



marc schooley q & a

writing, philosophy, theology...and chickens

You seem like such a nice person, and yet you write some very weird and unusual storylines. How did that come about?

Yes, I might be able to fool some of the people some of the time. But I'm attempting to be honest about what I see as a fundamental truth of Christianity and the first plank of the Gospel: the sinful nature of man. That, and I'm convinced that what we perceive and hold as *non-weird* and *usual* are not near the whole of the matter.

What made you decide on the setting for *Konig's Fire*? How did you come up with the idea?

The manner in which this question is worded seems to entail that I have a choice in the matter. I don't, outside of picking Romania instead of Transylvania, the German dark forest, or a similar substitute. The setting appeared to me one night around 9:34 when I was playing dominoes at my Grandmother's house. From there it

was only a matter of determining a suitable location where Nazis might inhabit a dark forest during WWII, that also had mountains.

So much less stress this way, allowing the ideas to happen rather than attempting to create them or manipulate them: no storyboards, outlines, fretting over this or that with regard to the setting.

Do you use cream, sugar, and / or flavoring in your coffee? And if you don't drink coffee, please tell me instead which planet you're *really* from.

It's coffee. Black. The stronger the better.

Do you write down the ideas as they come to you or let them germinate?

That all depends on what you mean. I love to let ideas germinate, especially the seed kernel of a story. But once the writing starts in earnest, in a perfect world the story would go on the paper as it comes into the head.

Have you ever slaughtered a chicken (for food, presumably)?

Only in the philosophical pursuit of Plato's featherless biped...

If someone wanted to try your method of off-the-cuff writing, what would you advise them to do?

Take some time out of life to just sit and relax. Close your eyes. Imagine things. And wait. Do it for as long as it takes. Something will come. When it does, it will be something like a setting or a character. Then both elements will be there and the character will be doing something. Something unusual, or momentous, or interesting, or fun. Then you'll notice s/he has a problem, and the environment will add to that problem, and in some cases help with it.

Once this happens, the key is to trust it. Let the story happen; watch it unfold and write what you see. Don't try to gerrymander the character—now perhaps character(s)—and the setting into fixed roles or courses of action. Let *them* do it. They'll know what to do; it's their life.

Back to chickens. Why did the chicken cross the dusty Texas road?

Not to get to Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, or Mexico.

Based on your experience dialoguing with people from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs, what are some of the most fundamental reasons why people become atheists or believers in God?

- Some people do not believe in God for a variety of honestly considered reasons.
- Some people resent the Christian church's involvement in politics, usually the Christian right's involvement in the Republican Party. Atheism provides a natural outlet for this resentment, and becomes an attractive choice on that basis.
- Some people who value science highly find religion's involvement in the public school science class, and with science at large, deplorable. Atheism, though not formal in a creedal sense, shares this concern.
- Some people desire to drink beer on Saturday night, and the current religion in this culture meets on Sunday morning.
- Some people desire to resist authority structures. As a confederation of freethinkers, atheism provides a natural haven for this desire. This may occur against parents, churches, the government, mainstream culture, societal tradition, and other societal structures. The counterculture of the 1960's contributes to these phenomena.
- Atheism appears more fun than theism.
- An increasing number of once traditional societal structures, universities for instance, have increasingly taught atheism as a viable philosophic and lifestyle option. This has translated into a greater number of atheists.
- The notion on the street that science has disproved theism has contributed to the spread of atheism.
- The widespread belief that science, education, technology, and economics will lead to a humanistic utopia has disenfranchised the need for God in many people's minds, thus leading to atheism.
- Some people consider religion an evil, therefore atheism is a natural option.
- Some people hate, distrust, or have lost faith in God over bad events which occurred in their lives.
- The publicity campaign of the New Atheism.

For theists, then:

- Some people were raised to believe, and therefore believe.
- Some people choose to believe, therefore they believe.
- Some people revere the Bible, or another holy text, as the word of God.
- A sense of community is important to some people, therefore they attend church. Moreover, some seek influence or networks from a local community.
- Some people sincerely believe for a variety of honestly considered reasons.
- Some people feel God, therefore they believe.
- Some people have experiences they attribute to God, therefore they believe.

- Some people consider authority structures their duty to uphold. This is increasingly rare, I think, and descriptive of older generations.
- Some people consider atheism an evil, therefore belief is a natural option.
- Some people turned to faith in God over bad events which occurred in their lives.
- Some people look at a sunset or the stars, and find atheism a difficult option.
- Some people find a sense of hope in God, therefore they believe.

These, and probably more could be added, are reasons for belief and unbelief. Faith and unbelief, in my experience with people, is generally caught and not taught. The well-considered reasons generally follow; there are notable exceptions, I'm sure, but it's not normative for the well-considered reasons to lead.

You've dialogued with atheist communities in the past about belief and non-belief. How would you describe experiencing God to someone who doesn't believe in God?

The Bible says the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Experiencing God is no different. A man or woman, or even a child, who experiences it will trade all she has for it. So, go find it!

In my experience, though, this question is much more problematic within Christianity. Can experience of God constitute revelation? Does God still perform miracles through human agents? What is the relation of experience to logic? Is there such a thing as near-death experience? These and more crop up constantly within Christian conversation, and deserve serious attention.