



Windows into Illustration: Elys Dolan

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[Elys Dolan](#) [1]

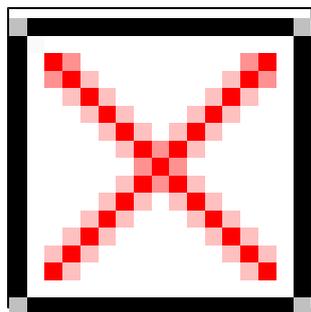
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Windows into Illustration

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Weasels, weasels everywhere: Elys Dolan on her debut picturebook



Elys Dolan's hugely original and witty debut picture book **Weasels** was shortlisted for the **Roald Dahl Funny Book Prize**. Here she explains its genesis and her illustration technique.

Weasels came about while I was on the MA in Children's Book Illustration at the Cambridge School of Art. We did a class project where everyone was given a letter of the alphabet to illustrate and I was very disappointed to get W because what can you draw that beginnings with W? If only I'd got T or S or even A! I think we can all agree W is a rubbish letter and there's obviously nothing at all beginning with W that's any good to draw.

So from that I ended up spending the rest of my Masters doing a whole book about weasels plotting world domination. They conduct their dastardly plans in a huge underground base full of high-tech machinery, laboratories and frothy coffees. Disaster strikes when THE MACHINE, the key to their plans, breaks and Weasel leader (who has the personality of Blofeld and the dress sense of Chairman Mao) declares they must find a way to fix it!

I probably watched too many Bond films growing up because we can safely say this book is influenced by those Bond-style villains, but some more mundane influences also crept in. For instance my own time spent in caffeine dependant workplaces definitely comes across in the weasel's love of a good coffee and the deeply unsafe use of a drill occurs more in my everyday life than you'd think.

I always start my work with research. This can range from going out and drawing things in the actual real world for visual reference, or actually doing things to get a feel for the story I'm writing. Here are some of the things I've done in the name of research:

Followed a ferret around for hours (turns out what they do all day isn't plot world domination).

Watched all of the **Star Wars** films.

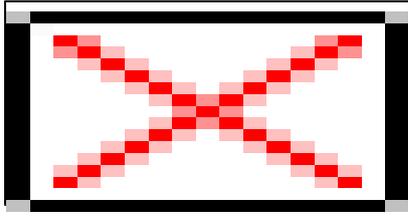
Shouted at pigeons.

Got thrown out of the Tate gallery.

Sat in Costa and heroically sampled many iced coffees. I don't like coffee so I AM a hero.

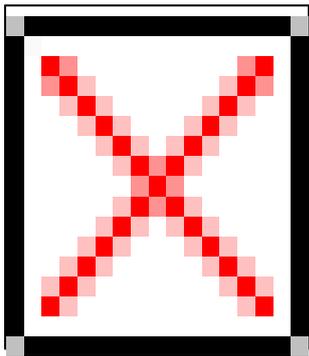
Hid behind a wardrobe in a country house.

Touched things I shouldn't have in the Science Museum.



Once I've collected that valuable stock of information, it's time to actually create the book. I use the research and any doodling I've done to create roughs which are pencil drawings of every single page in the book. After that it's time to employ the illustrator's most illustrious and time honoured skill; colouring in. I created the full colour artwork for **Weasels** by tracing my roughs using a light box and coloured pens to create the outline. Then, on a separate piece of paper, I painted the solid colour using ink washes. Once I had my separate outline and ink colour sheets I scanned them into the computer and used digital witchcraft (I think people call it 'photoshop') to layer them up and create the finished artwork.

And there you have it, all my secrets. To be absolutely honest with you I just tend to make books that make me laugh. I'd love to get all super intellectual and talk about the in depth psychology and complex theorem I employed in the making of **Weasels** but really I just thought the idea of an underground base run by caffeine crazed weasels was a bit of a giggle. I hope you use this precious knowledge for the forces of good and not evil. If you must go down the other route though do it like a megalomaniac weasel, they have all the fun.



Weasels, Elys Dolan, Nosy Crow, 978-0857631992, 32pp, £10.99 hbk

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Source URL (retrieved on Jan '20): <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/204/childrens-books/articles/windows-into-illustration/windows-into-illustration-elys-dolan>

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