



# De zevensprong

*Tonke Dragt*

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Naar aanleiding van een geheimzinnige brief gaat een jonge onderwijzer op onderzoek uit en heeft op elk van de zeven wegen van de zevensprong een wonderlijke ontmoeting. Vanaf ca. 10 jaar.

## De zevensprong Details

Date : Published 2004 by Leopold (first published 1966)

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Author : Tonke Dragt

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Genre : Fantasy, Childrens

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# From Reader Review De zevensprong for online ebook

## Juli Rahel says

So, De Zevensprong, or The Song of Seven, was a major part of my childhood. Some of my favourite memories are of my father reading the book to me when I was young, or Skyping home while at University only to realize my family is binge-watching a Dutch TV adaptation of the book. When a novel is that close to your heart it becomes close to impossible to be objective about it. The same counts for the Harry Potter books, for example. I will defend those books to the death, simply because they have become a part of me and my history. The Song of Seven is special, in a way, because it deals in and of itself with story telling as well. Mr. Van der Steg, a relatively new teacher, entertains his students by telling them wild tales of distant and imagined lands. The children adore the adventure, while he is able to keep them quiet and engaged. All is well, until a new story begins and it comes to life. Stories are no longer a distant thing, suddenly there is danger around the corner and people aren't who they say they are. What always added to this novel's magic for me was that it felt so true to the gentle magic of the Eastern provinces of the Netherlands, where folk tales and legends lurk behind every corner and all names and rhymes have meaning and power.

Tonke Dragt is, rightfully, celebrated in the Netherlands. Her fiction has enriched countless of childhoods with her stories of adventure. Her writing style is straightforward and spare on big words, perfect for the younger readers, and yet, without any fancy frills, Dragt is immensely good at creating atmosphere. Whether it's the House of Stairs or a rambunctious school class, she describes everything in such a way that you don't even have to close your eyes to see it. She also doesn't underestimate her readers, and there are many points in the book that remain mysterious. Dragt retains that sense of magic and legend by not spelling everything out perfectly, nor by giving a reason for everything. Some things just are, and The Song of Seven almost feels like a snapshot, capturing the potential for many more stories to come. De Zevensprong is beautifully translated by Laura Watkinson, who captures the easy flow with which Dragt writes her books, as well as the charming quirks of her characters. I was very happy to see that all the Dutch names were retained, rather than changed, even if they might take some getting used to for English readers. The Song of Seven is the perfect book for adventurous young readers and their parents.

For full review: <http://universeinwords.blogspot.com/2...>

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## Ojon Van Strijland says

Puur jeugdsentiment. Fantastisch boek, nog steeds!

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## Mathilde / Ikvindlezenleuk says

*Het was drukkend heet, al stonden de ramen open, evenals de deur naar de gang. De kinderen waren een uur lang doodstil geweest, waarschijnlijk meer door de warmte dan door de boetpredikatie waar de meester de middag mee begonnen was. Nu waren ze bijna allemaal klaar met de langdradige les die ze hadden moeten overschrijven uit hun taalboek. De rust begon te verdwijnen – er klonk gefluister, een kuchje, onderdrukt gegiechel, geschuifel van voeten, gekraak van banken, geritsel van papier.*

*Frans van der Steg, die aan zijn tafel op het podium zat, keek verstoord op. Zijn strenge blik maakte echter weinig indruk, misschien ook omdat zijn bril op de punt van zijn neus was gezakt. Maar hij zei niets; hij had er gewoon geen zin in. (blz. 7)*

Meester Frans werkt sinds kort op een dorpsschool. Hij geeft les aan de vijfde klas (dat heet nu groep 7). Elke dag tijdens het opruimen, aan het einde van de middag, vertelt hij een verhaal. Hij doet alsof hij allemaal spannende avonturen heeft beleefd. Maar vandaag is hij moe en hij heeft geen zin om een verhaal te vertellen. Hij vertelt de klas dat hij niets te vertellen heeft, omdat hij een brief verwacht...

In de brief staat dat Frans op gesprek mag komen bij iemand die Gr... Gr... heet. In de brief staat dat Frans gereageerd heeft op een advertentie voor een gouverneur, een onderwijzer voor bij iemand thuis. Maar dat heeft Frans helemaal niet gedaan. Maar hij is wel nieuwsgierig geworden. De volgende avond komt er een zwarte koets voor hem en hij besluit mee te gaan. Maar Frans wil wel weten waar hij naartoe gebracht wordt. De koetsier geeft geen antwoord en bij de Zevensprong krijgen ze ruzie. Frans stapt uit en de koets rijdt weg.

