



HARRY POTTER AND ME: AN INTERVIEW WITH LEVI PINFOLD

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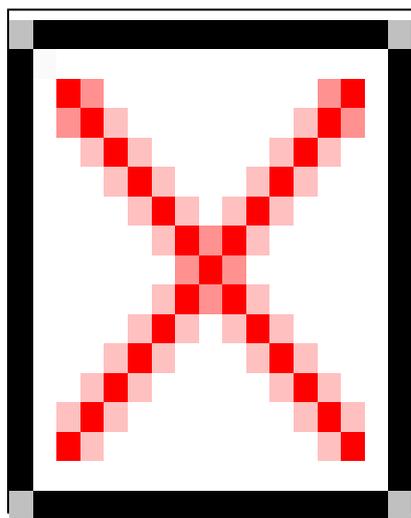
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Carey Fluker Hunt interviews **Levi Pinfold** about his illustrations for the **House Editions** of the **Harry Potter** books.

The fourth volume in Bloomsbury's series of **Harry Potter House Editions** has been published, but **Levi Pinfold** still can't quite believe he's illustrating them, as he explained to **Carey Fluker Hunt** who interviewed him for **Books for Keeps**.



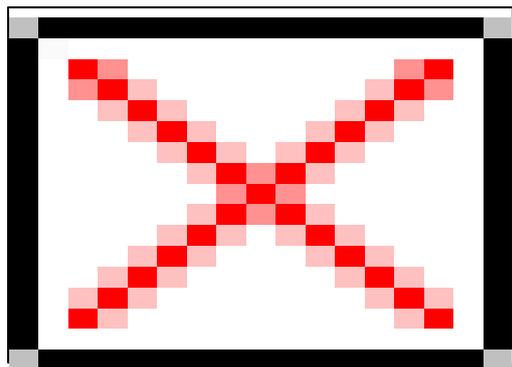
Like many of his generation, Levi Pinfold's **Harry Potter** memories are woven into the fabric of his life. He devoured the first four titles as a teenager after his family returned to the UK from Australia - a reading experience he remembers as hugely enjoyable and "a way of reconnecting with English culture" - and discovered the later volumes while painting tempera artwork for [Black Dog](#) [3], his **Greenaway Medal**-winning first picturebook. "Stephen Fry read me **Harry Potter** while I was working in the studio," he laughs. "That last spread on **Black Dog** took me the whole of **The Half Blood Prince!**"

Measuring endeavour in "Harry Potter units" might not be standard, but given the boy wizard's continuing popularity it makes an odd kind of sense. According to a YouGov poll, 68% of British 25-34 year olds are **Harry Potter** fans. They grew up with the books, they revisit them frequently and now they're passing on the magic. This year, audiences celebrated a truly multigenerational **Harry Potter Book Night** - and Levi flew in from Australia to join them. How did he land such an exciting commission? And how does it feel to be picturing the **Harry Potter** universe?

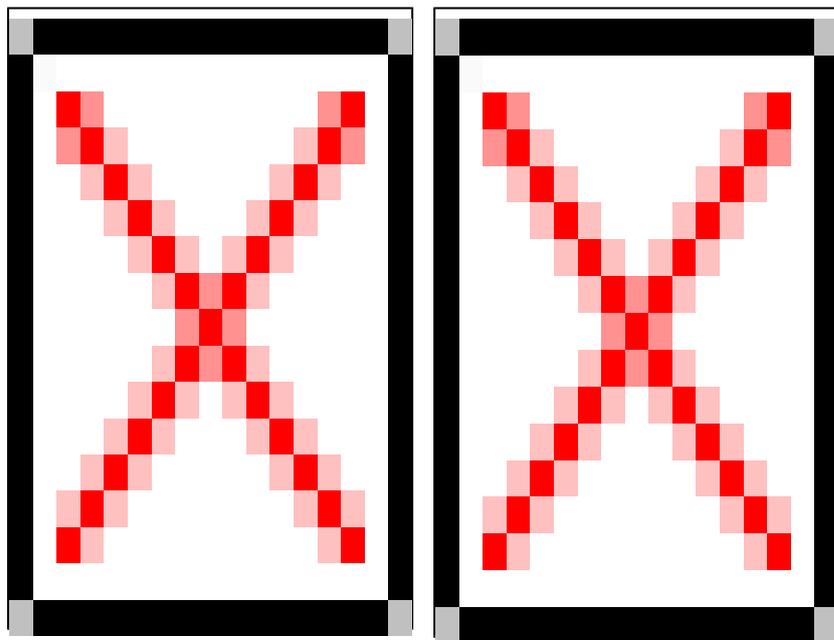
Despite his many awards, Levi is modest about his achievements and the opportunities they provide. But it wasn't luck

