

Interview with Ty Johnston

April 26, 2012

1.) William, according to your website, you write mostly "fantasy novels for young adult readers, with a Christian flavor." What has drawn you to write in such a genre?

I think I've always enjoyed spending time with young people and talking to them about their lives. I was a high school teacher for several years, and kids are just interesting people, I think. That goes a long way toward explaining the young adult part. As for the fantasy. . . well, I've always felt that fantasy writing is the purest expression of a writer's art, with the most creative freedom. In a strict sense, all fiction writing is fantasy anyway, since we're writing about people who don't really exist, doing things that never really happened.

I'm sometimes reluctant to classify my work specifically as Christian fiction, because I think people often have a mistaken idea about what that means. There's a tendency to think it either means thinly-disguised sermons, retellings of Bible stories in allegorical form, or (for kids) sweetness-and-light stories where nothing bad ever happens and everything is perfect. Worse still, people often think that Christian writers never write about anything except the conversion experience. But not all Christian writing is like that. Janette Oke has her beautiful Christian love stories, and Ted Dekker even manages to write Christian horror novels which appeal to a broad audience. Those are the types of Christian authors whom I admire and would like to learn from. My characters will now and then discuss their faith and it forms a big part of who they are and the reasons why they do things, but they don't spend time trying to convert anybody and they don't indulge in long-winded sermons.

2.) Do you ever write in other genres, or have plans to do so?

I've sometimes thought about writing science fiction, or possibly other types of fantasy. I used to teach biology and chemistry, so I have the background for a good meaty science novel. I just haven't gotten around to it yet.

3.) Which of your books was the most fun to write, and why?

I think The Last Werewolf Hunter series has probably been the most fun to write, at least so far. Zach (the main character) has an entertaining sense of humor, for one thing, and he always kept me laughing. Characters really do take on a life of their own after a while, and you end up getting to know them like you would a best friend. The story took about two and a half years to write, and that's quite a while to spend with someone.

4.) Who are some authors you feel have had a big influence upon your own writing?

There have been several, but the ones I usually pick are C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and George MacDonald. Perhaps MacDonald would be the root of it all, since Lewis and Tolkien both admired him greatly and thought of him as a deep influence on their own work. He was a pastor of a church, a deeply pious man, and a deeply humble one as well. I've read some of his sermons and learned a lot from him. He has an amazing way of cutting to the very heart of whatever he wants to talk about and eliminating confusion. He writes beautiful stories which are hard to forget.

5.) As a writer of Christian literature, how do you approach the sometimes unsavory elements that can pop up in writing a story?

My outlook on this subject is that a writer of Christian literature should never be afraid to take up difficult subjects and unsavory characters. These things exist in the real world, and they will certainly come up during the writing process. In various stories of mine, I've found it necessary to address alcoholism, child abuse and abandonment, occultism, fatal illness, and several other harsh topics. What interests me as a writer is the way people cope with these things and how they relate to the main characters' faith at times. Every human being at some point has to confront questions about what he or she believes and how to apply those beliefs to the real world of messy choices and difficult decisions. They won't always choose wisely. I think having a main character who loves God and tries to live that way even if he doesn't always succeed is something a lot of people can relate to.

6.) Cats or dogs? Why?

Two dogs at the moment. A half-Rottweiler, half-German Shepherd named Blue, whose only use as a guard dog would be if robbers could be licked to death, and a chihuahua who's meaner than a snake. lol