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### **Tell us a little about your latest release...**

My latest release is my first novel, an epic fantasy called *DreamQuest*. I started this book in sixth grade, and it has a unique blend of humor, military strategy, romance, religion, and self-discovery that should appeal to a wide variety of readers. The story follows the young protagonist Tarthur as he travels the lands of Daranor in search of clues to the meaning behind an enigmatic dream.

### **What are you working on at the moment?**

I have two projects going on right now. I am writing a non-fiction account of a journey that a friend and I took around the world in 1999. We were on the Semester at Sea program the year that MTV's Road Rules filmed the adventure. I am also working on *ProphecyQuest*, a sequel to *DreamQuest*. The book is the second in a planned trilogy and delves much deeper into the world of Daranor, solving some old mysteries and offering tantalizing clues to some new ones.

### **When did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?**

I've always devoured books. I think it goes back to my parents' strong devotion to reading. In elementary school, my sister and I would win awards for things like checking the most books out of the library and in middle school I'd walk around the halls with my nose in a book, literally. It's a wonder that I didn't run into more things. I guess I'm not really answering the question. That might be because I still can't say that I want to be a writer. Right now, I'm just enjoying my work, and it's this sense of personal satisfaction in my ability to create something worthwhile that sustains my writing during the down times.

### **Who has had the most influence on your writing over the years?**

This is a tough one. On one level, I'd have to say that everyone who I have come in contact with has influenced my work to a degree, because they've influenced how I view fundamental things like human nature and the value of beauty. On another level, there certainly have been writers whose style has made its mark on me. I would count Lloyd Alexander, Terry Brooks, J.K. Rowling, C.S. Lewis, and Dan Brown among these influential individuals.

### **Who was your favorite teacher and what influence did s/he have?**

I have been truly fortunate to have many great teachers, so to single any one out would do an injustice to the rest. Still, I can say that Sue Giovanini, Rod McKinney, Antje Baeumner, Ted Tsumura, Maura Honen, and others have all had a great positive impact.

### **What is your greatest strength as a writer?**

Maybe we should let the critics answer this one. => Seriously, though, as non-fiction goes I'd have to say it's my ability to deconstruct a particular issue and come at it from multiple directions. On the fiction side, I'd say it's my ability to weave together many characters, themes and sub-plots into a coherent whole.

### **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Right now, I can't even tell you where I see myself in 5 months. However, I'd like to be married and have more published novels than kids. =>

### **When you're 80 and you look back on your life...**

I want people to say "Damn he looks good! Couldn't be a day over 50." Seriously, though, the greatest praise I can hope for is that people will say that the world is a better place because I have lived.

### **What are the best tools out there for new writers?**

Well, digital technology and the internet is obviously a huge thing, but the internet isn't a tool in and of itself in this context. Online writers and critique groups are important, both for polishing and promoting work. Perhaps the most important tool is often overlooked- the word processor. It's hard to believe what people did in the days where they had to type everything out by hand, or, \*gasp, use a pen and pencil!

### **How important do you think villains are in a story?**

Well, in non-fiction, having a 'pure' villain isn't too important, because in life things are rarely broken down along lines of good and evil. In fiction, however, especially fantasy, the villain becomes very important. No one is going to read a story about heroes who have to go find powerful weapons and fulfill prophecies just to go beat up an old troll with arthritis.

### **Why did you choose to write this particular subgenre?**

I've always loved fantasy. Something about the ability to create an entire new world calls out to me. I can make the sun rise in the west if I want to. (And I did) I may try my hand at other genres in the future.

### **Do you tend to see certain themes in your books?**

There are certain themes that I try to portray, such as the intrinsic value of all human life and the ability of people to change their world for the better. However, I have only completed one novel so far so these themes are still developing in my work.

### **How do you make your characters real and believable?**

I started off modeling many characters from people that I knew in real life. That helps me get an understanding of how they are in my mind, but for showing the reader, I think the most important tool is carefully constructed dialog. If you look at the Harry Potter series, for example, this is done so well that the characters often come off as being more believable than some characters in non-fiction stories.

