

1999/July ROBIN JARVIS - Publishing News

Robin Jarvis is what you could call a Story Master, overlord of all he thinks up. He's a fairly benign dictator, though, and someone, as those who know him will attest, who spends a lot of time laughing. When we met he'd been up all night finishing off drawing the 'map' for his new book and hadn't, he said, yet been to bed. You wouldn't have known. He admitted to having left the house in a bit of a mess, but he was spruced and ready to talk books.

The idea for *Thorn Ogres of Hagwood* came to Jarvis a couple of years ago, and, right from the start, he just knew it was going to be a trilogy. "That's the way it is with me," he says, "and publishers like to have a series, or anyway, more than one book, and readers like it too. The only person it's hard for is me - but that's why characters die at the end of my books...so I don't have to write about them any more!"

Jarvis has recently moved from Macdonald to Puffin, and his new publisher had, he tells me, accepted him without having the slightest idea what he was going to do. "Which was nice," he goes on, "but I then had to go in with my character models, sketches and notes and tell them the Thorn Ogres idea. Thankfully, they liked it." If you're wondering about the sketches and models bit, Jarvis was, in another life, a model-maker for film and TV as well as being no slouch in the brush and pencil department - he also illustrates the covers and interiors for all his own books.

So, is *Thorn Ogres*, with its cast of...well, ogres and other fabulous creatures, like the shape-changing werlings, yet another journey through a fantastic reality created by Jarvis? "No, this one's different," he replies. "All the others, like *The Deptford Mice* and *The Whitby Witches*, have been set in a specific location...this time I was walking through the woods and I started thinking about all the stuff going on round me, in the undergrowth and the trees; by the time I got home I had the idea for the werlings and on it went. This is very much scary fairyland, not quirky reality. It isn't about the real world...there are no real people in this book."

As such, had it been an easier project to write, I asked. "If you know who the characters are, and treat them as real individuals, that always makes it

easier,” Jarvis says. “You have to work hard to make the readers suspend their disbelief... to want to live in, or at least visit the places you’re writing about. *Thorn Ogres* has been like a completely clean sheet of paper for me and I’ve loved it because I haven’t been constrained by anything.”

It almost sounds as if Jarvis had been searching for something new, but not so, apparently. “I wasn’t actually looking for an idea - if you’re desperately searching for one they very often don’t come,” he explains. “This one popped into my head and made me laugh, and the fact that it’s a new direction is pure luck. The fact is, though, I’d written all I could about the Deptford mice, and nearly everyone in Whitby’s dead now...although there is something else I’ve got to do with the Wyrd Museum...”

Jarvis is that rare character type - a true original. He creates worlds of fantasy and has the ability to make them real in words, three dimensions and pictures as well. The really odd thing is, he’s worried that someone else is going to have the same weird notion and get it published first. “I live with these ideas and get really excited about them,” he says, “and when I’m like that I never tell anyone anything about what I’m doing; I’m a bit like a chef who won’t open the oven door for fear of ruining the soufflé...and I’m just basically paranoid as well, I suppose - that’s why Puffin didn’t know what I was going to do until a year after I came to them!”

Locked away with his precious idea, Jarvis produces what he describes as a map for the book. “It’s a storyline, really, but they can get quite long...up to 80 pages or so,” he says. “And then I make the character models, out of whatever works...a little bit of fibreglass, a little bit of wire, hair, fur, glue, paint and spit ...they’re great to take around schools and bring out when the kids are bored of looking at me!”

He does his own illustrations not only because he has the talent and ability, but also because he doesn’t think anyone else could get inside his head and see everything the way he does, which is a fair point, especially when you find out what a thorn ogre really looks like. “The way I see it, a model is just a 3D drawing and writing’s just like drawing with words - they’re not that different,” Jarvis avers. “And when I’m writing I’m looking at a widescreen picture in my head and just taking notes.”

Talking of movies, isn't there supposed to be a film of *The Deptford Mice*? "There's supposed to have been one for the last six years," nods Jarvis, "and the BBC want to do *The Alchemyst's Cat* as well...I sort of prefer the idea of my books on TV, it's so much more immediate; as a viewer it's also what I like because there's more interaction than with a movie, you can all sit around and chat about what you're watching - and there's also the advantage of having a serial, which always gets more out of a book."

Unlike most of us, Jarvis knows what he's going to be doing up until well into the next millennium - there being, at the very least, two more Hagwood books to not only write but think up titles for. Titles, he lets on, not being his strong point. He is, he says, not a slow writer, but a lazy one: "When it's all happening - all the action and the death - I'm right there and I can do 20 pages of good stuff in a day," he says, "but when I'm not in the mood I can spend all day looking for the right CD to put on!"