

Interview with Michelle Snyder of White Knight Studio, Fall 2011

Tell us what inspired you to write fantasy?

I think I've always loved fantasy more than any other genre. It seems to me to be the most creative and the purest expression of the storyteller's art. When I read, it's because I want to be inspired or uplifted or at least taken away from the ordinary troubles of the world, so reading a realistic novel just doesn't appeal to me. I already see the real world all around me every day, so why on earth would I want to read about it? It's because of my taste in reading that I developed my taste in writing.

Do you start writing with the end of the story?

Not usually. Sometimes I have a hazy idea of how I want the story to end, but sometimes I don't have a clue. One of the things I like best about writing is that it's very much like telling myself a brand new story that I never heard before, and even better than that, it can end any way I want it to. Usually I'll start a new story with some kind of image in my mind. . . a boy running down a lonely street after dark, or a gushing fountain with a golden cup beside it, and then I go on from there to tell a story about that image and how it came to be.

Do you have characters, or plot first?

I would say that the characters and the plot develop pretty much simultaneously, but if I had to choose one over the other I'd pick the character. The character makes choices, and that determines how the story will go on. You can't have your character do something totally unlike himself, just for the sake of getting over a plot difficulty. He is who he is, and you have to write in a way which is true to that reality. Characters very quickly take on a life of their own.

Is writing fantasy contradictory to your faith?

Absolutely not. Quite the contrary, in fact. I believe we are made in the image of God, the Creator of all things. He gave us the ability to create things also, and when we tell a beautiful story then we are walking in His footsteps and reflecting just a little of His glory, just as He told us to do. It's a small thing, of course, like the reflection of the sun in a dewdrop, but it's real. Tolkien said the same thing. My work always contains a Christian theme, but it's not always obvious unless you know to look for it.

What do you find most challenging?

The thing I find most challenging is to finally decide when the book is finished. I'm a perfectionist, and I can always look back and find things I could have improved or done better. But there comes a time when you have to let that go and say you're done, or else you'll never be able to move on to something new.

What kind of research do you do for your books?

I do a lot, actually. For my werewolf series I had to do a lot of research on werewolves, naturally, but also other things. I had to dig out topographical maps of obscure places so I could find just the right location for certain things that needed to happen, and I had to use

the Yellow Pages to find out whether certain businesses were available for my character to use when he visited this or that town. I even had to check what hours the library was open in Sulphur Springs, Texas, of all things. For my new book I found myself having to read up on Batten's Disease, a rare childhood genetic disorder. You just never know what will pop up. You want your work to be as close to reality as possible, and that involves doing as much research as you need to do. There are times when you'll have to alter some facts for the sake of your fiction, but don't do it more often than necessary.

How do you choose the title?

I like for the title to be suggestive of what the book means. For example, Cry for the Moon was named because of its suggestion of wishing for things that are impossible, but also because of the sorrow that Zach felt because of the werewolf curse.

What has worked for you in marketing your books?

There are several things I've used from time to time, but I think the most effective tool I've ever found has been giving away free books and samples. Your writing itself is the best tool you could ever have when it comes to advertising your work. So for that reason I always keep several free short stories posted on my website at www.williamwoodall.org, and at the end of every book I write I almost always include a chapter or two of some other book I wrote as a sample, so the reader can see if that other book might be something they would enjoy also. Good reviews definitely help, and you need to go out and be active in finding sites and blogs that will do them for you. Finally, keep writing. The more books and stories you write, the better your ability to market all the others.

What advice would you give a new author?

I think the most useful advice I could give would be not to let yourself get discouraged. Writing is hard work, and it's just as much an art form as painting or sculpting. Painters don't become masters of their craft overnight, and neither do writers. It can take years of practice and dedication before you become really good and find success. Just keep plugging away, and writing about what you love, and you'll make it. But I would add one thing to that: remember that your purpose is to serve your readers, not yourself.

Do you have a new book in the works?

Yes, I'm almost finished with my next book, which is due to be released in March of 2012. It's the story of a boy who lives in a poor family with his alcoholic mother and his baby brother, and wishes for better things than all that. But then he's given the chance to make all his wishes come true, and he finds that what he thought he wanted isn't quite what he cared about, after all. The book is an expansion of a short story I wrote a long time ago, and I decided to make it into a novel because I had so many requests from fans to hear more about it.

Excerpt from "The Last Werewolf Hunter Series":

"Justin told me once that there are only three questions a man ever needs to ask: What is the nature of God, what things are worth living for, and what things are worth dying for. And the answer to all three of those questions is the same: only love. I had only a few

seconds to decide if I really believed all that, and then I took a deep breath before I could change my mind."
-Spoken by Zach Trewick.