

What Inspired me to Write The Spider in the Laurel
Originally published on The Ragnarok Publications Blog
Sept 2015

Talk a little about your inspiration for *The Spider in the Laurel*, my publisher said. Sure thing. No problem. You see, it...I mean, I...Ah, hell. How did this thing get started?

The Spider in the Laurel is like a motorcycle project – one you plan for years and years to build in your garage. Then you start collecting parts. Wrenching them together. Plans change based on what EBay yields. Based on how much change is clinking around in your pocket.

When it's done, it's nothing like those original bar-napkin sketches. Still, you love the bastard.

But where'd it start?

Nanowrimo, 2010, I think it was. I'd been strictly a short story writer until then. But I got the itch. I was going to write a novel. Saying it out loud was like shouting to a room full of academics, "I'm going to GO OUTSIDE and CLIMB A MOUNTAIN." Even I didn't believe it. But I began researching.

It was going to be an Indiana Jones style adventure. But with a stronger grasp of myth and history. Something like James Michener's *The Source*. Back and forth through time. A chapter in the Dark Ages. A chapter today. A real world relic at the heart of it all. Something unique. The Holy Grail's been done over and over. I wanted something real.

I stumbled on the story of Clovis, Merovingian king of 5th century France, and his extraordinary moment with the Vase of Soissons. Historical protagonist chosen. Now all I needed was a hero for the contemporary chapters.

BAM. The process locked up. For months it went nowhere, rusting away in the back of my mind.

I don't remember what kicked it back to life. I think I'd been dabbling in a sci-fi story at that point. Probably reading something. Maybe *Neuromancer*. Maybe just watching a lot of movies. Whatever the case, I discovered two things. First, this novel was not going to bounce around in time. Second, it surely wasn't going to take place today.

But I had a premise:

What would happen if you dropped Indiana Jones into the future? What if that future had outlawed religion and criminalized the artifacts Indy sought?

I needed a starting point for a new timeline.

After September 11, 2001, I speculated, America reacted with more than just blind patriotism. The nation's rage sought out more than Middle Eastern enemies. It turned towards all fundamentalism.

What if religion itself got caught up in that cleansing?

How would a nation without religion delete the memory of its past?

How far would Believers go to attain the power their government insisted didn't exist?

The project was back on. I built an entire mythology dating back over 3500 years. I wove this new mythos through existing lore. A protagonist coalesced before me. Rafael Ward. A historian forced to destroy history.

We shared plenty of Scotch, Ward and I.

There's truth in Scotch. Ward will tell you that. He'll also tell you he's no super-agent. No Indiana Jones. He's a bookworm. An analyst. An academic. MacKenzie's the one, Ward would say. She's the fire. He's the oxygen. Therein lies the novel's horsepower.

Between the start of the project and Ragnarok Publications getting a look at it, about three years elapsed. I got married, moved twice, bought a house, had a daughter, and oh yeah: managed to keep my day job as an English professor.

I thought writing a novel would be an experiment. Once around the block, then back to my short stories. So much for that. I've got the itch now. The sequel to *The Spider in the Laurel* is in the works. I've outlined a third book to round out the trilogy. And I've got a couple chapters going on a new thriller as well.

With a little luck, *The Spider in the Laurel* will hit the highway and won't run out of fuel any time soon. And this won't be the last you hear of me.