



# Windows into Illustration: Jan Fearnley

Article Author:

[Jan Fearnley](#) [1]

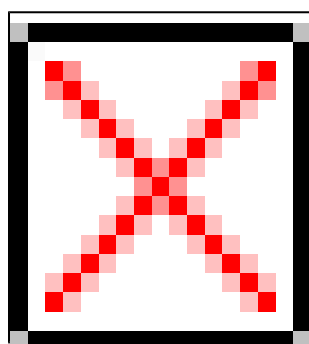
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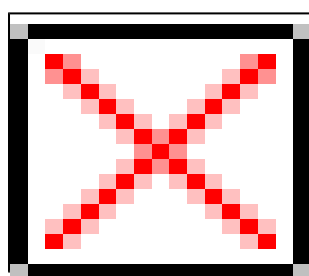
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**Jan Fearnley** on how she went about illustrating **Harry and the Jaggedy Daggers**.



After training as a graphic designer in Newcastle, Jan Fearnley became a primary school teacher. Her interest in early literacy led to her creating her own children's books characterized by framed or vignettted scenes full of delightful detail. Here, Jan Fearnley explains the thinking behind her latest picture book **Harry and The Jaggedy Daggers**.

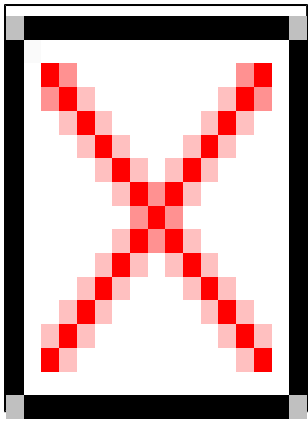
Harry began as a small sketchbook image of a mouse paddling a teacup. My publisher was smitten with it. She challenged me to write and illustrate a series of stories inspired by it. After a lot of thinking, I discovered the little mouse's story. In this book Harry is heartbroken when his boat is dashed and smashed on the dangerous, mean old rocks - the terrible Jaggedy Daggers!



I've never written a series before, and I wasn't sure how best to go about it. I only knew that I wanted each story to shine with its own integrity. My musings and sketches led me to create a little world, a community of animals that provided the framework and inspiration for me. They are introduced on a map in **Harry and the Jaggedy Daggers**.

The setting of Harry reflects a community where found and washed-up items are part of the fabric of the pictures. I wanted it to resonate with children because they have an innate capacity to use their imaginations to transform objects. A box becomes a boat or a castle. A kettle is a house for a toad. Actually, I really do have a toad living in an old blue kettle in my garden?

Children love to make dens out of 'found things' - as an adult, I still do this on my allotment! I've always been fascinated by the idea of another world living parallel to ours, albeit crossing over at times - a bit like **The Borrowers**.



In the pictures there are real items collaged into the artwork. The buildings juxtaposed are traditional or fanciful. I imagine each one having a story, possibly swept up by the wind and the sea. It heightens the sense of an intriguing community. I also wanted to bring as much detail and generosity to the illustrations as possible, to prove to myself that I could still create artworks with a high level of detail.

### **Introducing collage**

A few years ago, one of my eyes was damaged by a negligent surgeon. I spent many months unable to see properly. It was one of the most depressing, exhausting and frightening times of my life, compounded by the fact that the surgeon and his employers concealed the severity of my injury.

When the truth came out ? after I suffered an episode of total blindness ? I had to undergo two surgeries to enable me to function. I was told to prepare myself for the worst; that my eye was so badly torn that any operation would be extremely risky and losing its sight was a real possibility.

I started using collage as a means to continue bringing detail and texture into my artworks should the worst happen. It also gave me a chance to slow down my drawing process, which I found invaluable in rebuilding my confidence. Unbelievably, every time I had questioned my impaired vision, my ?carers? told me I was mistaken, that my vision was fine, that I was imagining it. This went on for months. It made me doubt the very things I was seeing, which is catastrophic for an illustrator. When you lose confidence in the instinctiveness of your drawings, you question and check everything. It nearly destroyed me. Using collage, printing and fabrics to ?draw? in different ways helped me to rebuild and also prepare myself in case I lost my eye. It enabled me to create something positive and beautiful from a nightmare situation.

The boathouse Harry lives in is made an old wooden fruit box, onto which I printed using hand-cut lino fruit motifs. A boat hook is a real safety pin. Shoes, violins and handbags make townhouses. I included a plethora of recycled objects, a baseball becomes a buoy, a cigar tube is a chimney and ring-pulls from a couple of beer cans are the door knockers!

It?s important that this book has a scary element. The Jaggedy Daggers ? based on the Black Middens near the River Tyne ? serve that purpose. They?re alive, creepy enough to make you shudder, but compelling enough to make you want to look at them again and again.

The story is a tale of bravery, of triumph over adversity. Given my recent experience, I know how Harry must have felt when he faced the huge storm.

**Harry and The Jaggedy Daggers** (978-1405261685) by Jan Fearnley is published by Egmont at £10.99 hbk.

Jan Fearnley?s awards include the Association of Illustrators Gold Award in 2002 for **Mr Wolf and the Three Bears**, an Oppenheim Portfolio Gold Award for **A Perfect Day For It** and the Stockport Children's Book award for **Mr Wolf?s Pancakes**.

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