



# PRINCESS BMX

BY MARIE BASTING

## SYNOPSIS

Avariella is fed up with being the princess of the fairy-tale kingdom of Biscotti – she'd much rather spend her time sledging down the stairs in a potato sack, or playing with her puppy, Jeb. After one particularly good sack-sledging session, Ava finds herself through a portal ... which takes her and Jeb to a kingdom much unlike her own – London!

Ava finds London – and its people – very strange. After getting lost on her way to King's Cross (someone there *must* know her father) she finds herself at a skate park – and fascinated by the 'flying' bikes, which must be enchanted in some way! One of the boys, Ethan, tells her the bike is a BMX, and invites her to come back tomorrow if she'd like to try it.

Ava finds the entrance to the portal and returns home to find no time has passed since she's been away – and all she can think about are the BMX bikes. She asks her Aunt Maude whether she knows anything about the strange kingdom – though with a spare eyeball and a pet teabag, Aunt Maude isn't the most reliable of sources. Aunt Maude isn't very helpful, but cryptically mentions someone she refers to as 'her': 'the one they don't talk about, the one they sent away'.

Ava's parents aren't too pleased to hear that Aunt Maude has been filling her head with 'poppycock', which makes Ava even more determined to return to the BMX park – which she does, with the

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help of her fairy Godfather, Nigel. There, Ethan teaches her to ride a bike and they meet a mysterious woman, Odette, who seems oddly familiar to Ava – and who begins to crop up everywhere.

Strange things begin happening in the kingdom, making Ava's parents suspicious. After listening in on one of her father's meetings, Ava learns that Odette is no other than the 'Black Sorceress' – and her aunt. Ava tells her mother that Odette has been following her, and it transpires that – much to Ava's surprise – her mother was the one to open the portal to London, and has been helping her to BMX. After finding out Odette is on the loose, her mother forbids her from going through the portal again.

Odette, wanting revenge for being banished, kidnaps Jeb and Ava's brother Bertie. Ava, confined to her room but determined to save Jeb and Bertie, sneaks out of the castle with her BMX – only to find *Ethan* in the forest, who had accidentally come through the portal! Together they make their way through the forest, navigating run-ins with boggarts, river griffins, forest sprites and sherbet dragons, until they find Bertie – who has inexplicably been turned part-pumpkin.

The three catch a ride on a dragon to where Odette is hiding out with Jeb. Bertie and Ethan are taken hostage, and Odette, impressed by Ava's rebellious streak, reveals her plan to take Ava as her adopted daughter and turn Biscotti into a theme park for Other World folk. Ava refuses – and finds out that Odette was the one who fried Aunt Maude's brain and made her the way she is.

With the help of Alun the sherbet dragon and Doreen the unicorn – and of course, Ava and Ethan's BMXs – the trio manage to overpower Odette and rescue Jeb. Ava is shocked when her mum turns up, riding a pink mountain bike, revealing that she was the leader of Biscotti's secret Protectors when she was younger! But before they have a chance to apprehend Odette, she disappears in a puff of purple smoke.

Ava's parents, far from being disapproving, name her Prima Protector of Biscotti – the first of a new generation – give her a brand new BMX helmet, and unveil a BMX track right there in Biscotti.



## WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...

*'Most of us dream of escaping to fairyland, but in Princess BMX our lovable heroine can't wait to escape her perfect (but boring) world of unicorns and dragons! She travels to our grimy real world where she can bike, adventure sport and be her true self ... When she returns, she'll shake up her kingdom – and sort out a spot of nastiness too! Thank the good goblin Marie Basting decided to tell us about this brilliant girl and her fantastical adventures.'*

**BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE**

## AUTHOR BACKGROUND

When Marie Basting was fifteen, she was told by a careers advisor that girls *like her* don't become writers. For a long time, she believed this. But then something magical happened and Marie finally came to realise that girls *like her* can do anything they want.

Marie lives in Manchester with her husband, son and a giant, hairy woo-dog called Polly. When she's not writing or annoying her family, you'll find her supporting other girls and boys to follow their writing dreams. *Princess BMX* is her debut novel.

## AUTHOR MOTIVATION

*'Being about as sporty as Tyson the tea bag, I never expected to find myself writing a book about BMX. But if you follow Avariella's journey closely, you'll discover that Princess BMX is all about challenging expectations.'*

*Sure, BMX is what keeps the plot racing along, but it's Ava's inner journey the reader will really connect with. A journey where, by challenging the expectations of others, she can achieve her full potential. And having been told by a careers advisor at fifteen that girls like me don't become writers, the book isn't just about Ava's ability to believe in herself, it's about mine too.*

*But why BMX? The idea first came to me while watching the BMXers at the Undercroft skate park on the*



*Southbank in London. When I was growing up, BMX was for boys, the gender divide so ingrained it never even occurred to me to challenge the view that girls should stick to their roller boots. Yep, there we have it – once again, I just accepted those expectations. I was the good Catholic girl I was told to be. And while my teachers and parents were hardly Mademoiselle Hornet-Boules, they did set a number of limits that, unlike Ava, I wasn't confident enough to challenge.*

