



STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 19.30 WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2024

**Story of lovable teen rapper, inspired by author's adolescence on the North Peckham Estate, named outstanding debut novel for young people**

**Nathanael Lessore awarded 2024 *Branford Boase Award* for *Steady For This***

#BranfordBoaseAward #BBA24 [www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk](http://www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk)

[Images available for download](#)



Thursday 10 July 2024: **Nathanael Lessore** is the winner of the **2024 Branford Boase Award** for outstanding debut novel for young people with ***Steady For This***, his story of 13-year-old would be rapper Shaun, aka MC Growls, as he navigates life, love and dreams of stardom. The **Branford Boase Award** is unique in honouring editor as well as author and Nathanael shares the win with his editors, Ella Whiddett and Ruth Bennett, of Hot Key Books.

The **Branford Boase Award** is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Nathanael Lessore joins a list of winners that includes Frances Hardinge, Kevin Brooks, Meg Rosoff and Mal Peet.

**Christine Pillainayagam**, who won the 2023 **Branford Boase Award** for **Ellie Pillai is Brown** and was judge this year, says, “Every book on this year’s shortlist represents the very best of children’s literature, and shows how the publishing industry is adapting to the needs of children and young people today. It was an exciting year to be part of the judging panel, and I feel grateful to have had the opportunity to read and discuss these brilliant books that made me feel every emotion imaginable. Despite strong competition, **Steady For This** was a unanimous winner. A bright, funny, moving story that felt joyful and fresh, we couldn’t wait to read more of Nathanael’s work.”

Set in the Peckham estate where Nathanael grew up and written in lively, rap-infused language, **Steady For This** is original, laugh-out-loud funny but tender and moving too. Nathanael says that while stories set ‘on the block’ tended to be gritty and dark, “My childhood on the North Peckham Estate was actually fun, and mostly positive, so all I had to do was write honestly about life in an estate.”

He claims that Shaun is loosely based on himself and that lots of the silly things he says and does are based on real life events that actually happened. He used his cousin and brother, both “young, streetwise and difficult to please” as his “authenticity” readers.

On winning the **Branford Boase Award**, Nathanael says, “Writing **Steady For This** was fun, in the same way that crying with laughter or having unlimited funds at a funfair is fun. I can't say that I'm proud of myself for writing **Steady For This**, in the same way I'm not proud of myself for playing pool in the pub, because I enjoyed myself so much when doing it. And while work plays a big part in the publishing of books, so does luck. My publisher Hot Key Books and my editors Ella and Ruth have played the role of genie in a lamp granting wishes. The best thing about this award is that I get to share it with my genies. Together, we've produced a book that brings a smile to people's faces, and I will forever be grateful to the **Branford Boase Award** for choosing **Steady For This** as this year's winner.”

**Ella Whiddett** says: “We knew Nate was a very special writer from the first page of this extraordinary story about an ordinary boy living and laughing through the growing pains of teenagehood. Years after that first read, **Steady For This** continues to bring such joy to my life, so to be shortlisted for the **Branford Boase Award** with this book in particular was truly special. But to win it with Nate and Ruth is an absolute career highlight.’

**Ruth Bennett** says, “We are over the moon that **Steady For This** has been chosen as the winner of the **Branford Boase Award**! It’s such an incredible honour for the editorial partnership between Nate, Ella and me to be recognised by the judges – working on

bringing Nate's unforgettable characters and unique storytelling skill to readers has been a satisfying and hugely enjoyable experience from start to finish. **Steady For This** shows that books can be funny *and* powerful, they can teach you things *and* make you laugh, and we look forward to many more readers falling in love with Growls and his friends, just as we have done."

**Julia Eccleshare**, Chair of the judges and co-founder of the **Branford Boase Award** adds, "25 years after their deaths, we are delighted to be remembering Wendy Boase and Henrietta Branford and celebrating such dynamic editor/author relationships through the award that bears their names. Children's books have changed a great deal in those 25 years but the creative partnership between author and editor, so evident in Wendy and Henrietta's working relationship, is still the heart of successful publishing. Congratulations to Nate, Ella and Ruth and to all the authors and editors on this year's shortlist. We look forward to watching the shortlisted authors' careers develop and to many more outstanding books for children and young people."

The 2024 winners of the **Branford Boase Award** were announced by Christine Pillainayagam on Wednesday 10 July at a ceremony at **CLPE**, Webber Street, London SE1 8QW. Nathanael Lessore receives a cheque for £1,000 and he and Ella Whiddett and Ruth Bennett receive engraved trophies.

The **Branford Boase Award** is delivered in partnership with the [Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society \(ALCS\)](#) and supported by Walker Books.

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

Founded in 2000, the **Branford Boase Award** was set up in memory of award-winning author Henrietta Branford and her editor Wendy Boase of Walker Books, who both died in 1999, and is unique in honouring editor as well as author.

Wendy Boase co-founded Walker Books in 1978 with Sebastian Walker and Amelia Edwards. Her role was to look after the words and she was instrumental in shaping the list, and especially in editing the fiction. Finding new authors was one of Wendy's talents and she nurtured many prize-winning writers including Lesley Howarth and Hugh Scott. Her authors relished her passion for their writing and her obsessive eye for detail. Combined, these ensured that they were driven, though not against their will, to produce their best.

