

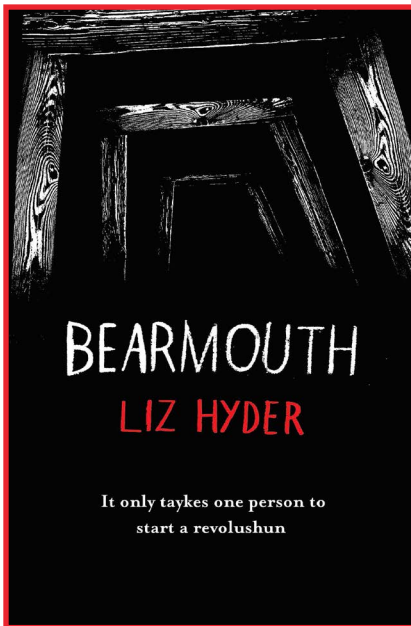
AN  
EXPLORATION  
OF

# BEARMOUTH

LIZ HYDER



PUSHKIN  
CHILDREN'S  
BOOKS



## THE STORY

We hope that you will enjoy reading *BEARMOUTH* by Liz Hyder. It is a story about courage, friendship, exploitation and rebellion.

Set deep underground in the fictional Bearmouth mine, the story is told from the perspective of a young worker named Newt. Like the other workers in the mine, Newt both lives and works in Bearmouth, enduring a tough life with sparse food and long hours of labour in dark and dangerous conditions. Reward will come in the next life with the benevolence of the Mayker and Newt accepts everything – that is, until the mysterious Devlin arrives.

Newt starts to look at Bearmouth afresh, questioning all the things that until that point had seemed certain, but the friendship that offers a way out of the darkness also threatens to destroy their entire world.

## THE AUTHOR

Liz Hyder is a writer, experienced workshop leader and award-winning arts PR consultant. She has a BA in drama from the University of Bristol and, in early 2018, won the Bridge Award/Moniack Mhor's Emerging Writer Award. She is currently working on her second book and a range of other creative projects. *Bearmouth* is her debut novel.



*'One of the most ambitious and darkly brilliant YA books I've read. It's provocative, tender, claustrophobic and epic. It blew my mind'*

Kiran Millwood Hargrave, author of *The Girl of Ink & Stars*

*'An accomplished, intelligent, gripping and unforgettable debut... once you start reading you will not be able to put it down'*

M. G. Leonard, author of *Beetle Boy*

AN  
EXPLORATION  
OF

# BEARMOUTH

LIZ HYDER



PUSHKIN  
CHILDREN'S  
BOOKS

*BEARMOUTH* is told in the first-person by Newt, and is written in a distinctive vernacular. Newt is learning to read and write so doesn't know how to spell correctly, but as the story develops so too does Newt's spelling. What do you think this distinctive voice achieves in bringing the character to life? Does the development of Newt's writing skills mirror their ability to question and understand the world in which the story takes place?

Liz Hyder wrote *BEARMOUTH* after visiting mines in Wales and England that, in Victorian times, employed children as young as four to mine coal. What do you think the author shows the reader about the working conditions of children in the 1800s? Do you think by setting the novel in a made-up world rather than in a purely historical setting the author is able to explore the themes of freedom and rebellion more effectively?

Do you think that there are places left in the world today where young people face similarly difficult working conditions? Do you think reading a novel in which you come to care very much about the characters helps you have greater understanding for people who are facing similar situations in their lives in the real world?

Liz Hyder writes about a very particular setting in Bearmouth. She tells the reader about the day-to-day conditions in the mine, including details like how the workers need to buy their own candles, boots and clothes.

Liz did a lot of research into the conditions of real-life child miners in the past to make sure that the details in her book felt real. Do you think that the detail Liz shares with the reader helps you understand better the world in which the story is set?

Newt has very strong friendships in *BEARMOUTH* ranging from the important relationship with Thomas, who is teaching youngsters to read and write, to the friendship with Tobe, the young boy that Newt takes care of.

Central to the story is the friendship between Newt and Devlin. At first Newt is very suspicious of Devlin. What happens that allows this feeling to change? How important is the theme of friendship in the book? Do you think that friendship has the power to transform lives? The people that work in Bearmouth don't have contact with their families even though they are sending money home to help support them. In the underground world do you think people make new families?