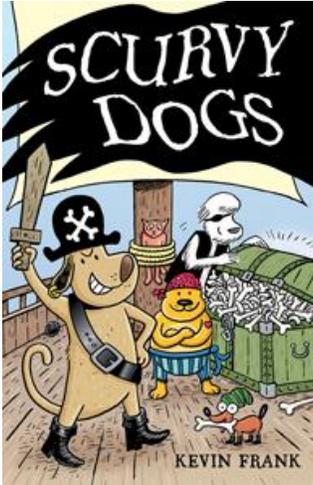




**INTERVIEW: KEVIN FRANK
(SCURVY DOGS)**

Scurvy Dogs is a fully illustrated middle grade graphic novel for kids who like silly books. Let Kevin Frank take you on a swashbuckling journey like no other!



Kane Miller: As a child, what role did books play in your home?

Kevin Frank: We loved books in our home. My dad would read stories to my brother and me before bed each night (*Watership Down* was a favorite), and my mom was our church librarian for a while. They kept a close eye on how much TV we watched, but there was no limit to how much time we could spend reading. Summers included frequent trips to the public library where I checked out every science fiction book they had to offer (it was a small-town library), along with every "how to draw" book I could find. We also took advantage of the school book club program. When I was in grade school, I remember ordering a book described as something like "young boys stranded on a desert island learn how to survive," which sounded like an exciting adventure story. It was *Lord of the Flies*, and it took me years to really appreciate that book.

KM: When did you first become aware that "illustrator" was an actual occupation?

KF: One of the how-to-draw books I found at our library featured a section on careers in illustration/cartooning. It must have been from the 1950s because all of the photos were of men wearing fedoras and suits, sitting at drafting boards. Not a very realistic view of the industry even when I was young, but it did pique my interest: "Wait... people get PAID for doing this?" I was hooked. But I have yet to meet any fellow authors or artists who work in suits and fedoras all day. Most of us can't be bothered to get out of our PJs.

KM: Did you encounter any barriers while pursuing your professional interests?

KF: Honestly, no. Sure, it's difficult to get published (and paid!), but I get to do something I really enjoy, and then get the added pleasure of sharing my work with others. And most times I even get paid. I know people who have encountered real barriers in life, and I'm fully aware of how fortunate I have been. Although I did once get a wicked paper cut.



KM: What are the challenges you face as a writer/illustrator for children, and what have those taught you?

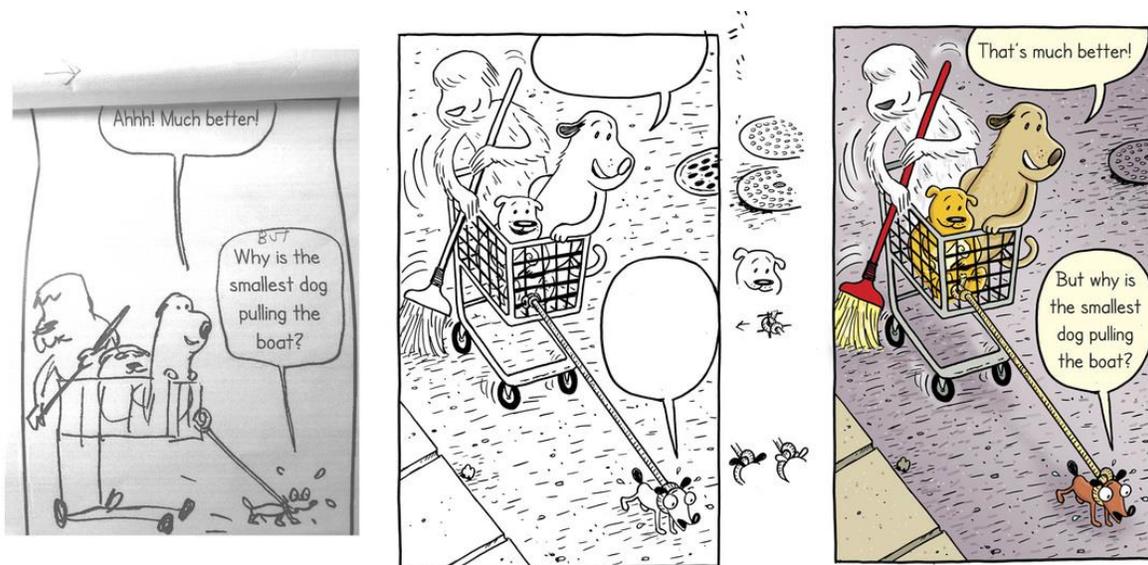
KF: I started writing for my own children, naturally, so I learned firsthand some of the things that did and didn't work. I found that pictures can tell a story too, and how disarming that can be for children. They think that they aren't reading, but of course they are; they're just reading a different language. Combining words and images in a format like a graphic novel helps to expand their grasp of narrative—"It can be like this. Or it can be like that."—to be followed by questions: "What else could it be like?" I think that's very exciting.

KM: *Scurvy Dogs* features a crew of backyard pets seeking adventure as pirates. Are you a keen observer of animal behavior?

KF: No, not at all! I just decided that if Snoopy can imagine he's flying a World War I Flying Ace, then my dogs could imagine that they're ferocious pirates. But I have not observed any actual dogs in pirate costumes in my neighborhood.

KM: Did you always envision *Scurvy Dogs* as a graphic novel?

KF: I envision everything as a graphic novel! I wish I could draw myself in this interview...of course, in my PJs. That's how I frame stories, through a combination of words and pictures. For instance, why would I describe three dogs paddling a shopping cart when I could draw it? Plus, there are details I can add to a story through images that I would not be able to squeeze into the word count of an early-reader story. It's such a cliché to say that a picture is worth 1000 words, but there is truth to it, and this means that I'm inserting 1000 words into every page of my stories.



Work flow from *Scurvy Dogs* by Kevin Frank (Kane Miller).

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KM: What steps would you suggest to a child or anyone with an interest in becoming an illustrator?

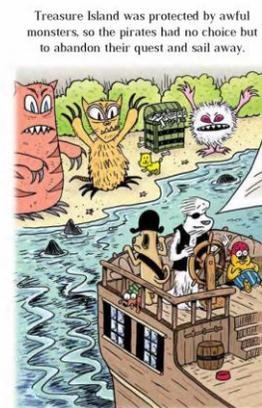
KF: Practice. Not exciting advice, I realize, but that's really all there is to it. Do it. Do it again and again. And try to do it better each time. Then find something that interests you, and write (or draw) about that. Monsters? Horses? Aliens? Toast! Dirt! Tell that story! It's YOUR story and you're the only one who can tell it.

Next, get your story published, it doesn't even matter where. Find the place that will accept your work; some magazine or blog or school newsletter will take your story or art, but seeing your work published is an infectious thrill that will spur you on to create more and better work. "My work has been seen in..." All it takes is once. Then you use that first publication as a stepping stone to getting your work accepted elsewhere.

KM: To you, what is the power of literacy and early reading?

KF: For me, early reading is worthless if it's not fun. Nothing squelches a new reader faster than being forced to read some book they hate. That's why I write books that I want to read myself. I confess that sometimes I crack myself up while reading my own stories, and I hope that joy translates to my readers. All the opportunities that early literacy give to children can be so easily forfeited by one or two boring books. That's the secret power of pictures in a story. They're fun, inviting and engaging.

KM: As are you, Kevin! Thanks for chatting... and thank you for Tinkles! We love him!



When you've finished *Scurvy Dogs*, be sure to check out the sequel [*Scurvy Dogs and the Dinosaur Boneyard!*](#)