



## The Letterpress Project

### Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

# An Interview With Cliff McNish

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

*I read very little when I was young. Mainly comics. My first real book memory is being given C.S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew* by my English teacher, Mrs Baldwin, when I was about 8. I loved that, and all the other Narnia books. In fact, I remember lying in bed in the dark, staring at the ceiling, and wishing with all my heart that I could be C.S. Lewis. Good job my dream didn't come true, because by then he was deceased.*

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

*I was used to making up short and funny stories for my daughter, Rachel. When she was about ten, however, she wanted a story about a really, really nasty witch. That sparked my imagination. This time I put pen to paper and what started off as a tiny scrap of an idea got ... BIGGER. It became *The Doomspell*.*

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

*If an author is passionate about their story, it shows. You can't fake it. So that comes first. Then: just superior execution. I like to see that the perfect word/sentence/paragraph have been worked on. As a writer I can always spot sloppy (meaning, usually, rushed) execution, and I just don't think there's any excuse for it. Why waste reader's time with a mediocre book with so many others out there? If you haven't got time to perfect it, put it aside until you can. Otherwise you're just a jobbing writer. That's*

*fine – we all have to make a living – but a GREAT book always flows from love and dedication, nothing less.*

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

*Initially it was my daughter. Now I just have to feel the story HAS LIFE. If it feels like it's jumping off the page I try not to worry too much about age range/who might be reading it. Obviously I edit internally in my mind as I'm going along whether I'm conceiving for YA or middle-grade etc, but that just happens quite naturally once the overall shape of the story becomes clear.*

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

*It's becoming clear now that the demise of the physical book has been greatly exaggerated. There'll always be a place for them, but without doubt as devices become better and perhaps a little more tactile themselves younger people will gradually migrate to primarily electronic media to consume books. And so what? The story is the same.*

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

*Not really. I obviously have quite a few books, but I always freely give them away and even to second-hand bookshops in droves if I'm not reading them any more. I make an exception, though, for the 1970's SF novels (usually Pan) that dominated my early life. They're mostly old and brown-papered now, but I can't throw them away. Someone will when I die, and I guess no-one will miss them. In fact, most of those authors have now been utterly forgotten already by people under 40, just as the books being written now will be forgotten except for a very few by new generations of children that comes through. And there's nothing bad about that. I'm more concerned right now actually about the fate of this generation of writers. Far too much space in bookshops is occupied by the same old classics, seemingly in greater and greater numbers. There's way too much nostalgia in the book world at the moment. We've even reverted to the original classic covers. What next? Original novel drafts? It's as if we've half lost trust in our current generation of writers, when in fact we've never had so many great children's and YA as we have right now. Roald Dahl and C.S. Lewis will always deserve a special place, but after all these decades dead do they really need all these endless retrospectives? Do they really still need to occupy central spot in so many*

*book stores, relegating living breathing authors to the shelved and corners?*