



James Jennewein

RuneWarriors
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An interview with authors James Jennewein and Tom S. Parker

1. How does writing a book differ from writing a screenplay? Do you prefer writing a book or writing a screenplay, and why?

Writing fiction is very different from writing a screenplay. Movies, by their very nature, have to *move*. Characters have to *do* things—take action—in order for the audience to understand and care about what’s going on. Therefore, generally speaking, movies are less about the *internal* lives of the characters and more about the *external* kinds of problems they get into. Novels, on the other hand, are all about the interior lives of characters. In addition to telling a good story, a novel can and should take you into the minds of the main characters and allow you to share in their deepest thoughts and feelings. In a novel, there is an intimacy and a kind of absorption in character that a movie usually cannot deliver. And, of course, it’s about the music and the rhythm of the language itself.

Movies can be great fun to write. Since motion pictures are an interpretive medium, you get to work with actors and directors and other creative people in bringing the story to life. And when the movie is finally finished, it is an amazing feeling to see big movie stars up on the screen delivering your dialogue and to hear the audience actually laughing out loud.

Ultimately, though, nothing beats the satisfaction of writing books. Because it’s just our words going right into your brain; it’s a direct connection. We the writers get to craft every moment just the way we want—and you the reader get to escape to a whole other world, building your own mental pictures of how the characters look and talk and everything else that unfolds. It’s a special kind of magic that happens when you read a book—a special kind of power that both the reader and the writer tap into—and we’re very happy to be a part of it.

2. It’s hard enough for one author to write a novel, but *RuneWarriors* has two authors. Was this collaboration a difficult process, or did it come naturally? What are the best parts of being a writing team?

We have been working Hollywood screenwriters—and writing partners—for nearly twenty years. Together, we’ve written and sold numerous scripts to all the major studios and have several movies to our credit, including *The Flintstones*, *Richie Rich*, and *Getting Even with Dad*, to name a few. So we have developed a system of working together that really works for us. And although the mediums are as different as night and day, oddly, our process for writing novels is the same as writing movies. Basically, we throw ideas back and forth, discarding the ones that don’t seem to work and keeping the ones that do, and slowly a story develops. And then one of us sits at his computer alone and writes up a synopsis—anywhere from two or three pages long to as much as fifteen or twenty pages, putting in all the details we have discussed. And then we go back and forth, tweaking the synopsis, breaking it down into scenes, fine-tuning the story and the characters until we both agree that the story is pretty much all there. Then we begin the actual writing, each taking alternating chapters, and then, when we’re done, we email them to each other. We read each other’s work and talk about what we each did, and then we each might rewrite certain parts of what the other guy wrote and send them back, and we go like that all through the first draft. And once we have a completed first draft, we start again at the beginning and repeat the process all over again, refining language, adding comedy, and clarifying character and theme as we go.

Oh, and we drink a lot of coffee. Lots and lots of coffee.

The best thing about being part of a writing team is that you have another mind to bounce ideas off of, another mind that is as invested as you are in creating something really special. We don’t always agree at first as to how certain scenes should be written or what certain characters might say. But the disagreement then leads to discussion; it forces each of us to better articulate and communicate his ideas, and in doing this it then becomes easier to see which idea is best.

3. How do you define a heroic character? How does Dane measure up to the notions of a hero?

Heroism is about risk. In most literature, and in genre fiction especially, the hero at some point in the story must put himself in jeopardy for the good of others. This is not to say that heroic characters always see themselves as heroic. The most interesting heroes should feel the whole range of human emotions—reluctance, self-doubt, fear, terror, love—so that we the readers can see pieces of ourselves in them and identify with them as much as possible. Heroes often are drawn larger than life—they are shown to be stronger, braver, and smarter than most people we know—even superhuman in some cases. We tend to enjoy writing about flawed heroes, real people who are challenged to become heroic. Dane the Defiant is more of a “reluctant hero.” He doesn’t start out that way; he earns his heroic stature through the choices he makes and the actions he takes. Also, with Dane being a young teen, he is on a coming-of-age journey of self-discovery, taking sometimes painful steps toward greater maturity. So even his smallest victories can be seen by the reader as heroic. In this way, the book celebrates and honors the courageous process of growing up that young readers of all ages are undergoing. Even adult readers, we hope, will find Dane’s journey something they can relate to.

4. Are any of the characters in *RuneWarriors* based on anyone you know personally? Are these the types of characters you were looking for when you were growing up?

Every story we write, in some way, is informed by the lives we have led, the people we have known, the experiences we have had. But we wouldn’t say that characters such as Drott the Dim or Fulnir the Stinking are *literally* based on actual people. They are people who spring from our imaginations, characters with unique strengths and foibles whom we hope the reader has as much fun reading about as we do writing.

When we were growing up, we read everything we could get our hands on. We especially loved the adventure stories of Jack London, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Charles Dickens and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. were also big influences, as were Ray Bradbury and Jules Verne. So we looked up to our own fictional heroes—and the writers who created them—as much as young readers do today. We were also greatly influenced by the musicians and movie stars of the 1970s and 1980s—rock groups such as the Beatles, and the Doors, and Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and many more. We liked comic books, too, and watched a lot of (too much!) TV.

In real life, interesting characters are everywhere; all you have to do is pay attention. The most important thing when creating characters in a novel is to make them identifiable in some way. You have to believe the people are real; you have to understand what it is they want or need or are obsessed by in order to care whether they succeed. Villains, of course, are a whole different story. You’re not supposed to like them, but, still, you should understand what it is they want and why. Or at least be fascinated by them.

5. *RuneWarriors* centers itself around Norse mythology and the Vikings who used to control the land. However, these aren’t your typical Vikings. These Vikings are hysterically funny and embraceable in the various situations in which they find themselves. How do you use humor in the novel to further the plot and show the Vikings’ depth of character?

In literature and

history, Vikings were typically not known for their lighthearted ways. The eddas, or heroic poetry of the day, were usually tales about violent, humorless men who conquered lands, engaging in rampant bloodletting or of selfless heroes who defended their lands and tribes against these incursions. Also, because the Norse myths reflected the very harsh living conditions of the period, the gods Odin, Thor, and their ilk were a pretty serious bunch, too.

But we are not interested in writing about iconic heroes or villains if we can't humanize them in some way and make them relatable. And one of the best ways to humanize a character is through humor. If our protagonist can make funny observations or can laugh at himself, it not only makes him more likable, it makes him more unpredictable. Because the essence of humor is unpredictability. (If you already know the punch line, you're not going to laugh.) This works with villains, too. If they are quick-witted and amusing, the reader is less likely to know what they will do next. Comedy can also come from a character who doesn't have a sense of humor. For instance, if the big bad serious villain strides in and everyone sees he has a bit of toilet paper stuck to his shoe, then he's comically brought down a notch and made more real to the audience. (We don't use this gag. Toilet paper had not been invented when the Vikings were around.) *RuneWarriors* is not a spoof. We have tried to construct flesh-and-blood characters—placing them in a dramatic story we hope our readers will enjoy. If a character is to have flesh and blood, we feel humor is a basic attribute. Although we know there is no set formula for writing a good book, we're also certain that the characters and the story must constantly surprise. By its very nature, humor can move plot and character in surprising ways.