

Unveiling the Craft with TRISTAN ZELDEN

From Entertainment Journalism to Fiction Writing: Exploring the Genesis of 'The Huntress and the Trickster'

Tristan Zelden, a former entertainment journalist with a penchant for delving into the worlds of video games, movies, and television, brings his storytelling prowess to the forefront in his debut novel, *The Huntress and the Trickster*. A graduate of California State University, Fullerton, with a degree in journalism, Zelden's transition from reporting on the fantastical to crafting it himself speaks volumes about his passion for narrative.

In this exclusive interview with Reader's House Magazine, Zelden shares insights into his creative process, revealing the inspirations and challenges behind the fusion of urban fantasy and thriller that defines his novel. Rooted in a love for the likes of *John Wick* and the recent *God of War* games, Zelden's narrative concoction emerges from the collision of these two worlds, sparking the inception of a tale where a John Wick-esque assassin crosses paths with Norse gods.

Zelden's journalistic background permeates his approach to fiction, as he seamlessly weaves research and storytelling to construct a world both believable and captivating. Through the lens of Abigail Byrne, a formidable yet conflicted protagonist, Zelden explores themes of workaholicism and personal sacrifice, grounding his narrative in the complexities of human relationships amidst a backdrop of danger and intrigue.

The Huntress and the Trickster is not merely a tale of action and mythology; it is a testament to Zelden's meticulous world-building, where the mundane and the magical coalesce to form a tapestry of rich narrative. From the intricacies of assassin culture to the nuances of Norse mythology, Zelden's attention to detail lends authenticity to his storytelling, inviting readers to immerse themselves fully in his fictional universe.

As Zelden reflects on his journey from journalism to fiction writing, he offers valuable insights and advice to aspiring authors navigating the daunting landscape of publishing. From staying true to one's creative vision to embracing the learning curve of the publishing process, Zelden's wisdom serves as a guiding light for those embarking on their own literary endeavors.

In an age where the boundaries between literature and other forms of media blur, Zelden's narrative prowess stands as a testament to the enduring

power of storytelling. Through *The Huntress and the Trickster*, he invites readers on a thrilling journey that transcends genres and captivates the imagination—an invitation not to be missed.

Tristan Zelden is a former entertainment journalist who covered video games, movies, and TV. Graduating from California State University, Fullerton, he got his Bachelor's degree in journalism and a passion to start writing. He currently is focused on his career as a novelist with the hope of getting horror novels published. While working on future novels, he tends to read, play video games, get tattoos, and look at cute pictures of dogs and bears on social media.

Your debut novel, *The Huntress and the Trickster*, blends elements of urban fantasy with a thriller narrative. What inspired you to combine these genres, and how did you approach creating a unique world and story within them?

The idea all came from two different worlds. I

Tristan Zelden discusses inspirations, world-building, and the journey from journalism to fiction in crafting his debut novel, blending urban fantasy with thriller elements.

am a huge fan of John Wick and the last two God of War games. I did a rewatch of the first three, at the time only, John Wick movies. Around that time, I replayed 2018's God of War entry. Consuming two things I love dearly popped up this idea in my head that made me think, "What if a John Wick-like assassin went up against a Norse god?" From there, I went into world-building, character development, and building out this story. It all came rather naturally as I thought about the idea for months to years before ever writing it. When I did finally commit, I did my research and took notes to figure out the characters and world. Much of that world-building and character development came from making it as grounded as possible despite the fantastical elements. What would the world be like if assassins were legalized workers? How do Norse gods fit into the universe? I asked myself many questions about logic, legality, and lore to create a believable and captivating world.

As a journalist covering video games, movies, and TV, how has your experience in

media influenced your approach to writing fiction? Are there any specific lessons or skills from journalism that you found particularly valuable in crafting your novel?

The most obvious way journalism helped is the basic writing aspect of it all. It helped me refine my skills as a writer; although style, prose, and pretty much everything is different when writing fiction, I at least gained improvements in the foundation of writing. The other major skill I gained is research. As a journalist, I would ensure I had all the facts straight by researching. Other times, I would research to gain a better insight into the topic I was writing about. When writing fiction, I want it to be believable. So, I research all kinds of relevant topics to make my characters, world, and story come to life. I think covering so many topics when I was in journalism helped me get a broad view of things, especially when I was putting in the work to research all kinds of subjects.

Your protagonist, Abigail Byrne, is described as a workaholic assassin caught up in a dangerous job. What inspired the creation of this character, and what challenges did you face in developing her personality and motivations throughout the story?

The story was intended, thematically, to be about workaholics and how consuming work culture is. Abigail has a great relationship with her husband, Jacob. Still, she creates her own friction because she is so devoted to working. The book shows the highs and lows of that relationship. That was probably the biggest challenge. I needed to balance the relationship she had with Jacob and her job, which the story attached itself to. These aspects are tied to her motivations, as she is determined to get this job done, but the pay could release her from her work enough to allow her to spend more time with Jacob. Will that actually get her to put in place some boundaries from work? It was aspects like that that made for a compelling character study. Striking that balance was tricky, but I think readers will get a great sense of her life, both professional and personal.