Een paar dagen later komt Frans toch bij Gr... Gr... voor een gesprek. Hij wordt aangenomen als onderwijzer voor Geert-Jan. Die is volgens zijn oom te zwak om naar school te gaan. Frans spreekt af om twee middagen in de week langs te komen. Dit blijkt het begin van een spannend en mysterieus avontuur te zijn. Is Geert-Jan echt zo zwak? Wat is er aan de hand in het kasteel waar Geert-Jan woont? Waarom heeft de Zevensprong maar zes wegen? Wat vinden de kinderen uit klas vijf van dit avontuur?

Lees de rest van mijn recensie op **[Ikvindlezenleuk](#)**

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## **Talitha says**

Wat een leuk verhaal!

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## **Buddy says**

This is why I started writing

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## **Els says**

One of my favorite books still. Every now and then I read it again. It's a clever, slightly sinister, fun story where the good guys win.

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## **Pop Bop says**

Spare, Vintage Post-Modern (?), Whimsical, Strange, Fantasy Adventure

I very much enjoyed this book, and so want to do it justice in trying to describe it as a reading experience. It

was first published in 1966, in Dutch, and has now been translated. Dragt was, and is, rightfully celebrated in the Netherlands and it is a real pleasure to have her available now to English readers. Because many of her books have sci-fi and fantasy elements and are set in near-future environments, and because of her crisp and direct style, (and maybe because of the translator's inclinations), this book has a very modern, and even slightly experimental, feel.

The story starts off modestly, perhaps with the suggestion that our mild school teacher hero will have a mysterious adventure of some sort that will shake him up a bit. He always ends his class school day with wild made up stories about his earlier life as an adventurer/spy/secret agent, and his tall tales hold his young charges in thrall. But, one day he pretends that he is awaiting a secret terribly important letter. Later, he in fact receives a secret terribly important letter. With that, we are off the rails.

This isn't exactly Lewis Carroll territory, at least not with a literal rabbit hole, but it gets close. A pub that is an abandoned ruin one day is full of customers the next, and then back to being a ruin again. One character appears repeatedly in different guises, and each time denies that he is any of the others. There is a Sevenway intersection in the woods, but possibly with only six paths leading from it. Distances become impossibly long or impossibly short. Everything, including especially time, becomes just a bit distorted and confused and vague. Big houses seem small inside, and vice versa. Hints and clues are cryptic and incomplete. No one can be trusted. How many conspiracies, and conspirators, are there? There is sometimes a sinister shadow over the proceedings. And as the action picks up past the halfway point there are enough odd and quirky characters to populate half a dozen novels.

All of this is written in a spare and oblique style that is descriptive and even sometimes atmospheric, but often suggests rather than explains. Our hero can be quick to anger, or simply bemused. He both resists the adventure, and yet is quite engaged. He can be detached, confused, or totally focused, often changing from paragraph to paragraph. When he isn't being shrewd he can be dense. Luckily, he never loses our interest, and he is clearly on track ultimately to become the hero he was perhaps always meant to be.

This struck me as a book for an ambitious, independent and confident reader, perhaps with a bit of a taste for oddball adventurers and a certain amount of flexibility in the matter of narrative clarity, and isn't that a nice thing to be able to say?

(Please note that I received a free advance copy of this book without a review requirement, or any influence regarding review content should I choose to post a review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.)

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### **Anne says**

I really enjoyed this book as a kid.

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### **Sanja\_Sanjatica says**

3.5 I realized I prefer Dragt's fantasy stories. This one had a great writing style, but the story itself didn't quite captivate me. It had some interesting points, but after the Letter for the King series, this was a bit too

plain. I really liked some of the characters, though. A nice book, but I expected more.

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## **Fran says**

Frans van de Steg, teacher, devoted time at the end of each school day to telling tall tales. A born storyteller, he entranced his students with yarns about his adventures, shipwrecks and desert island escapades as hero, Frans the Red. One day, he told his class that he was expecting a letter and headed for home without weaving a story. An ensuing storm rattled windows, blew open doors and a mysterious letter drifted in requesting that he take a carriage provided by GrGr (signature illegible) at 7:30P.M. On the dark, rainy night in question, Frans requested that the coachman stop the traveling carriage and demanded to know its destination. Frans refused to proceed and the coach left him at Sevenways.

