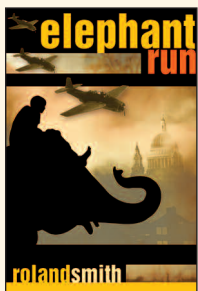


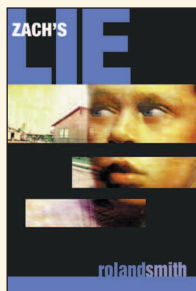
This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of *Reaching for Sun*. Visit her Web site [www.tracievaughnzimmer.com](http://www.tracievaughnzimmer.com) to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.

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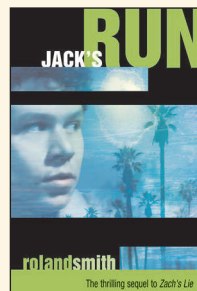
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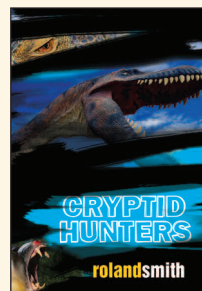
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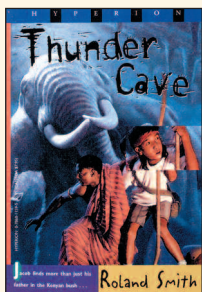
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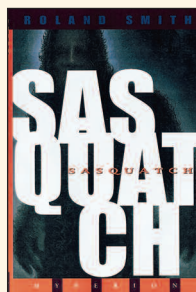
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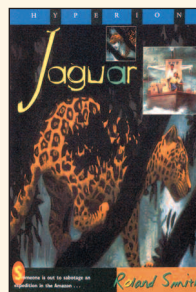
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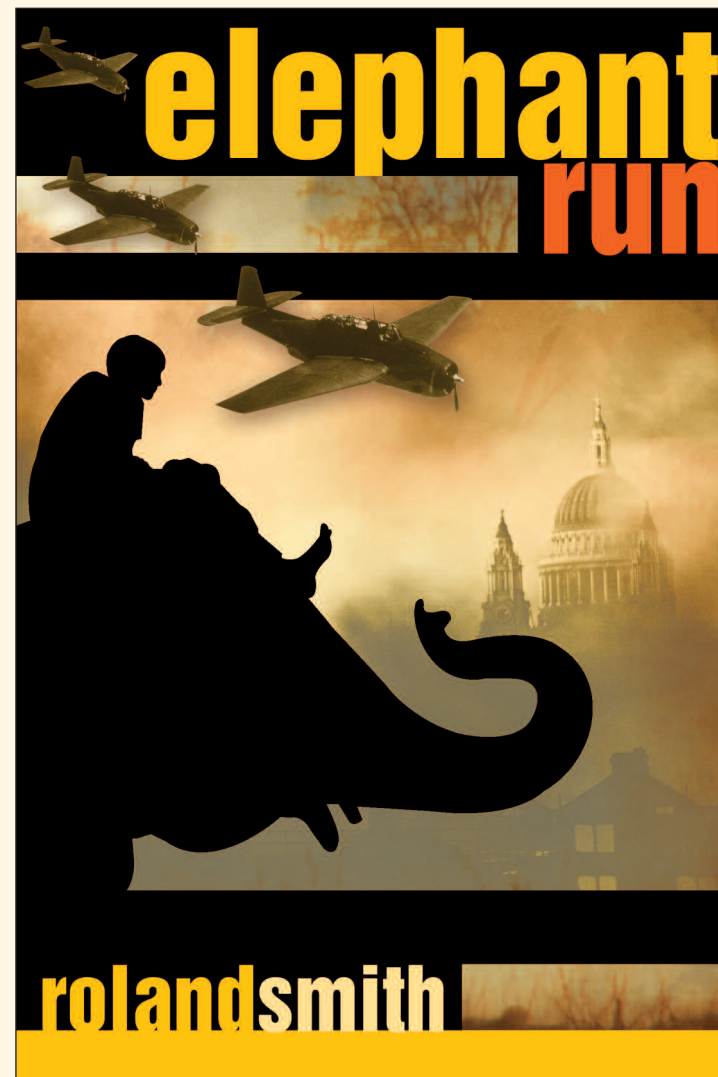


