

BY ALICE REINER
STACY WHEAT

For Ann Arbor author Kurt Hassler, the idea for writing a children's book came out of a rather heady class in medieval literature he took while attending Indiana University.

He became intrigued with the power of the word and words were thought to possess power.

That's what planted the seed for *Hannah* and the *Homunculus* that Ann Arbor-based Sleeping Beauty recently published.

Hannah is a precocious girl whose "No" is stolen in the night by a rag doll obsessed with increasing his vocabulary. When *Homunculus* captures her premature giggles in a jargon of words literally can't be said to her father's request for her to eat her oatmeal, or her mother's request to clean the garage.

Hannah ponders her predicament in the woods, where she happens upon the rag doll's tree stump and stash of other words such as "compromise," "stalemate" and "impasse."

She engages in a word battle with the *Homunculus* and finally strikes a deal. She knows where else that he can find her word.

After two years of thinking about the *Hannah* character, Hassler wrote the book in one afternoon in Central Park. He chose to set the story in Central Park because it is an obscure word that's fun to say, but hardly a vocabulary staple.

"I like the idea of using challenging words in children's literature," Hassler said. "Each day is simple, and while that's a good start, I like to build on that. It fits into my philosophy of the power of the word."

What Hassler also wanted to accomplish was to establish a character that had a real voice.

"I think this is particularly important with little girls," said, noting that one of *Hannah's* strengths is that she outspoken and not afraid to say no.

Illustrated by award-winning artist Kate Darnell, *Hannah* or the *Homunculus* is a visual feast of bold color and movement. She also illustrated *Flibblett* that was published last year.

Sleeping Bear Press.

Hassler said that he will feel a sense of accomplishment if he can read the book and can take something away from it. "I want children to raise questions, to begin to grow a new vocabulary," he said.

Kurt Hassler will be signing copies of his book at *Borders Books and Music* in downtown Ann Arbor at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 6, and at *Arborsland Mall* in Ann Arbor at 3 p.m. Saturday, June 9.