At school the next day, he questioned the children whom he surmised were playing tricks on him. But no...the Sevenways was the point in the middle of the woods where six paths met. The seventh path, very overgrown and barely perceivable, led to the House of Stairs. This grey stone house, in ill repair, looked haunted, had towers, turrets and was replete with a remarkable number of staircases, ladders and fire escapes. The House of Stairs was a ghost-like dwelling holding many secrets.

Frans the Red became part of "The Conspiracy of Seven" trying to find treasure hidden in the House of Stairs. Legend had it that 200 years ago, Count Gregorius Gresenstein wrote a document, a sealed parchment to be read by the eldest son of a Gresenstein. The catch was that upon the eldest son's eighteenth birthday, if the treasure was not unearthed, the parchment would then be sealed until this son's eldest son was of age to view clues to the treasure. Count Gregorius hid the treasure, Count Gradus, legal guardian of Geert-Jan wanted the treasure, but Count Geert-Jan, age ten, was the rightful owner of the treasure. This explains why Geert-Jan couldn't attend school with the other children and has been held captive by Count Gradus in the House of Stairs. Can Geert-Jan aided by the "Conspiracy of Seven" uncover the secret treasure, if it truly exists, in a timely manner?

Dutch writer Tonke Dragt has written an excellent children's book full of riddles, clues and puzzling events. The characters were often multidimensional. Frans van de Steg, teacher was Frans the Red, reluctant hero. Appearances were deceiving. A traditional looking house opened to tents in a wooded area. It was hoped that the true and legal Lord of the House of Stairs, ten year old Geert-Jan would emerge victorious and the dragon or foe would be defeated.

"The Song of Seven" by Tonke Dragt was an awesome adventure likely to entertain both children and adults. I highly recommend it. Thank you Pushkin Press and Edelweiss for the opportunity to read and review "The Song of Seven".

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## **Mathew says**

The second of Dragt's books that I have read and one which, unusually, has an adult protagonist in the guise of Frans van der Steg, a storytelling teacher. Although I enjoyed The Letter for the King more with its easier-to-follow narrative, there was still so much here to celebrate. The characters are complex, the setting elusive and wild (reminding me of Wynne Jones and Aiken in a way) and the plot itself - super-smart. When Frans van der Steg arrives at his new school, he falls on telling the children stories as a reward for

their hard work. One day though, he begins a story which starts to show elements of truth and become real. The teacher and his class find themselves involved in a deep conspiracy which involves saving a boy from a wicked uncle who wishes to find a long-hidden treasure destined for his nephew.

Again, I am floored by how accomplished Laura Watkinson is in her translation. Riddles and word-play about in this Dutch children's book yet none of the humour or play seems to have been lost at all. I would agree with reviews that says this book is not for all readers but then, which book is? I think what they mean is that it asks a lot of the reader to work and stay with it but if you do so, you open up a rare little treasure of a book.

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## **Bruce Gargoyle says**

I received a copy of this title from Allen and Unwin for review.

### Ten Second Synopsis:

Frans is a reasonably content young school teacher who enjoys nothing more than sharing a tall tale (all featuring himself, of course) with the children he teaches. When one of his tales starts to permeate into his real life however, Frans is reluctantly drawn into a centuries old mystery and a plot to save a young boy from a fiendish foe.

After having put Dragt's *The Letter for the King* and *The Secrets of the Wild Wood* on my TBR list when they first came out, but never having got to reading them, I was excited to see *The Song of Seven* released, not least because it's a standalone novel. It took me a couple of chapters of delightfully vintage-feeling prose before I looked at the publishing information to find that rather than just being vintage-feeling, the text actually was vintage! I must applaud Laura Watkinson, the translator, for recreating that nostalgic tone of great children's literature of times gone by in this contemporary English release, because the story just oozes retro charm.

The most interesting thing about this book for young readers is that the protagonist, Frans van der Steg (or Frans the Red, as he calls himself when telling stories to his class) is an adult, and more than that, a schoolteacher! It's so rare to find contemporary children's stories that aren't told from a child's perspective these days that it certainly made the book immediately stand out for me as something different, and perhaps even timeless, as no doubt to a child, an adult is an adult is an adult, no matter what historical period you find them in. In fact, apart from the supporting cast of Frans' class and Geert-Jan, the boy confined in the House of Stairs, all of the main characters are adults. This collection of unlikely companions makes up a group of conspirators, who are invested in dealing with the prophecy connected with the House of Stairs, and Geert-Jan himself.

