



*A conversation with illustrator*  
**Christopher Cyr**



Christopher Cyr talks about his debut picture book, *Who Will Bell the Cat?*, one of Patricia C. McKissack's final books.

★ “Cyr, in his debut picture book, creates an atmospheric and precarious landscape through brilliant use of shadow and color.”

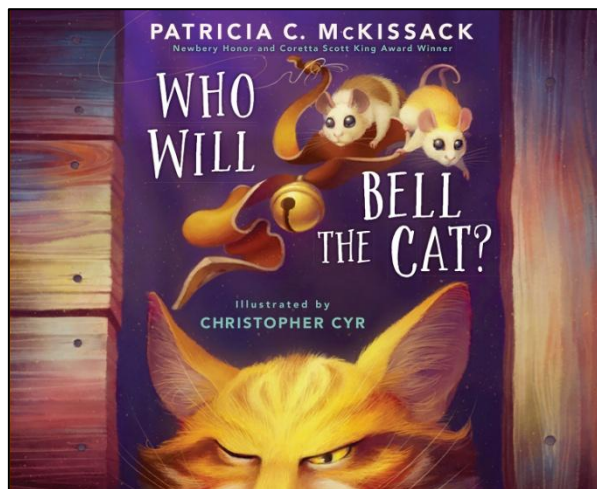
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

**Christopher, please tell us about *Who Will Bell the Cat?***

*Who Will Bell the Cat?* is the story of a group of mice who live peacefully in a barn. When they take in a cat one cold winter evening, they are surprised to find that all Marmalade wants to do is exactly what cats do best—hunt mice. After a hasty meeting the mice decide they must tie a bell around her neck so that they can hear her coming; getting the job done, however, is more difficult than they thought.

**You're a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design's illustration program. Tell us about your process for creating the illustrations in *Who Will Bell the Cat?***

My illustrations always start with sketching. For this book, after deciding on the looks of the main mice and researching old barns in my area, I drew the layouts of each page on paper. From there I scanned them into the computer and began adding value, and eventually color digitally in Adobe Photoshop. Digitally painting the image until it comes together is always my favorite part of the process—adding in all the small details and textures.



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**What inspired you to illustrate, and when did you know you would become an illustrator?**

When I was young I loved picture books. I would spend much longer on books with pictures than books without because I would take my time absorbing everything the illustrations had to offer. My inspirations for my artwork come from everything in my world around me; from my home and life, games and movies, my imagination and the things I read. When I realized my art could be a wonderful fit for children's books like the ones I consumed with such fervor as a child I thought it would be a great way to tell the stories I wanted to tell and create the worlds I wanted to create.

**What makes this book special to you? What impression do you hope it will leave with young readers?**

This book is special to me not only for being my first book but also because I grew up among old barns like the one the mice live in. It feels almost nostalgic to me, like it has all the little pieces of the barns I've visited. I hope the young readers who enjoy my illustrations in this book are able to feel like they could jump into the pictures with these mice and escape to this world.

**Which spread from *Who Will Bell the Cat?* is your favorite?**

My favorite spread in the book is when Wee, Tiny, and Teeny Mouse are nearly caught by Marmalade when Teeny Mouse sneezes and wakes the cat from her slumber. I think it's a very exciting moment in the book, which I tried to bring to life with a big pop of red, and it still makes me laugh a little when I see it.

**What was your favorite book growing up?**

*The Fat Cat: A Danish Folktale* by Jack Kent. It may not be the most well-known children's book, but the humorous story and quirky characters kept me entertained and delighted as a child. I bet Marmalade and the cat in that book could have been friends!

**What would be your dream book to illustrate and why?**

This has me overwhelmingly stumped! There are just so many stories I'd love to illustrate it's hard to pick just one. Fairy tales and folklore were always a favorite of mine, so anything in that realm—especially anything involving dragons—would make my inner child proud.

## About the Author

**CHRISTOPHER CYR** is an artist from New England. He graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and is also trained in animation.

Visit him online at <http://www.plaidcats.com/index.html>.