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**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

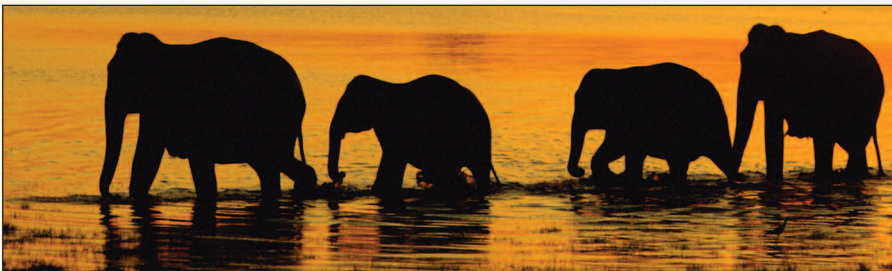
## About the Book

The year is 1941, and bombs are being dropped from the night sky, blanketing the city of London. When fourteen-year-old Nick Freestone's home is demolished, his mother decides the situation in England has grown too unstable. Nick will be safer, his mother hopes, living with his father in Burma on the family's teak plantation.

Nick arrives at the plantation eager to learn about the timber elephants raised and trained there, and to spend time with his father. But before he can settle in, trouble erupts in the remote Burmese village. Japanese soldiers invade, and Nick's father is taken prisoner. Nick is stranded, forced to work as a servant for the new rulers. As life in the village grows more dangerous for Nick and his young friend Mya, they plan a daring escape through the jungles of Burma, determined to rescue their families. But to succeed, they will have to overcome not only the threat of enemy soldiers, but the dangers of their journey through the wilderness.

## About the Guide

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel, including friendship, loyalty, betrayal, hope, and violence.



## Discussion Questions

- 1 What time period and setting opens the novel? Explain why Nick needs to go to Burma for his safety. Would you be as willing to go?
- 2 Compare and contrast the house (Hawk's Nest) of Nick's memory to the one he finds nine years later. Why is it so deserted? What makes this place so important to Nick's family?
- 3 Who is Magwe? What conflicts swirl around him? Have you ever worked or known someone who made things more difficult? How did you handle being near this person?
- 4 Describe Nick's first encounter with Hannibal. What are the effects of this event over the next several chapters? How would you have felt in this situation?
- 5 Why can't Mya become a *mahout*? Are there any good reasons for this tradition? Why is Mya eager to have Nick around on the teak plantation? How does having him there backfire on her?
- 6 What is Hilltop's (Taung Baw's) story? What is his history on the plantation?
- 7 How does the war find Nick in Burma, and how does it affect his stay on the plantation? What are the plans to get him to safety? Describe what happens instead. What would be the most frightening part of these events?
- 8 What deal does Colonel Nagayoshi make with Nick and his father? Would you believe him or not? Why? Does he keep his promise? When the Colonel learns of the internment of the Japanese in America, he changes his mind. Do you blame him? Had you ever heard previously about America's treatment and internment of citizens during WWII?

- 9** Describe Nick's days as a captive of the Japanese. Who shows mercy? Who is cruel? Do you think that war forces people to behave differently than they normally would, or reveals their true character?
- 10** Communication is a crucial element for the prisoners' hope for escape. How do they manage to get word to one another without being caught by the Japanese? Even the letters from Nick's mother are intercepted. Why? Is "all fair in love and war," just like they say?
- 11** Hawk's Nest is more than what it appears. How? Does this prove to be important to Nick and Mya? Would you want to live in a house like this? Why or why not?
- 12** What is the escape plan? Does it work? Who surprises them in the tunnel? How have the main characters changed from the way they were at the beginning of the novel? Who has transformed the most?
- 13** Why do you think Hilltop was able to gain control over Hannibal when no one else was capable of it? Do some people just have an affinity for animals while others do not?
- 14** Discuss the ten precepts a Buddhist monk novice must agree to live by. Which ones would be most difficult for you? Why must Mya and Nick submit themselves to these rules? Does Buddhism have connections to other religious traditions that you know of? Is there something that all religions have in common?
- 15** Sonji is guarding Nick's father. Why is this fortuitous? What does Nick learn about his father? Why is it so much easier for Indaw to escape than for Jackson? Is he able to reunite with his son? What is the climactic scene of the escape? Did you picture it as a movie? How does this help with comprehension?