that brought Levi and Harry Potter together. Levi was working with Bloomsbury on AF Harrold's [The Song from Somewhere Else](#) [4], creating atmospheric artwork for a complex novel, when Bloomsbury asked if he "might be interested" in taking on the **Harry Potter Twentieth Anniversary House Editions** - four versions of each title, one per House, complete with all-new front and end-matter. "I tried not to act too excited," says Levi, "but it felt like I'd stepped into a dream. It was like there were bluebirds flying around my head!"

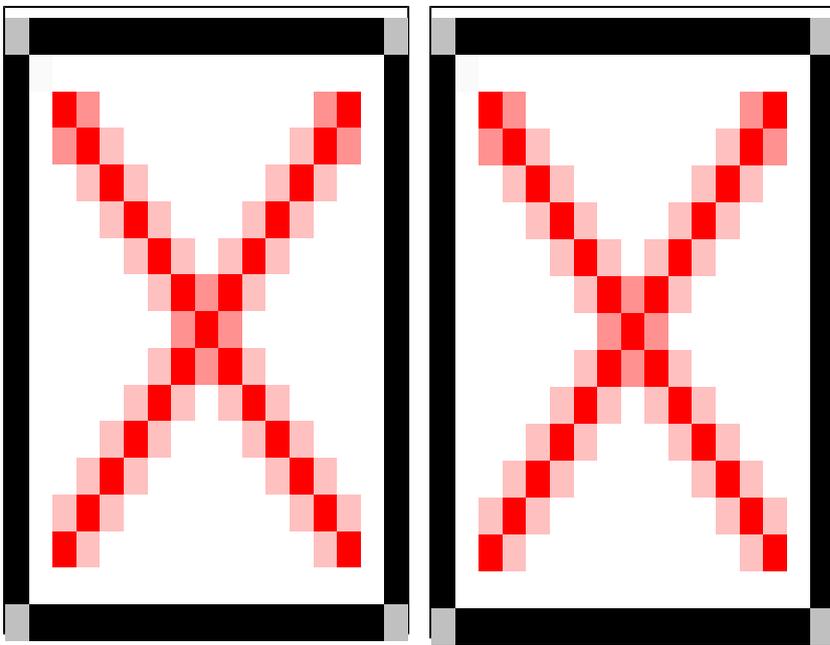
Much planning was done at Bloomsbury before Levi could begin, and once he'd started sketching, refining and producing his intricately inked drawings, he was still part of an intensely collaborative process. So far, he's created a Hogwarts map and four House Crests, together with character portraits, differentiated book-jackets, a design for each common room and more. His illustrations are deeply enticing for anyone familiar with the Harry Potter universe - there's much pleasure in seeing old friends depicted "just so" - but there's plenty for newly fledged Potterheads to feast on, too.



Levi's borders and backgrounds are packed with revealing symbols and details. Significant objects are interwoven with natural forms, recalling woodcuts by anonymous medieval artists alongside Durer and Blake, and ideas as diverse as medieval heraldry and Philip Pullman's alethiometer have influenced his House-themed crests and book-jackets. "I love coded systems and the language of alchemy. It's saying something specific about qualities, not just concrete things. And I've always enjoyed the artistry in heraldry - it's a beautiful system of expressing complex things simply."



