturally drawn to LGBTQ+ characters and themes, as he identifies with the struggles of this community. Having faced bullying and misunderstanding throughout his life, he knows what it feels like to be an outsider. Thus, he strongly believes in the importance of unity among outsiders and proudly considers himself an ally.

"Do it! If not now, when?" Tair passionately encourages others to seize the opportunity to live their lives to the fullest. Recognising the preciousness of a single existence, he firmly believes that it should be embraced and lived with purpose.

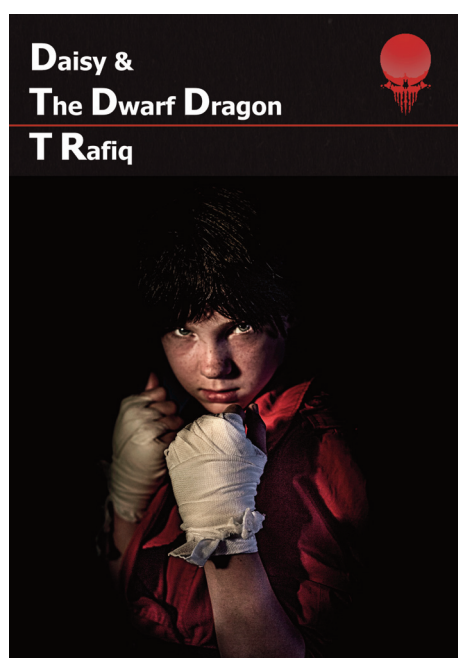
Presently, Tair is immersed in the development of his play for schools, entitled *Paradise Square*, funded by the Arts Council. It revolves around a mysterious woman endowed with the power to fulfil any dream except her own. Additionally, she possesses the ability to transform her appearance into anyone she desires, but never her true self. Accompanying her is a pet rabbit named Crusher, who has the remarkable ability to grow to enormous proportions.

Similar to many of Tair's works, *Paradise Square* holds elements of his own life experiences, making it semi-autobiographical.

Ultimately, Tair hopes that readers and audiences will emerge from his books and plays with a sense of bewilderment, pondering the inexplicable experience they have just encountered.

* Learn more about Tair here:

