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Chronicles of Ancient Darkness #5: Oath Breaker Unabridged
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What are you working on now?

Right now, I'm getting deeper and deeper into a new series, which is immensely exciting. However, like many writers, I'm a bit superstitious about discussing my stories before I've actually written them, so I'm afraid I can't tell you very much. Like Torak's story, the new series will be set in prehistoric times -- although at a slightly later period, and in a different part of the world. But that's all I can say for now!

Where do you get your ideas?

The short answer is that I really don't know -- they just come. But it's true to say that once I've got the bare bones of a story, I often get ideas from my own research trips to faraway places.

Take *Ghost Hunter*, for example. The story takes place in the High Mountains, and it tells of Torak's final battle against the strongest, most terrifying Soul-Eater of all: Eostra the Eagle Owl Mage. To research the story, I traveled to Finnish Lapland in midwinter, where I went snowshoeing through the forest, following the trail of a female moose and trying (unsuccessfully) to talk to ravens. And I spent time in the mountains of northern Norway, where I encountered herds of musk oxen. They look like small, extremely shaggy bison, and they can be quite bad-tempered, so you've got to be careful not to get too close. Also, I climbed one of the mountains and fell down part of it -- which really helped me understand what Torak goes through on the Mountain of Ghosts.

When did you know you would be a children's writer?

I didn't. I was simply keen on writing an adventure about a boy and a wolf, which then became Wolf Brother. It became a children's book because the hero, Torak, is twelve years old; but I didn't plan that, it just happened. You see, in general, when I'm writing, I concentrate on the story itself, and I leave it to other people, such as agents and publishers, to work out who it's for.

If you were not a writer, what do you think you would be instead?

Miserable.

What has been your most memorable book event thus far?

A few years ago, I did an event for the launch of the third book, *Soul Eater*, which was very special indeed. It was at a bookshop in London, and it was attended by some fans from my website (the Clan: www.torak.info), some reporters, and two extremely special guests: a pair of wolf cubs, named Torak and Mosi. I'd known them since they were tiny -- I'd bottle-fed Torak -- so both cubs were friends with me and felt very relaxed. They weren't at all worried about being in a bookshop. They were just very, very curious, sniffing everything, ignoring the reporters' cameras, and graciously allowing their fans to pet them. It was wonderful. I don't think any of us will ever forget it.

What qualities do you think makes Torak an appealing hero?

I suppose it's because he's very brave and yet he often gets scared; he's quite isolated, with no parents or siblings; he has an awful lot to deal with, as he has to battle the Soul-Eaters; but he also has the strongest, most loyal friends, in Wolf and Renn. Also, he's not perfect. He tends to blame himself too much for things, and often he tries to do things all on his own, instead of letting his friends help him. Luckily, they know this, and help him anyway.

Renn is such a great character -- a really tough girl. Is she based on anyone?

There's a little bit of me in Renn, in that she's quite sharp and critical, and can be impatient; but she's a lot tougher than me, and I definitely don't share her skill with a bow and arrow! Mostly, though, she's her own person: someone who walked into my imagination seven years ago. I've gotten to know her much better as the stories have gone on. Sometimes she surprises me, and she's made me alter my plans for some of the books. For instance, in *Spirit Walker*, I thought she'd be staying with her clan instead of following Torak to the Seal Islands. It took me a while to learn that she's definitely NOT the sort of person who would stay at home when her friend is in trouble.

How do you come up with new characters, like Dark?

You know, writing is a mysterious process, and many ideas come from deep within the imagination, so it's very hard to say how characters come about. Mostly, they just happen. With Dark, I knew from the start that he's very pale and has white hair, and I also knew his name, and that he has a white raven for a friend. After that, the rest of his character just came.

Do you think fans will be satisfied with the ending of the series?

I've had quite a lot of feedback from fans in countries where *Ghost Hunter* has already been published, and they love it, which makes me fairly confident that American readers will, too. Be prepared for some sadness, some scares, a very satisfying ending, and above all, lots of edge-of-the seat adventure.

What do you hope your readers will take away from this sixth book? And from the series as a whole?

I definitely don't write with any kind of "message" or "lesson," probably because when I was a child, I used to run a mile from books like that. As with all the stories in the Chronicles of Ancient Darkness, I want my fans to feel that they're really there, living and breathing the adventure with Torak, Renn, and Wolf. That's why I do all the research: to make the stories real.