The creation of her came down to a few things. In the beginning, you get a great description of her.



She is big and muscular and tattooed all over. I love a good woman lead, especially in action. I find it inspiring and empowering but also different, as buff men take up too much of the zeitgeist. When I see these women in movies, they look great. They are fit and clearly trained, but there is an odd body standard that men must be muscular and women must be fit yet petite. Why can't the women be big and buff? I wanted to give that body representation because there are women who have those bodies and look great. I hope I nailed that because any woman reading the book who has muscles that are too big for society, I want them to see themselves and be proud of their lifestyle and body.

The Huntress and the Trickster features intricate world-building that blends grounded elements with fantastical elements. Can you tell us more about the process of building this fictional world, and were there any specific influences or inspirations that guided your world-building efforts?

There are two sides to the world-building, some of which I have already touched on. But for the assassin side, I had to think deeply about how it would be in real life. There are these different companies, like Hazardous, the one Abigail works for. How do those companies differentiate from one another? I love tattoos and incorporated that into the culture of assassins. They are mostly heavily tattooed people. In John Wick, you see some of that, and I loved that as a visual. The alternative, counter-culture aspect of it all gave my assassin world a personality. I thought about the legality of it all. How would this conflict with state laws in the U.S. versus federal? What restrictions would there be? Also, the corruption of it all. Power, money, and violence are all corrosive things. Sure, power and money can be used for good, but this book shows the evil of it. Abigail believes she is doing good, but not many people on the other end of her gun truly deserve to die. That is the corruption of it all. A world of violence devouring itself. So, there was that element of showcasing this in a political way but also in a compelling thriller story.

The other side is the Norse mythology element. I naturally have a fascination with Scandinavian culture and lore. The recent God of War games gave that interest a major boost. I also read Neil Gaiman's Norse Mythology. In that book, he has a few pages dedicated to the creative process. He talked about adhering to the mythology but taking influences from other people's stories and the fact that much of that part of history is gone. It is gone because of a mixture of factors, which leads to creative freedom. I wanted to make this believable so that when you get the explanation later on in the book, it comes together in a way that is digestible. Some of that explanation makes no sense because it is magical. Other parts feel real. I wanted to balance something that readers could have a firm grasp on, like the characters, but also feel just as confused as Abigail when navigating this fantastical

Tristan Zelden crafts a mesmerizing fusion of urban fantasy and thriller, showcasing meticulous world-building and compelling character dynamics.

element that shakes up a seemingly grounded world.

With your background in covering entertainment media, how do you see the relationship between literature and other forms of media evolving in the digital age? Do you believe that your experiences in journalism have influenced your approach to storytelling or marketing your novel?

I think all media is in this area that requires everyone to readjust themselves to figure out how to maintain sustainability. I am too new to the literary world to have a firm opinion, but from the data and studies I have read, I think it is in a good place. Literature is having a surplus of book sales and book stores opening in the pandemic era. Obviously, the pandemic was horrible, but some positives came out of it, like how the literary industry has been booming for the most part. I guess the big issue for all media is that there is so much, which makes for tough competition to get your work seen by an audience. But I won't complain. Lots of art is a great thing, whether it be film, video games, literature, or music.

I do think, for other kinds of media like video games and movies, it is in a tough space. It costs so much to make certain things that it makes it hard to profit. If it is hard to make a profit, the business people who make the decisions may skip out on what could be great art. It is about navigating the business and the art sides that make it difficult. I just hope people can figure out a way to make sustainable businesses that still let creatives make the things they want and maintain their truth as artists.

Journalism has influenced me to maintain authenticity. Now, it is less about reporting on facts and more about telling my truth. When I write fiction, I write what I find to be entertaining, thought-provoking, or emotionally evocative. I feel like I hadn't gained too much from journalism as a fiction author, but it has held me down to tell stories that I find to be important in one way or another.

What advice would you offer to aspiring authors who may be navigating the process of writing and publishing their first novel? Are there any lessons or insights from your own journey as an author that you believe would be helpful to share with others?

For the storytelling aspect of it all, tell stories you find entertaining. I can't remember the exact quote, but Stephen King said something along those lines about how he writes stories he finds entertaining. If you find the story entertaining, surely someone will find it entertaining, too. Just cross your fingers that the person is someone who can make things happen for you, like a literary agent or publisher.

My advice on the publishing side is to learn. Read about what other people have to say. Read about people's experiences. It is a complicated world that I am still figuring out myself. Take those chances and learn from them if it doesn't pan out. Life is all about taking action and then learning from the outcome, whether it is a win or loss. Just know that once you get your foot in the door, then some good will come out of it. Opportunities will, hopefully, come along. For me, I got to do interviews like this, which is great. Now that I have done something like this, maybe the right person will read it, and I can get another interview or another great opportunity.