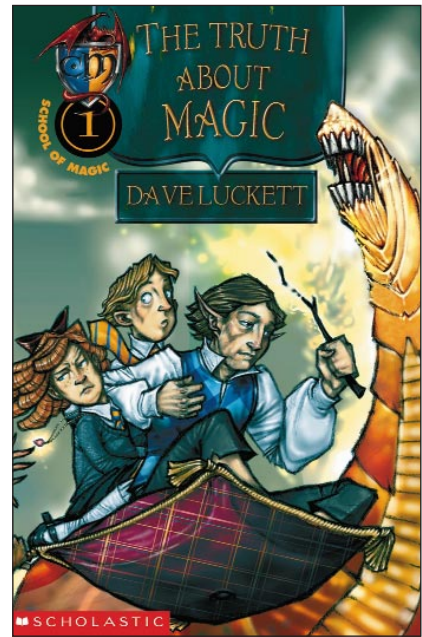


The Truth About Magic

Written by Dave Lockett



◀ The Back Story ▶ with Dave Lockett

The author notes at the back of *The Truth About Magic* mention that fantasy and science fiction are your favourite genres. Your website comments that you like science fiction because you're 'living in it'. What do you mean by this?

The world has changed so enormously in my lifetime that I hardly recognise it. But I know enough to say for sure that this is just the start. Pretty soon we'll have to start writing inheritance laws for clones. Dealing with interactive virtual reality that you can't tell from actual reality. Figuring out what property rights one has over one's own genetic code. Writing ethical guidelines for reconstituting extinct animals. And so on. I think our children are going to have to work out what to do about living to 150. Or maybe longer! Science fiction? Watch this space. You're living in it, too.

Where do you get your ideas?

Nonfiction – history and science magazines, mostly. And by asking that most important of all questions, the one that starts with the words 'What if'. Take magic. It needs rules. Everything has rules. There are things you can and can't do with magic; costs that have to be considered; scarcities; limitations; difficulties. Out of its limitations comes the shape of the community that uses it. Now ask, 'What if'. 'What if magic worked in this way, or that way? What would happen then?' If it was a rare talent and a difficult but very useful art, then you'd expect it to work the way all such arts worked in history, like, for instance, iron founding for ancient Celts, or gothic masonry for medieval kingdoms. Reading history gives the clue about how to treat it, but more. It also gives stories, because history is stories about things that happen to people.

Names are important. How do you think of these things?

I don't really know. I usually try a name over and over, speaking it and writing it, until it feels right. I have little patience for characters named H'quir or Sarulandra or Vkornitwarp. I'm writing in English, often pretending it's a different language, but still the names have to work in English and they have to be short and handy.

How do you plan a book that you are going to write?

I start having conversations with people in my head, and pretty soon they're having conversations with each other. They start having arguments, taking sides, finding answers, moving on. The story starts to tell itself then, and I start writing it down. Usually – but not always – I know how it's going to come out, but not much more. Usually, I don't know how they're going to get there, and I have to wait for them to tell me. I know this sounds mad, but it's the way it works!

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

Did you have to make many changes in the editing phase of this book?

This is about the fifth version, completely different from most of the other four. All I had was an idea – gift-givers and a particular set of gifts that could be used in surprising ways. The rest was all fit-and-try, looking for an interesting conflict and an adventure with the spice of danger and creepiness about it.

This is Book 1 of the series and I believe you are working on the sequel. How many books do you plan to have in this series?

I've finished and delivered the sequel, *The Return of Rathalorn*, and there will be at least one more.

Why do you think kids enjoy reading your books (and this book in particular) so much?

I hope they enjoy them because they're really about humans (elves with tempers are human beings, too), but just removed enough to be interesting and strange. Humans have to master their powers and learn how to cope with the world and find a place in it, and deal with people who wish them harm, and conquer fears, and manage resources and all that stuff. But I've always thought that telling stories in those terms is boring. That's why I tell them in different terms – elves, and the Department of Wishes of Faerie, not the boss and the office.

What do you particularly like about this book?

The people. I really like Dink and Alain and Mr Tipkins. I even have a sneaking understanding of Rathalorn. He gets his comeuppance, sure, but he's a product of his upbringing. His rich and classy family always looked down on him because he hasn't much magical talent. He overcompensates for it, and that's very unpleasant for those around him, but you can understand why. In the second book, he gains a bit of stature, finds something he's good at, and actually turns up trumps at the end, but not before causing a lot more trouble.

About the author: Dave Lockett

I discovered science fiction and fantasy at age thirteen, while cleaning out my parents' garage. A previous tenant had left a tea-chest full of pulp science fiction magazines. The covers were lurid, but the stories were wonderful, and I was promptly hooked.

For most of the next fifteen years I laboured under the delusion that nobody else liked this stuff. After all, it was totally different to what was presented at school. In fantasy and science fiction stories, people did things, rather than talk about their state of mind, and their efforts quite often succeeded. In what was called literature at school,

the characters were always defeated. I could never understand why this was thought to be entertaining.

In the late 1970s, I found SF fandom. Fandom encouraged my writing, brought me into contact with writers, and was forgiving of my many stumbles. Slowly, I learned the craft.

