

A CONVERSATION with CARTER WILSON about *REVELATION*

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, HOW AND WHEN YOU STARTED WRITING.

I started writing about twelve years ago. It was a bit serendipitous. I was taking a continuing-education class for work and was bored out of my skull, so I started sketching out an idea for a story. Really something just to engage my mind to make it to the end of the day. Three months later I had a 400-page manuscript, and I thought to myself, *now that's something*. I haven't stopped writing since.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

I've always been curious to know how hard it would be to start a religion, and I thought it would be interesting to give the idea to a few college students to see what would come of it.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVATION TO GO DARK IN YOUR WRITING?

Well, a good story is about conflict. I like to explore how someone reacts to great tragedy, or some event that is beyond what most people would ever have to deal with. What do they have to do to push through to the other side? In order to test the limits of my characters, bad things need to happen. It's not so exciting to see how someone deals with a tax audit.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Rarely. Sometimes there's a mannerism or a flash of something I recognize in one of my characters from someone I know, but usually my characters are built from the ground up from bits and pieces I find all over the place.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

I really like Harden. He's had a hard life and he struggles to figure out his position in the world. He gets drawn in by the allure of Coyote, but I appreciate how he fights against that once he realizes Coyote's true nature.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Coyote, for sure. He's really the definition of a psychopath: charming, influential, and devoid of conscience.

WHAT PART OF WRITING YOUR BOOK DID YOU FIND THE MOST CHALLENGING?

It was difficult to find the right voice for Harden. Because much of the book is written from his first-person point-of-view, I needed to really work hard to find a voice that reflected both the terror of Harden's situation and the underlying strength of his resolve.

IS IT MORE FUN TO WRITE THE HERO OR THE VILLAIN?

You have to have a good, balanced hero to thwart your villain. The hero needs to be strong but flawed, accessible but aspirational to your readers. But the fun for me is always the villain. I like exploring the depths of what we consider evil, but what evil people consider normal. I like writing villains who are just being true to their nature. There's something much scarier about a killer who thinks what he's doing is right, rather than a killer who simply doesn't care.

WHAT'S YOUR WRITING PROCESS LIKE?

Staggered. With a family and work obligations, I'm always looking for time to write and rewrite, which currently most often happens in the early mornings. I try to budget two pages a day, or the editing amount equivalent.

DO YOU KNOW THE ENDING OF THE BOOK WHEN YOU START?

Rarely. I mean, if I knew the ending right away, I am assuming the reader's going to see it a mile away, which is always a letdown. For me, the ending needs to evolve from the story, which itself continuously twists and turns as I write the story. I like the surprise myself.

SO YOU DON'T OUTLINE?

I tried it once. I really, really tried. Character boards, intricate timelines, the whole bit. After I outlined for about three months, I hated the story and felt like taking a bath with an electrical appliance. Shame, really, because it was kind of a cool story. I might revisit it someday.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

That to remember writing is entertainment. You have to write something people want to read. I know that sounds basic, but it's easy to get caught up in something that might be constitute amazing writing, but it's not something people want to spend their time absorbing. Don't put the quality of writing above the need for a strong, compelling story.

WHAT IS THE WORST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

That a writer has to outline, or know the ending to their story from the outset.