Henrietta Branford began writing when she was 40, starting with pieces for a local newspaper, and before long was writing books for children and winning prizes. Henrietta's books covered the whole range from picture books to teenage novels. *Dimanche Diller*, the first in a trilogy about the eponymous heroine, won the Smarties Prize and in 2002 was awarded the Prix Tam-

Tam in France; *Dimanche* and *The Fated Sky* were both shortlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize which Henrietta subsequently won with *Fire, Bed and Bone*, a title that was also Highly Commended for the Carnegie Medal.

The Branford Boase Award is now regarded as one of the most important awards in children's books and has an impressive record in picking out star authors at the start of their careers. Previous winners include Meg Rosoff, Liz Hyder, Marcus Sedgwick, M.G. Leonard and Frances Hardinge. Winning editors include JK Rowling's editor Barry Cunningham, Philip Pullman's editor David Fickling and Fiona Kennedy, publisher of Michelle Paver, Marcus Sedgwick and Sally Gardner.

The shortlisted authors may have published other books in another genre – e.g. poetry or a picture book – but eligibility for the prize requires that this is their first children's novel. As well as encouraging publishers to find and promote new writers, the Award sets out to alert readers of all ages to the work of interesting newcomers.

The Award is the joint idea of Julia Eccleshare MBE and Anne Marley MBE. Julia is the director of the Hay Festival children's programme. Anne was Head of Children's, Youth & Schools Services for Hampshire Library & Information Service for many years and helped to found Authors Aloud UK, an author booking agency.

This year's judges are **Christine Pillainayagam**, author and winner of the **2023 Branford Boase Award**; **Emily Drabble**, Head of Children's Books Promotion and Prizes at **BookTrust**; **Lucas Maxwell**, former School Librarian of the Year and winner of the **UK Literacy Association's** Reading for Pleasure Teacher Champion Award 2022; and **Amy McKay**, also a past UK School Librarian of the Year and for ten years **Yoto Carnegies National Coordinator**. The judging panel is chaired by **Julia Eccleshare**, Director, Hay Children's Festival.

**Nathanael Lessore** was born in Camberwell, Southeast London, as one of eight children to French and Madagascan parents. Although he has spent most of his life in Peckham, Nathanael has also lived in Paris, Strasbourg and Singapore. Nathanael became a marketing executive after graduating from the University of East London, believing at the time that a Creative Writing degree destined him for a career in marketing. His second book, **King of Nothing**, has just been published. **Steady For This** was also shortlisted for the 2024 **Carnegie Medal** for Writing.

**Ella Whiddett** joined Bonnier Books UK in 2021 as editor for Hot Key Books and Piccadilly Press. Prior to that she was at Little Tiger, managing Holly Webb's young fiction publishing and commissioning and developing the Diary of an Accidental Witch middle grade series amongst other projects.

**Ruth Bennett** is Editorial Director, children's fiction at Bonnier and also worked at Little Tiger between 2012 and 2020.

The two were shortlisted for the 2022 **Branford Boase Award** for **Digger and Me** by Ros Roberts.

The complete list of titles on the 2024 shortlist are:

**The Final Year** Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton, edited by Charlotte Hacking (Otter-Barry Books)

**The First Move** by Jenny Ireland, edited by Ruth Knowles with Sara Jafari (Penguin)

**Safiyah's War** by Hiba Noor Khan, edited by Eloise Wilson (Andersen Press)

**Steady for This** by Nathanael Lessore, edited by Ella Whiddett and Ruth Bennett (Hot Key Books)

**The Swifts** by Beth Lincoln, illustrated by Claire Powell, edited by Ben Horslen and Julie Strauss-Gabel (Puffin)

**You Think You Know Me** by Ayaan Mohamud, edited by Sarah Stewart (Usborne)

Running alongside the Branford Boase Award, the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition** encourages writing talent in under 18s.

The **Branford Boase Award** is delivered in partnership with the [Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society \(ALCS\)](#) and supported by **Walker Books**.

### About the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society



Authors'  
Licensing and  
Collecting  
Society

**The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS)** is a not-for-profit organisation started by writers for the benefit of all types of writers. Owned by its members, ALCS collects money due for secondary uses of writers' work.

It is designed to support authors and their creativity; ensure they receive fair payment and see their rights are respected. It promotes and teaches the principles of copyright and campaigns for a fair deal. It represents over 120,000 members, and since 1977 has paid over £700million to writers.

For more information visit [alcs.co.uk](http://alcs.co.uk)

### About Walker Books

The **Walker Books Group** is one of the world's leading independent publishers of books and content for children. This vibrant international group includes **Walker Books UK**, London; **Candlewick Press**, Somerville, Massachusetts; and **Walker Books Australia**, based in Sydney and Auckland.

Renowned for its truly original publishing and outstanding quality, the **Walker Books Group** is home to books for readers of all ages. Award-winning authors and illustrators for the group include National Ambassador for Children's Literature, Kate DiCamillo, M.T Anderson, Patrick Ness, and Jon Klassen, and major brands for the group are **Maisy**, **Guess How Much I Love You**, **Tilly and Friends**, the widely acclaimed **Judy Moody** and the bestselling **Where's Wally/Where's Waldo**.

The **2023 Branford Boase Award** was won by Christine Pillainayagam and her editor Leah Thaxton with **Ellie Pillai is Brown** (Faber).

For more information about the award, including a full list of past winners, and the Henrietta Branford Writing Competition visit [www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk](http://www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk) .

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