

Interview with Author Todd Fahnstock

By Brandy Vallance

I'm sitting next to Todd Fahnstock and, before I've even asked the first question, he's said at least five things of note. A thought flits through my mind: This is going to be the most inspiring interview I've ever done. I hate myself for forgetting my tape recorder, and I try to keep up, hoping my shorthand can cover it all.

He apologizes at one point, afraid that he's talking too much. For me, that's a good thing. I look up and smile. "Sweeping and epic," I tease him, referring to how some have described *The Heartstone Trilogy*, his three book collaboration. How could the author be any different?

"Prolific too," he says as he laughs. And given that those 1,648 pages are not the only pages he's had published, I happily agree.

Todd's devotion to writing is very clear to me. Although he's resting his arm casually on the back of a padded bench, there's a passion in his expression that says he can't wait to get back to the next page, the next story, his next imaginary world.

We talk about discouragement and how writers can overcome it. "My ego's pretty indestructible," he says. "But there are moments...Every time you put your hands to the keyboard, you wonder if it's good enough. You really have to be selective of who you let critique your work. People always want to tell me what I should do with my writing. You have to listen to yourself. If you don't believe in the story, no one else will. Sometimes you have to turn on your blinders and just bull forward."

"What's the best writing advice someone ever gave to you?" I ask.

"That was Donald and Lisa," Todd says, referring to his agent, Donald Maass, and Lisa Rector Maass. "Whatever you're afraid of the most, love the most, fear the most—put that in there. You've got to get over not being daring enough. People don't want perfect novels; they want something that resonates with them. Don't make your story happy all the way through."

We talk about the measure of success and he gives me a good piece of advice from fantasy novelist, Margaret Weis. "Whatever you do, don't listen to the bad reviews. Don't listen to the good reviews either."

"It's all about the stepping stones," he says when asked what advice he would give new writers. "It's important to write really bad stuff so you can look back on it. Put a story down if you've been working on it for more than two years. Donald Maass says that until you've written more novels, you don't really know what's close to your heart... You may want your first novel to be a grand explosion, but it's not very common."

Todd tells me a little about how he fell in love with sci-fi/fantasy. “My parents divorced and I got lost in reading. I decided that I wanted to do that—create this amazing story that can take you away...Besides,” he adds with a laugh, “I’m sort of bent on being 12 years old for the rest of my life.”

He answers immediately when I ask about his favorite book in his genre. “*Tigana*, written by Guy Gabrielle Kay. He takes historical details from real Earth time-periods and weaves them in so perfectly. As far as writing craft books go, I have to say *The Fire in Fiction*—it’s amazing. What little down-time I do have, I spend reading *Marvel Comics*.”

Then Todd’s voice turns serious. “The more I hang out with editors and agents, the more I realize that’s it’s not a one-hit-wonder they’re looking for, they want a writer who can write.”

He continues. “What I’d like to do is write full-time, but I’ve got a day job that’s 40 to 60 hours per week.” Todd’s the Director of Special Events at the American Diabetes Association in Denver. “I’ve had to train myself to write whenever—every spare scrap of time. I’ve seen so many writers whose personal lives are a mess. For that reason, I share time with my wife, Lara, who’s an artist. Mondays and Tuesdays after work are my time to write, and Wednesdays and Thursdays are for her, even if she just wants to go to a coffee house and sit. Fridays are when we’re all together—Lara, Me, and our two kids.” I admire Todd for making his family a priority. As for me, I’ll keep a teachable spirit, especially in the business of writing. And I’ll put my family first. At least that’s what Todd told me, and I believe him.

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