

BRIAN FARREY

on writing

THE SECRET OF DREADWILLOW CARSE

Maybe the number one question asked of any writer is: *where do you get your ideas?* Personally, I draw inspiration from all around me. Sometimes, a bit of music will translate into images I feel compelled to write about. Sometimes, a single line of dialogue from a play might send my brain off on a “what if” journey. I’m inspired by colors and shapes and things that happened to me today and things that happened to me twenty years ago and things that I envision happening someday. I doubt I’ll ever run short of things that prompt me to write.

Two things in particular inspired *The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse*: my nieces and Ursula K. Le Guin.

I have three nieces. It’s been my privilege to watch them grow up for several years now. When they were younger, they all went through the phase where everything you tell them is answered with “Why?” Most people find that frustrating. But I always saw it as an important part of their growth.

I wanted to write something that assured my nieces it was okay to ask questions. You can’t turn on the TV or read a magazine without someone trying to tell young girls they need to behave a certain way. Some people even go so far as to suggest that girls shouldn’t ask questions and should just listen instead. I don’t like that. Listening is important. It’s a key component of compassion and I think we could all

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRIAN FARREY is the author of the Vengekeep Prophecies series and the Stonewall Honor Book *With or Without You*. He knows more than he probably should about *Doctor Who*. He lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his husband and their cat, Meowzebub.

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be more compassionate. But I also believe that asking questions gives us the tools we need to make empathetic choices.

I don't want my nieces to just accept everything that's told to them. That's not healthy. They should be able to ask "why" if someone tells them to behave a certain way. They should be able to ask "why" if they're asked to accept something without any evidence to back it up. And then they should be able to use their judgment to decide if the reason they're given is a good one.

Sure, more often than not, when children are told to behave a certain way or accept something at face value, it's because the person telling them that is trying to protect them. But even then, I think they have the right—maybe even the responsibility—to ask "why." I sincerely hope my nieces never stop questioning the world around them. I'm convinced they'll come out the better for it.

As for Ms. Le Guin, I've never met her. I know her only through her impressive body of work and how it's informed my own writing. I'm hardly the first writer to draw inspiration from her. In fact, to admit it almost feels like a cliché. But it's true. Like many writers, I owe her a debt: for broadening my mind, for challenging me, and for telling me that it's okay to dare. A character in the book, *Queen Sula*, is named for Ms. Le Guin.

Her Hugo Award-winning short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," had a profound impact on me when I first read it. It's the primary reason my book exists. The story got me thinking about how far some people will go to be happy. It also got me thinking about our leaders, the people—elected or otherwise—who guide our society. What are they willing to do to keep the people who follow them content? That question hangs heavily over this book.

I hope my nieces grow up to be leaders. I hope they go out into the world with a strong sense of self that came from asking questions and only accepting the answers that resonated with them. I see the seed of it in all three of them right now (and all are under the age of twelve). There's not a single moment I spend with them where they don't burst with potential. I want them to explore that potential. I want them to share it with others.

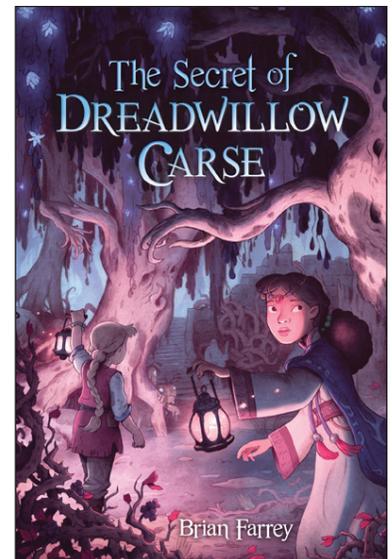
And I want them to keep asking "why." Because I feel leaders who stop asking that—leaders who just accept what seems obvious, who say and do things just to be popular, who act purely with good intentions that aren't guided by critical thinking—aren't doing their jobs. Leading is so much more than just making decisions and telling people what to do. Leadership, without empathy and critical thinking, is dangerous.

And that's exactly what Jeniah and Aon, the two main characters in *The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse*, come to realize.

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