



What does war teach you about writing fantasy that research cannot?

The five senses. War changes the way you interact with the world on a sensory level. When writing fantasy, you craft a world that must be believable. How do you get a reader to believe? You lure in their five senses. Research cannot teach you the same depth of sensory perception that war can.

Why are ordinary people more interesting than chosen heroes?

Ordinary people are real. Those are the people you meet when you travel, or even serve in a war. Armies and nations are made up of ordinary people. When extraordinary times fall upon them, they can become extraordinary people. That is what makes it interesting.

A hero trained from birth is not as interesting to me as the boy who spent his life sleeping by the river and stalking rabbits in tall grass.

Can imagination actually help people survive difficult realities?

In my personal experience, yes. I wrote through several long bombing campaigns. Even when I couldn't have a laptop, I would just lie there and get to know the story, plot the chapters, and when I was safe and had some downtime, it flowed for sixteen hours or more. Other times, when I was not on duty, I would just sit there being bombed and write, because the world my fingertips created was far better than the ongoing war I endured outside.

How has psychology changed the way you create characters and relationships?

I don't wish. I think that is a huge separation between me and some writers. I don't have wishes for my characters; I don't audit or edit their world. If my background did one thing, it helped me step out of my characters' situations. What would you tell a teenager who wants an unusual life but feels pressured to choose one identity? I would say they need to define what unusual means to them. Is that clothes, art, or speech? It may sound simple, but you're destined to be yourself. Don't say no to good adventures, and say no to some dangers. Push past your fear and introduce yourself in a way that makes the world not think you're someone else. Originality and creativity, in my view, are more valuable than money and power.