<https://tairrafiq.wixsite.com/terrificwriter>

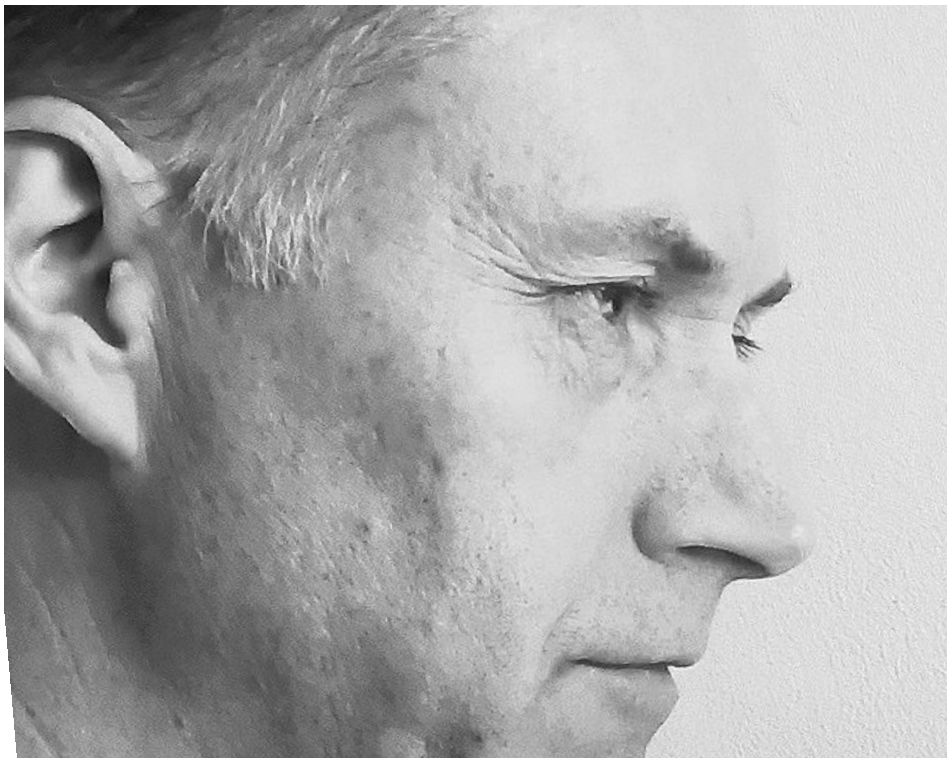


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FEATURE



Sean Webster

SEAN Webster hails from a working-class background and spent his formative years in Great Houghton, a small mining village in Barnsley.

Growing up in the '80s, he recalls a village that seemed to recede into the distance as time went by, with limited facilities and an abundance of fields and woods for children to explore and play in.

Sean's father worked as a miner and like many families in the area they faced financial challenges during the strike of '84. Fortunately, his mother was employed at the renowned Slazenger factory in Barnsley, manufacturing tennis balls. Despite the hardships, Sean remembers the strong sense of community during that time, with neighbours coming together and providing support to one another.

Even in his early years, Sean exhibited the qualities of a writer, being shy and introverted.

He discovered his passion for writing when he would craft long and admittedly terrible stories during his school days. While his friends handed in simple, worn-out homework sheets, Sean's assignments often spanned ten pages due to his penchant for letting his imagination run wild.

As the late '80s approached, Sean faced a limited choice for a writing career and decided to pursue the growing field of IT instead of journalism.

He worked as a computer programmer for several years, enjoying the social aspects of office life. However, he felt an increasing frustration at not dedicating enough time to his writing endeavours while juggling a full-time job.

The turning point came when Sean's office was forced to shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Confronted with the realisation of life's fleeting nature and the need to pursue his ambitions, he made a difficult decision. Despite the sacrifices and the uncertainty of financial security, he enrolled at Sheffield Hallam University to pursue an MA in Creative Writing.

The transition to a full-time writing career has undoubtedly been challenging, especially in terms of the cost of living crisis. Sean maintains his focus by following a strict schedule, devoting the mornings of weekdays from 8am to 12pm to his writing as though it were a regular job. He actively searches for

ways to monetise his writing and chances to advance his writing career in the afternoons.

When faced with challenges in his writing, Sean finds solace in taking walks.

Sean's passion lies in stories set in the present day, where relatable characters undergo personal growth.

His true fascination lies in capturing the essence of human nature, delving deep into the truth to ensure that his characters' actions and words resonate authentically with his readers.

Influenced by esteemed authors like Stephen King, Sean greatly admires their skilful characterisation and compelling dialogue. Additionally, he holds a deep appreciation for timeless classics such as 1984, The Catcher in the Rye, To Kill a Mockingbird, and Lord of the Flies. These literary masterpieces have shaped his perspective and further fuelled his passion for crafting meaningful narratives.

Sean firmly believes in heeding life's inner voice, particularly when it has conveyed a consistent message over the years. Taking gradual steps toward fulfilling one's dreams, regardless of age or imposed barriers, was a philosophy he ardently embraced.

Currently, Sean is immersed in the second draft of his debut novel, titled Labyrinth for One, a psychological coming-of-age drama set in the '80s and '90s.

Additionally, he is working on a short horror-themed play that will be showcased as part of an upcoming event at the Cast Theatre in Doncaster.

Simultaneously, he is developing ideas for screenplays, exploring new avenues for his creative expression.

A remarkable milestone in Sean's journey came when he received the prestigious Developing Your Creative Practice funding from Arts Council England. This recognition has alleviated significant financial burdens, granting him the freedom to wholeheartedly dedicate himself to his artistic pursuits.

Sean Webster's journey serves as a testament that age should never be a barrier to pursuing dreams and ambitions. His story is an inspiration, demonstrating that with determination, perseverance, and a willingness to take the necessary steps, anyone can overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

As Sean continues to carve his path as a writer, he encourages others to embrace their inner voices and seize the opportunities that await them on their own creative journeys.

Learn more about Sean here: <https://www.seanwebsterwrites.co.uk/>

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