*I was aware when I started my own family that this sort of gender stereotyping was very much still an issue – my son being told by a nursery assistant pink was for girls. He was three years old. And she was wrong on so many levels. But I forgive her because no doubt she too was a product of the expectations set for her.*

*Princess BMX is all about challenging these expectations and the harmful stereotypes that limit us not only as children but as adults. It turns the fairy tale on its head and gives the traditional characters a radical makeover: a masculine fairy godfather, a beautiful fashionista villain, and of course a strong, rebellious princess, coming together to offer an alternative way of being. Listed in the Gender Equality Charter Best Books List 2019, I hope it will encourage readers old and new to be like Ava and defy stereotypes and expectations. And don't be disheartened if success doesn't come straight away – as my own story shows, it's never too late to prove others wrong.'* **MARIE BASTING**

## **THEMES**

- Fairy tales & fantasy stories
- Expectations & freedom of choice
- Biking, skating and extreme sports
- Feminism & rebellion
- Comedy & humour
- Friendship & teamwork
- Non-conformity & challenging stereotypes



# WRITING STYLE

*Princess BMX* is written in the first person, past tense, and Marie Basting does a wonderful job of connecting the reader to Ava through her distinctive and humorous voice. The novel takes place in both a fantasy kingdom and our world, and is interspersed with quirky black-and-white line illustrations by Flavia Sorrentino. **44 chapters, 282 pages, age 7+**

## PUPIL ACTIVITIES

### 1. Design your own fairytale land

In *Princess BMX*, Ava is the princess of the fairytale kingdom of Biscotti. Marie Basting introduces us to all the weird and wonderful parts of Biscotti, and many of its features are in reference to some type of food – the name ‘Biscotti’ is even a type of biscuit!

Have a think of what your ideal magical kingdom would be like. What would it be called? What would it look like, and smell like? Who would live there? Would there be any rules? Who would run the kingdom? Is it magical, or is it a world much like ours? Make a list of all the important features you can think of.

Once you’ve done this, it’s time for you to have a go at creating a map of your own kingdom. Using A3 paper, draw your location and add some landmarks or place names that you think would be important. Be sure to add a compass and scale. Once you’ve finished, create a class display out of all your maps.

### 2. The food of Biscotti

While Ava and Bertie share our love for cakes and ice cream, some of the food in Biscotti is rather strange. Banoffee Burgers, raspberry ripple rabbit stew, griffin eggs and dragon cabbage: not your average snacks, are they? But it’s the perfect food to get your imagination juices flowing. How do you think these foods would taste? What adjectives can you think of to describe them? Can you come up with some weird and wonderful foods or food



combinations yourself?

On your own, have a go at writing a recipe for raspberry ripple stew. First, research some stew recipes and then mix and match the ingredients to give it a raspberry twist. Maybe you also want to add a hint of magic to your recipe!

### ***3. Introducing ... Tyson!***

It seems everyone loves Tyson, the tiny tea bag who wears an even tinier bobble hat on top of his perforated pyramid head. But despite being the coolest beverage since chocolate milkshake, there's not a lot known about Aunt Maude's unusual pet. In fact, he's a bit of a mystery. Which is great, because it means Tyson can be whoever you want him to be! First, create a fact-file for Tyson (complete with an illustration, of course). What is his full name? How old is he? Does he have any friends or family? Where was he born? Where does he live now? What are his likes and dislikes? Try and think of all the key things the reader would need to know to get a picture of Tyson.

Once you've done that, it's time to create your own Tyson story. Imagine it's Tyson's birthday party. Use descriptive language and lots of adjectives to tell us about the setting – is it a magical place like Biscotti? Don't forget to tell us about the food the guests are eating. What clues does it give us about Tyson's world and the story setting: is it the same sort of food we eat, or food with a twist, like the banana-flavoured banoffee burger?

## **WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Ava defies her parents' expectations of what a princess 'should be' to ride her BMX. Do you agree with her parents' views? Do you think Ava should be allowed to be a BMXer, or do you think princesses should behave a certain way?
2. Which famous fictional prince or princesses can you think of? What traits do they share? How do you think the princes differ from the princesses? What do you think makes a princess, specifically?
3. If you lived in Biscotti, what would you miss about our world? Would you prefer to live here or there? Why?



4. Ava meets all sorts of mythical creatures in Biscotti, and even has her very own microcorn, Doreen! If you could choose a mythical creature as a pet, what creature would you choose? For what reasons? Would you want something big and intimidating to protect you, or something small and cuddly?

## IF YOU LIKED *PRINCESS BMX*, WHY NOT TRY ...

- *Milton the Mighty* by Emma Read
- *The Great Chocoplot* by Chris Callaghan
- *Who Let the Gods Out?* by Maz Evans

