



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

# An Interview With Irfan Master

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

Earliest memories are difficult to locate nowadays, especially when it comes to books, but my earliest memories are the early readers at Primary school that we used to read. My mother was a very young woman when she had me and having migrated from Pakistan she was getting to grips with the English language herself, so Urdu was my first language for the first five years of my life. I distinctly remember running into the classroom and lifting my desk lid and being disappointed that I was still stuck on Billy Blue Hat whilst almost everybody else was on Roger Red Hat! It took me a few years to realise that having two languages was an advantage and by then I was quite an advanced reader. Mainly because my mother took me and my sister to the local library. My favourite place in the world. I read everything I could get my hands on. But, my favourite book at the time was, *Where the Wild Things Are*. Sendak's illustrations and simple story merge to create a potent mix of atmosphere and adventure. At about age nine I discovered *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. A beautifully lyrical book that gave me a glimpse of what you could do with language. How poetry and prose could overlap in such a startling way.

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

Fame and fortune, of course! Aside from that, I had no choice. I'm not sure I picked to be a writer rather, writing picked me! I always dreamt in stories. Always daydreamed in stories. They were always within me and I think I spent a long time suppressing them because I didn't know what these ideas were. And also because someone like me, where I came from didn't do that. We didn't

become writers. The arts was a closed door. So I wrote in secret for many years, building my confidence, reading, dreaming, hoping and letting the stories slowly emerge from the dark recesses of my mind into the light. Once they were out, they refused to go back in, so here we are!

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

For me, in terms of success or making of a classic, it would be the tone. Certain authors and illustrators have a signature tone that is recognisable as soon as you start reading or if you see it. Think Quentin Blake or David Almond. I think it's the same in any creative art - music, painting, photography etc. It's like meeting an old friend and feeling instantly comfortable and relaxed knowing you can ease back into the friendship despite the fact you haven't seen each other in years. The feeling is still the same and the more friends you make, the more you hope they come visit often.

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

Both my novels so far have been for YA so that's the audience I have in mind at the moment. There's a young core at the heart of my family and I try to tap into their energy and vibe and inject it into my writing. I've also done a lot of work with young people in schools, colleges, prisons and universities and that also feeds into my writing. I always feel you can take a lot risks writing for young people and that they will be receptive to innovation with language and narrative. Often more so with literature for adults. I also think this makes YA writing really interesting at this moment in time.

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

In a word, no! We're tactile creatures and the physical feel in your hand of a book you've lived with, for a few hours or days is hard to beat. You can write in it. You can gift it. You can leave it for someone else to find. You can lose it and find it years later. You can remember it just by the cover. You can use it as a doorstop. You can balance your cup of tea on it. See? Hard to beat!

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

I could be here a long time writing my answer to this... I don't have an aim to collect rare books but there are certain books I would love to own. It's a long list,

but at the top would be a first language edition of *Alf layla wa-layla* known most popularly in the West as *One Thousand and One Nights*. If I managed to somehow get that, that would be enough.