



The Letterpress Project

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

I remember racing through various book series when I was a kid. *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, *Goosebumps* and *Harry Potter* were all present on my bookshelves, and all of them influenced me from a young age in different ways, but my favourite books were Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. It was my first experience with what could be called a sprawling epic for young readers that didn't hold back; it was a dark series that didn't shy away from stepping into more grown-up territories, and that was incredibly absorbing to me. I still harbour an affinity for all of those books to this day. And, of course, I can't forget about Roald Dahl.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

When I was about five or six, my parents bought me a VHS tape of a three-part story from the nineties *Spider-Man* cartoon called *The Venom Saga*. Right before the episode started, there was a featurette hosted by Stan Lee. I distinctly remember watching him talking about various Marvel Comics titles, including *Fantastic Four*, *The Mighty Thor*, and *The Incredible Hulk*, and then he proceeded to explain how he created Spider-Man with Steve Ditko. Images of classic Marvel comic-books graced the screen and my imagination was captured immediately. Steve Ditko's artwork was unlike anything I'd ever seen and that little featurette was my introduction to comic-books, and I was then inspired to write and draw my own comic-books. I must've watched that featurette countless times. It was a little later on when I started writing my own 'novels' in small notebooks from the local post office. I knew I wanted to tell stories from that moment onwards.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

To me, a successful book is one that stays with you. It's very easy to read a book, put it down, and move onto the next one without giving it much thought, but the best ones are the ones that integrate themselves within your DNA. It's the same with films or records. It's all about connecting emotionally with a story that defines a book's success. Sales aren't equivalent to success, in my eyes, which might sound like a somewhat head-in-the-clouds mentality to have. A book can sell millions and be a load of unoriginal rubbish, and then there are books that find a very niche audience and stick with the reader for many years to come, despite not breaking into the mainstream. Some of my favourite books, films and records are ones that aren't exactly well known. It irks me that many people think that for a book to be successful, it has to hit the top of book charts or go viral on TikTok or get optioned by a big Hollywood studio. One of my favourite records of all time, for example, is Steven Wilson's *The Raven That Refused to Sing*; it's an incredible piece of work and the title track is so emotionally powerful, but you'll rarely hear anybody talking about it, and yet the passion and craftsmanship of that record is infinitely better than anything you'll hear clogging up the charts. Success, to my mind, is defined by how much a creator has invested into the making of a work. Say if a novel reaches just twelve people, and those twelve people connect to it and proceed to treasure it as a favourite for many years, then that's success to me.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

Not really. I know that might sound conceited of me to say, but whenever I'm sitting down to write a story, I don't go into it thinking about an audience. Too many creators fixate on that nowadays, especially filmmakers, and they try to appeal to everybody and then end up appealing to nobody. I write the stories that I want to tell and create pieces of work that I think would be worthy of spending two or three years of my life obsessing over. I think that's why David Lynch is so successful. He chases ideas that excite him and then his works attract a specific audience that are on his wavelength. I write stories predominantly to appease my own creative desires, and if people gravitate towards what I'm making then that's great.

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

Books are ancient. I don't think they'll ever die. Kindles and devices like that can be pretty handy, especially when you're out on the road, but nothing can ever replace a physical book. People still adore books and I really don't see that changing any time soon. If you go into any Waterstones branch you'll see that the demand for physical print is still very much alive. Graphic novels and children's books thrive especially as physical entities. I still have a lot of my big hardback books from when I was very little, like *The Wind in the Willows* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*. I can't imagine future generations not having the chance to read physical books like that. You can't exactly treasure an eBook, can you?

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

I don't actively seek out first edition prints of books or out-of-print classics, but there are some works by underground cartoonists that are excruciatingly hard to track down. I'm a big fan of Al Columbia but his work is very difficult to find. I'm still trying to locate a reasonably priced copy of *Pim and Francie: Golden Bear Days* and *Doghead*, but unless I find them secondhand somewhere, I don't think I'll be getting my hands on those works any time soon. Columbia is a pretty elusive figure in the world of comics, too. He's not very prolific and I think that's what makes his work all the more desirable.