The result has been two Aurealis Awards (for Australian science fiction), two appearances on the WA Premier's Book Prize shortlist, fifteen stand-alone books, and a dozen or so short stories. I hope that the critics will continue to be benign and not notice that my books are all about stature, courage, hope and salvation through our own efforts. Because I'm not going to write any other sort!

Teaching Ideas ✓

Before Reading ✓

■ Show students the front cover of *The Truth About Magic*. Ask what genre this book might be. What clues are on the cover to show that this novel is a fantasy? Encourage students to list other fantasy books that they have read. Compare the lists as a whole class. Have most students read a fantasy novel? Do they generally like fantasy novels or do they prefer other genres such as realism, crime, humour etc?

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

- From their previous reading experiences, ask students to brainstorm what elements are generally in fantasy novels? (For example, magic, witches, wizards, wands, good versus evil.) After examining the cover and the blurb, have students predict what elements might be in this book.
- Discuss the 'I' that is in the circle on the front cover. What is the purpose of this? Establish that this book is the first one in a series. Do students generally like getting involved with a series? What advantages are there? (One advantage is that the reader is familiar with the main characters.)

Activity

Baby shower

Read the blurb on the back cover. It mentions that Mr Tipkins gives a gift to a newborn baby. The blurb implies that things then do not go according to plan. Remembering that this is a fantasy, make a list of three or more gifts that Mr Tipkins might have given the baby. Use your imagination and have fun. When you have completed your list, read it out to class members. Discuss the ideas presented. Are they relevant to a fantasy novel?

During reading ✓

- Place students into small groups and ask each member to take it in turns to read a short section. Encourage students to discuss anything that they are not sure of. At the end of each chapter, have group members revisit the title of the chapter to discuss its relevance. Does the title give a clue about what is going to happen in the chapter? Is this useful?

After groups have read the first two chapters, ask students what they think about the two main characters, Mr Tipkins and Rathalorn. Do they have the same background and personality traits or do they differ from each other? Have each group predict what might happen between these characters as the story progresses. (When students have read the entire novel, have them compare their predictions with what actually happened.)

- Time is an interesting concept in this novel. Time goes much more slowly for elves than humans. Ask students if they find that time sometimes seems to go really slowly yet on other occasions seems to fly by. Why might this be? This could be extended to discussing the 24-hour day and the length of the year. How can these time constructs be explained naturally, and how have they come to be universally accepted? Encourage students to prepare a research report to find out.

Activities

Wizzy wands

Mr Tipkins and Rathalorn have very different wands to each other. If you had to choose a wand, what would it be made out of and how powerful would it be? Draw a picture of your wand, or create one out of recycled materials, and label its special qualities.

Let's fly away

The transport in this novel is fantastic! Types of transport include flying rugs, flying cushions and the Rainbow Road. Imagine that you have been asked to think of another 'out of this world' way to travel. What fantastic method would you create and why? Present your idea to the class.

After reading ✓

- Once students have read the book, discuss its title: *The Truth About Magic*. What is meant by this title?
- As we know, Alain and Dink were each given special, or not so special, gifts. These gifts did cause some problems for the characters but they also came in handy occasionally as well. Discuss with students when these gifts helped or hindered the characters.

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

- Encourage students to brainstorm some of the opposing forces and themes in this novel. (For example, rich versus poor; human versus elf, good versus evil.) Have students give an example of each.
- This is the first book in a series. It ends with Rathalorn stepping onto the Rainbow Road. Place students into groups to discuss what might happen to Rathalorn in the next book. What other characters from this book might be involved?

Activities

Character profile

Choose one character from this story and create a profile of them. Headings might include: name, appearance, species (eg elf, human), personality traits, and why you liked or disliked the character.

Book review

You have been asked to write a 200-word review on this book for a world-renowned international literature magazine. Go for it!

Magic?

Magic often seems like it would be fun to do. However, it is not so good when someone puts a banishing spell on you. Can you find examples of some 'good' magic and 'bad' magic that were in this story? With a friend and some props, mime one of these magical occasions to class members. Can they tell what you are doing?

My magic

Write your own fantasy story! Think about the types of characters you will need in your story (elves, humans, wizards, dragons etc), what they will need (wands, means of transport, housing etc) and what is going to happen to them (an evil witch wants the protagonist's special powers, kidnapped by a dragon, protagonist asked to rescue someone etc). Remember that most stories have an orientation, a complication and a resolution. When completed, read your story to the class.

Literature study

Help students gain a greater understanding of *The Truth About Magic*, and of the fantasy genre, by having them undertake the following activities and class discussions. Encourage students to generate other questions that will help them to think more deeply about the book.

- Examine how the author uses words to create a sense of fantasy. (Examples include names and titles of people and places, and the wording of spells.)
- Visit the library to obtain other fantasy novels by Dave Lockett. If possible, take these books home to read. Can you see any similarities between the books?
- Do some research to find the names of authors who write fantasy for Upper Primary readers. List the titles of the books. Create a class list and put a tick beside the books you have read. You can then use this data to compile graphs – which are a useful visual representation of information.
- You should now have built up a reasonable knowledge about the fantasy genre. Attempt to define what this genre is in a short paragraph. These definitions could be displayed in the school library.