



An Interview With Melvin Burgess

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

My parents read to me more or less every night. In fact, my dad used to make up stories for me, a tradition I carried on with my younger brother and sister and my own children years later. I don't actually recall any picture books – I'm not sure if there were such a thing back then – this would be the fifties and sixties, as I was born in 1954 – we were just very much a story family.

The first book I really recall was *The Wind in the Willows*. I had it read to me, then I read it myself, then I took it to school for our teacher to read it to the class. I was very proud – my book read to the whole class. I truly adored that book – not the chapters with Toad in them, which I found a wee bit disappointing, but the magical chapters about home – *Dulce Donum*, and *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. Real magic. I sort of fell in love with the Great God Pan after that, helped along by the Little Grey Men. My dad got an art teacher at the school where he taught to paint me a picture of Pan, skipping through the meadow with his pipes, which hung above my bed.

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

A suppose the answer really is a love of books and stories of all kinds. I was a very shy kid, a very dreamy kid – always “off in the land,” as my parents put it. If you love something very much, sooner or later you want a go at it yourself, and that was the case with me.

Also, I wasn't really much good at anything else at school.

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

Impossible question! I can tell you what I like though – to be surprised by a book and to fall in love with it. It has to have things I'm unaccustomed to, which makes me increasingly hard to please these days. But surprise on its own is no good, it has to touch me deeply as well.

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

No, not really. If it's for teenagers, it has teenagers in the central roles then you write about those people – that's it.

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

I'm sure the physical book will survive. For a while I wasn't sure, as ebooks were so much more convenient. But now I think that convenience isn't all people are after when they read a book.

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

I don't collect valuable things; I'm too careless with them.