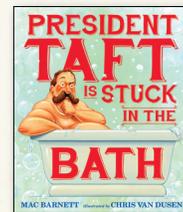


# PRESIDENT TAFT IS STUCK IN THE BATH

by Mac Barnett illustrated by Chris Van Dusen



## Q&A with Illustrator Chris Van Dusen



*What was it about the story line that initially appealed to you?*

Mac and I had been wanting to work together on a project for a long time, but somehow our schedules never quite lined up. *President Taft Is Stuck in the Bath* came at exactly the right time for both of us. What originally appealed to me about the manuscript was the historical aspect. A few years ago, I wrote and illustrated a book called *The Circus Ship*, which was loosely based on a true story. I guess you could call it historical fiction because I deviated quite a bit from the actual event, but I added an author's note to tell the true story on which the book was based. I'd been wanting to do another book along that line, and then Mac came up with *Taft*—author's note and all! Plus Mac's a great writer with an incredible sense of humor, and the way he crafted the story was so brilliant, I jumped on the chance to illustrate it.

*Describe the experience of painting President Taft.*

I had to buy extra tubes of peach-colored paint before I started the illustrations because President Taft was a huge man, and I knew there'd be a lot of skin! But I did tons of sketches before I found



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the right Taft for the book. It was a bit tricky—do I make him look exactly like he did in real life, or do I present a cartoonish Taft to match the humor of the story? In the end I found middle ground and combined the two—he still looks a lot like Taft, but with exaggerated features for the comic scenes. He was a *blast* to paint.

*Which scene from the book was most fun to illustrate?*

The scene that was the most fun to illustrate was the spread showing Taft flying out through the French doors. That's one of my favorite illustrations in the book. Bubble coverage was crucial in that painting!

*What is the best way to free someone who's stuck in a tub?*

If I had to guess, I would think that the secretary of agriculture was onto something—butter might do the trick.

*Did you learn any fun facts about President Taft while illustrating this book (besides the bath incident)?*

As you can imagine, I did a lot of research before I started sketching *Taft*, and the facts that Mac included in the author's note were hysterical. I also found out that President Taft was an avid golfer and the first U.S. president to embrace the game. There's a famous story about how he played at a course here in Maine called the Kebo Valley Golf Club in Bar Harbor. He ran into such trouble in a bunker on the 17th hole that he ended up scoring a 27 for the hole. I bet his temper was red hot after that incident!