### **What tricks and techniques do you use when plotting?**

The first thing that I do is draw out a rough outline. I try to get the story somewhere interesting, and then I check and double check to make sure that none of the characters have dubious motivations to get the story there. I dislike stories where things seem to happen 'for the plot,' like when it makes much more sense for a character to just do action A, but action B helps the plot along. From there, I just start writing and subplots always spring right up. There are enough characters that I never have a problem weaving together multiple points of view.

### **What tricks and techniques do you use when editing?**

Editing is key, and it's more important for authors now than ever before. For the first few edits, I just reread the story to try to catch typos and inconsistencies, both in character motivation and details. After that, I circulate the manuscript around to several trusted friends, take their comments, and make more changes. I'll read the entire manuscript aloud several times, as that sometimes helps to catch awkward sentences. Finally, I've found that I catch many more errors when reading backwards (by paragraphs) as otherwise I get too into the story and skip over small errors. Then, I'll send it out to different friends. I try to have at least ten people look at a manuscript in detail.

### **What promotions have you found to have the most impact?**

I have found that targeting sales to amazon.com or bn.com to occur in a specific time can raise the sales rank there greatly. Online book purchasing is becoming more and more important. I have developed a full web page dedicated to promoting *DreamQuest*, and filled it with animations and other contests. It's a great place to keep everything together, and you can make more money through affiliate programs. I also started a mailing list, so that when other books are ready I can advertise to that list and have quite a high sales percentage. Book signings are key, as an autograph really helps sell work, especially from an unknown author.

### **To what writers' organizations do you belong? Have they helped you grow?**

None now, although I'm looking into joining some in the future.

### **Do you have any good luck charms? Listen to music? Or other?**

Other than the computer, no. Although, I do like the feel of a well-balanced sword in my hand now and again to help me imagine. I generally don't listen to music, although when I'm editing I'll occasionally play some Final Fantasy/Dragon Warrior MIDI files.

### **If you could write any book you wanted, what would it be?**

That would be the very same book that I have written.

### **Where do you see the market heading in the next few years?**

Well, honestly I see the market going towards more online book purchasing. In the 5 year time frame, though, I see the market turning heavily towards the 'One Book' concept. That is, everyone would own one book with changeable pages, download an ebook into the spine, and the pages will change to form the particular book that the reader wishes. Current ebooks don't work because nobody wants to read it on their screen or print it out, but if new readers can give you the feel of a book in your hand, they will be much more successful.

### **How do you keep your creative well filled and avoid burnout?**

Easy- when I get tired of it I just go do something else. That's why my first book took 12 years to complete! Lately, though, I have been working much faster. I'm looking at a 2 year timeframe to be publishing now. I generally don't have too much of a problem. Once I start typing, words and scenes just come out freely.

### **Do you have any hobbies? What are they? How do they enhance your writing**

I like camping and hiking, and that helps in describing the natural environment. I'm also a fourth degree black belt in Taekwondo, and this martial arts experience has definitely helped my writing. I try to act out most of my fighting sequences to make sure that they are exciting and realistic.

### **Who are some of your favorite writers and what have they taught you?**

I gained my foundation in fantasy from authors like Terry Brooks and Lloyd Alexander. Recently, I've been reading a lot of Dan Brown and J.K. Rowling. I like Brown's ability to weave in suspense and leave a cliffhanger on every page- his books hardly ever require bookmarks. Rowling is amazing for her ability to create an entire world that's so similar to our world. I don't know of many other writers that have invented their own sports, and none are as well-developed as Quidditch. I like how characters will use phrases that make sense both in their world and ours such as: "Might as well be hanged for a dragon as an egg" and "Well, that cat's among the pixies now." I try to use that in my world also.

### **Do you believe where you live has had an influence on your stories?**

Not yet, as my books are mostly fantasy. This may come up in the future, however.

### **A few words of inspiration**

Tell your story- and then put the effort in to make it work. Writing is a hard business, but it's rewarding too. It's amazing to see a kid's eyes get big over your novel, and to see them eagerly devouring it just to find out what's next. It takes a long time, but if you believe that you can do it and you really work to make it happen, it will.