



FICTION DEBUT

Published September 17th 2026

FLEDGLING

by Josh Holton

Keynote

A compelling, tender, unforgettable portrait of a challenging father (and a son's relationship with him), juxtaposed with stunning, sometimes disturbing vignettes of the natural world. With controlled, precise, evocative, but always unexpected prose, this debut novel evokes an alienated rural childhood and the grief of losing a father.

Selling points

- **Shortlisted writer for the 2020 Working-Class Writers' Prize**
- A semi-autobiographical novel begun in the days after the death of the author's father, initially as a eulogy.
- **Combines nature writing with a powerful, deeply personal story of a boy's coming of age and his relationship with his larger-than-life father who is diagnosed with terminal cancer.**
- An idiosyncratic yet sensitive portrayal of living with auditory and visual hallucinations.
- **Deals with themes of childhood alienation, working-class rural life, masculinity, father-son relationships and grief.**

Summary

Stuart is raised on a nature reserve in Cumbria; his family is poor. Stuart is sensitive – endlessly bullied in school, he believes in magic and feels more comfortable taking dance class than playing football. Stuart grows up straddling two worlds, becoming the first in his family to go to university. His father, an ex-con, is quick to throw a punch, and won't eat anything in public 'more flamboyant than a ploughman's' in case someone would take him for a 'nancy-boy'. An avid birdwatcher, he has found peace in his new life as a caretaker for a nature reserve.

When his father is diagnosed with terminal cancer, Stuart grapples with grief as he tries to become the man he thinks his father would want him to be. Interwoven in the narrative are snippets of British wildlife, particularly the birds that captivate Stuart and his father, and reflect the bond they share.

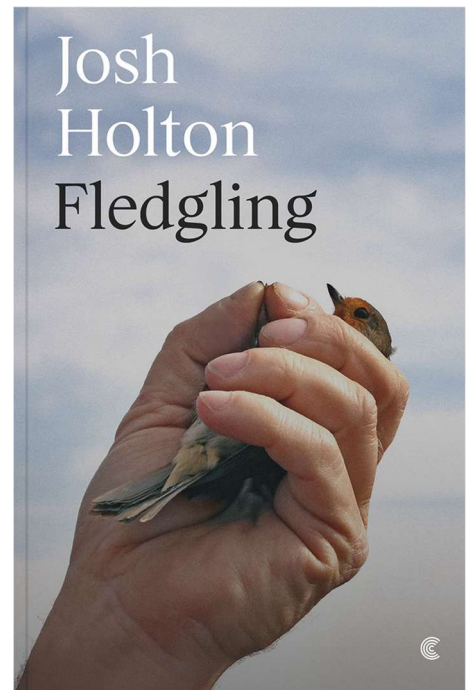
The writing is surprising, hilarious, and devastating. This is a story about grief, about masculinity, about the love of a parent and what remains when they're gone.

Comparative authors/titles

Grief is the Thing with Feathers by **Max Porter**; *Summertime* by **JM Coetzee**; *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* by **Blake Morrison**; *A Man's Place* by **Annie Ernaux**; *A Kestrel for a Knave* by **Barry Hines**; *Patrimony* by **Philip Roth**; *The Outrun* by **Amy Liptrot**

Author

Josh Holton grew up on a Cumbrian nature reserve and now lives in Scotland. He is an ex-MMA fighter who took too many blows to the head and now writes and draws the unexpected. He placed in Streetcake's Experimental Writing Prize 2021 and was runner-up in the Writers & Artists Working-Class Writers' Prize 2020. *Fledgling* is his first novel.



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WN	Nature writing
FXD	Fathers and sons
JBSC	Rural life
5PDD	Working-class life
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