## Projects

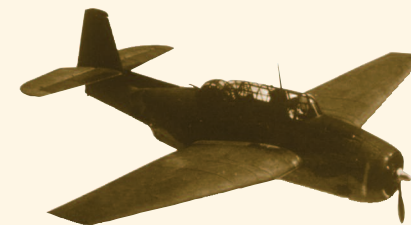
### Language Arts

Create a list of important characters as you read the novel. Include their name, their relationship to Nick, a description of important skills or attributes that they have, and the conflicts that arise. Use the list to study for quizzes and to help in your understanding.

### Social Studies

Research one of the following topics from the novel and create a presentation about it: (PowerPoint presentations, Web pages, etc.)

- *Mahouts*
- Teak forests
- Prisoners of war
- Asian theater of WWII
- Buddhism
- Timber elephants
- Burma
- Colonialism



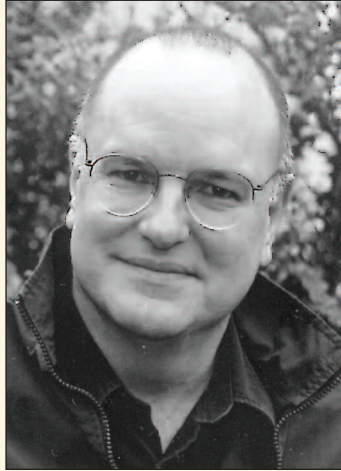
# Author Interview

## 1 Do you have a special connection to the setting of the novel? How did you decide what time and place to set it?

*Elephant Run* was a long time in the making. Before I became an author, I spent over 20 years working with animals in zoos and in the wild. My favorite animal is the elephant, and I'm very partial to Asian elephants. During my zoo years I don't think a day went by when I did not at least touch an elephant. I took a trip to Kenya, which led me to write my first novel, *Thunder Cave*, about African elephants. But what about my favorite species of elephant? I went on to write and photograph a nonfiction book called *In the Forest with the Elephants*. I spent two weeks in Myanmar (formerly Burma), living in elephant camps deep in the forest, photographing and researching that book. It was during this trip that the idea for *Elephant Run* solidified in my mind. I actually started working on the novel while I was in the Myanmar forest.

I have always been fascinated with World War II, and just like my preference for Asian elephants, I am more interested in the Asian theater of war than the European theater. Our involvement in the Pacific war was longer, more brutal, and just as critical to our future as the war we fought across the Atlantic. Even so, the Pacific war is rarely written about in books for young people.

In *Elephant Run* I wanted to write a historical adventure story in a place few Westerners, even to this day, have visited. I wanted to write about the special bond between timber elephants and their human handlers. Sadly, because of deforestation throughout most of Asia, Myanmar is one of the last places on earth this unique relationship still flourishes.



## 2 How much research did you have to do to bring this story to life? What were your favorite resources that kids might enjoy exploring?

It took years for me to find the right characters and voice for this story. I think I read every book ever written about Burma during World War II. I also wanted to portray the Japanese both honestly and fairly, which took a tremendous amount of reading and research.

As I mentioned, there isn't much literature written for young people about this interesting time and place. If you want to learn more, I'm afraid you will have read adult books about the subject. There have been many fine memoirs written by those who were there. To name a few: *The Burma Thailand Railway* by Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson; *River Kwai Railway* by Clifford Kinvig; *Behind Japanese Lines* by Richard Dunlop; *Beyond the Chindwin* by Bernard Fergusson.

## 3 What can your fans look forward to next?

I am working on a sequel to my novel *Cryptid Hunters*. And I hope to get back to Jack Osborne with a third novel after *Zach's Lie* and *Jack's Run*.

[www.rolandsmith.com](http://www.rolandsmith.com)