While the vintage tone of the book was definitely refreshing and cosy to fall in to, I did find that there were a lot of chapters in which not a lot happened. The author seems to delight in leaving Frans the Red in the lurch, and just when it seems he is about to make a breakthrough regarding the conspiracy, his fellow conspirators decide not to tell him, or something happens to ensure that the next key piece of information is left dangling, like a carrot on a stick, for Frans and the reader to chase.

Once Frans makes it into the House of Stairs as Geert-Jan's tutor, however, the pace begins to pick up and we are treated to yet more oddball adult characters, as well as a setting that must be seen to be believed. The climax of the tale comes together quite quickly and it is an exciting and unexpected ending that balances out the slower pace of the first half of the story. Throughout the book there is a definite sense of magical realism

lurking behind the ordinary happenings, the fact that one of the characters is a magician notwithstanding. Even though I wouldn't class this as a typical fantasy book, there is an undeniable undercurrent of the uncommon and extraordinary between the lines of each page.

If you have a confident, independent reader in your dwelling who isn't afraid to solve a riddle, and wishes that their classroom teacher would spend a good portion of each day telling stories, then you should definitely nudge *The Song of Seven* in their general direction. If you are an adult fan of books for young readers and you love a book where the magic is in the nuance of the story, then I can't recommend this one highly enough.

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## **Jade says**

*De Zevensprong* is one of my childhood favourites that I still reread occasionally, even though I now know the story by heart. It's a children's book by the famous Dutch author Tonke Dragt, and has received general critical acclaim here in the Netherlands.

This children's book can probably be described best as a mystery novel, in which schoolteacher Frans van der Steg almost hopelessly stumbles about, pulled into it all by what seems to be a simple accident (but is actually a well-concocted plan by a bunch of townspeople who are all involved in a conspiracy). Next to teaching at school, he's looking for a second job, and ends up tutoring the son of a count at a mansion in the woods, not far from the village he lives in. It's there that the true mystery starts, as poor Frans has been placed there by the conspirators in order to save the count's son, Geert-Jan, and help him search for a treasure that's mentioned in a prophecy of one of Geert-Jan's crazy ancestors. And this is all because Geert-Jan's evil uncle wants his hands on the treasure, and is keeping Geert-Jan away from the woman whom he wishes to be his legal guardian (a woman who is also part of the conspiracy).

The suspense is up high in this book, and it's most definitely an exciting and mysterious story. There are a few fantasy twists, and the overall premise of the story seems to be that people aren't exactly what they seem to be. The bumbling schoolteacher turns out to be a fearless hero in the end, the man who uses card tricks might even be a real wizard, and the angry young scooter driver might turn out to be the same person as the happy guitar player. The characters in this book are all rather well-developed: especially Frans, the main character and narrator, is unintentionally funny in the way he first rebels against the conspiracy and the fact that he has to believe in a silly prophecy *and* hunt for treasure. However, his desire to be a real hero instead of a lanky, uncourageous school teacher, eventually breaks through. The children in his class also start to meddle in the whole affair, even more desperate than their teacher to help Geert-Jan.

*De Zevensprong* is a delightful book, filled with mystery, imaginative situations, and a thoroughly sceptic schoolteacher who somehow can't seem to withstand the promise of adventure. A definite recommendation for any child looking for a book with an intelligent, fun adventure, and even a very entertaining read for adults looking for a somewhat 'simpler' book than usual.

*There is also a Dutch TV series (1982) of the same name, which I can give just as much recommendation as the book itself. It stays very true to the story, and is also an absolute delight to watch. They've recently rereleased it on DVD, so it should be easily available to those who wish to purchase it.*

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**Annet says**

Loved this book!

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**Patrick Scheele says**

This book was turned into a tv series when I was young. I saw all the episodes, except for the last one. So when I bumped into the original book, I figured after 30 years it was time to find out how it ended.

Turns out it's not a bad book, at least for children, but it doesn't age with the reader, the way some children's books do (like Harry Potter). All the mystery and suspense I remember from my youth, turns out to be a bunch of weird characters doing weird things and so accidentally solving an ancient riddle. Meh. Even 30 years ago I wouldn't have been very impressed by the ending.

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