Each Hogwarts House has a clearly-defined set of values and attributes that must be communicated, so Levi's interests and his brief are well-aligned - and he's had plenty of time to "get inside" each House. The **Pottermore** website sorted Levi into Ravenclaw, but he thinks that "Hufflepuff is where it's at," and when pressed, admits to liking his Hufflepuff illustrations. "They've got these really friendly natural forms like apples and bees". I love that side of things, it makes you smile when you're doing it." But as he confesses, "the stuff that comes out of me the easiest is the dark stuff. I grew up liking comics, so it feels quite natural."

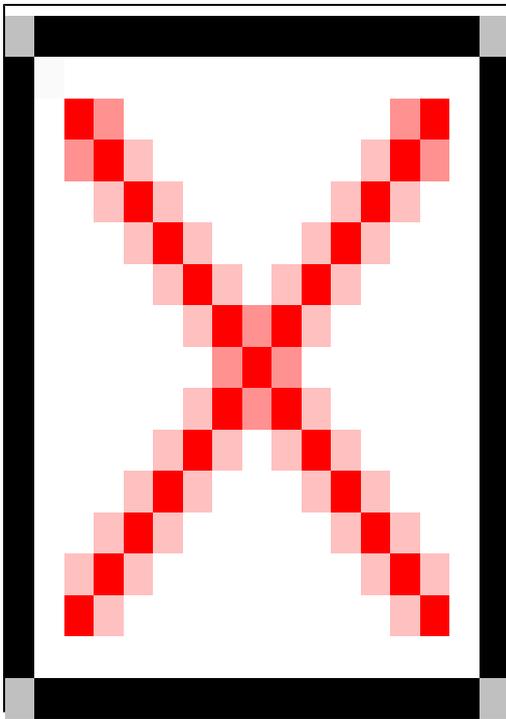


Levi isn't alone in having a House preference, and the topic elicits much debate amongst the Potterhead community. *"Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw are the most popular,"* asserts one fan online. *"Many of us are bookworms, like Ravenclaws, and Hufflepuffs are known as lovable, quirky cinnamon rolls. Everyone wants to be a cinnamon roll."*

Some illustrators would be daunted by this level of interest, but Levi has nothing but appreciation for the "smart cinnamon rolls" who comprise the audience for these books. "It's brilliant to be working on something with such a massive readership. **Harry Potter** fans are really generous. It's an amazing thing to be around that enthusiasm!"

Levi is now connected to the biggest-ever community of readers, with all the joy and opportunity that brings. Responsibility and pressure could be the downside, but Levi has the tenacity and imagination to embrace the learning opportunities that come with illustrating to such a demanding brief. "I've found these the most technically challenging things I've done," he says. "But Bloomsbury always pick some wonderful moments — stuff that hasn't been pictured before, and that's really enjoyable."

Responding to the challenges has offered Levi new tools and insights. For his earlier picturebooks, he produced hundreds of loose sketches, followed by big, time-consuming tempera paintings, and although he began work in the same way on this commission (drawing numerous pencil sketches and refining them, then using ink and a tiny paintbrush to produce highly detailed artwork) he soon realized that he needed to speed up. These days, most of Levi's sketches are done on a digital tablet. "It was a case of learning from my experience of doing things traditionally, and applying them to a digital mindset — basically layering everything up in the way you would do a painting. Every time you make a mistake with pen and ink you have to start again, so I'm just cutting that step out. But it still requires the hand, and it still requires that delicate touch."



What does the future hold for Harry Potter and Levi Pinfold? Illustrations for **The Order of the Phoenix** have already been delivered and Levi is currently working on interiors for the sixth book, to be followed by **The Deathly Hallows** and what he describes as 'more exciting projects with Bloomsbury.' He's also been working on a picturebook with Walker - **Paradise Sands** - so it's a busy time. But as he says with a grin, 'I'm extremely passionate about this stuff!'

And if passion is linked to successful work - as Levi believes - then we're in for more treats.

Carey Fluker Hunt is a writer and children's book consultant. She runs the website [Cast of Thousands](#) [5].

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