



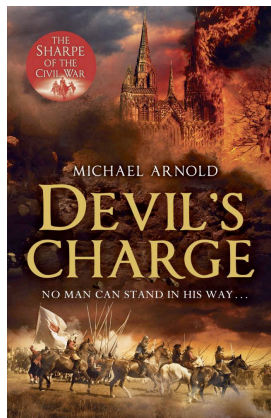
Good Morning! It's Thursday on September 01, 2011.

Literature for everyone in the South West

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Michael Arnold



Michael Arnold lives in Hampshire with his wife and young son. His childhood holidays were spent visiting castles and battlefields, but his fascination with the civil wars was piqued partly by the fact that his hometown and region of Hampshire are steeped in civil war history. *Devil's Charge*, the sequel to *Traitor's Blood* will be released on August 18th.

Cyprus Well caught up Michael to find out about his writing process...

Can you say a bit about why the Civil Wars hold such a fascination for you?

I've always been fascinated by the Civil Wars. It's easy to cite the social, military, religious and political complexities of the time as reason enough to write about it, but, in truth, I first fell in love with the era because I thought the idea of Roundheads and Cavaliers battering each other was far more interesting than the stuff we learned in school (Cold War, Treaty of Versailles, Industrial Revolution etc.). Once I had decided to write a novel, I knew that it would be set in 1642.

Where did the first inspiration for the make-up of the Stryker universe come from? Was there a moment you can pinpoint where an interest in the era suddenly became an ambition to write the novels and the main features of the books came together in your mind?

To be honest, I really can't remember where the first inspiration for the Stryker universe came from. As I've mentioned before, I was interested in the period since school age, and, due to the kind of books I read, it felt logical that the series would be of a military/action style.

In terms of Stryker specifically, I literally added facets of his character as I wrote. For instance, I came to the part where I needed to describe his eyes, and it occurred to me that it would be interesting for him to have some kind of disability, something to make him fallible, so I gave him just one eye. In that way, he almost wrote himself.

Could you describe your approach to researching Stryker's era and then incorporating period features into a story? How important is factual accuracy?

Factual accuracy is essential as far as possible. As a fiction writer, I have the luxury of inventing the characters and details that'll push the story along, but I think readers expect a certain level of accuracy (dates, locations and major events).

My general approach to research is to read up on the period as I go along. For the first book I obviously spent some time reading around the subject at a high level. Politics, religion,

“

Flint, flaked quartz, a cache of axes. These crinkled eggs shaped us. They glint and roll in the flooding gravel.

”

From 'Axes, Devon Sequence'
Checkpoint,
Exeter Poetry Festival
Ronald Tamplin

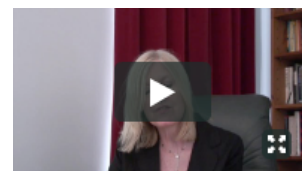
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military history etc. But once I had the main points, I dived straight in and let the story guide me, and that's how I've worked ever since. When I reach a point where a character uses a particular type of weapon, or I need to describe the uniform of a 'real' regiment of the time, I'll go and find out about it there and then.

We're now at book two in the series. What are the long term plans for the Stryker story? Do you have a mapped out sense of how you'd like it to develop and do you have ambitions to tackle standalone books outside the Stryker story, perhaps in a different era?

The long term plan is to take the Stryker Chronicles all the way through the civil war period, and, if people still want to read the books, up until the Restoration of the Monarchy. Obviously that's a great deal of history, so quite a lot of books!

I'd love to tackle some stand-alone stories along the way. Maybe after the first few Stryker books I'll be able to turn my attention to another period in history... but that'll all be down to my publisher!

Stryker forms a platoon with some other well known historical combatants, Sharpe, Cato, Hart, and other comrades. Why do you think these heroes of past conflict are so enduringly popular?

I think everyone loves to follow the fortunes of a charismatic hero, but where historical fiction excels is the sense of escapism you can get from a tale set in the past. A good historical novel will open a window onto a long forgotten point in time. You can immerse yourself in it, relive events that you'd only ever read about in dry text books and, hopefully, learn a bit too.

Can you describe your writing environment and practice - do you have a particular place where you write, or time of day, number of words, for example?

I generally tend to write in the glorified shed at the bottom of the garden. I work during the morning, seven days a week. I would put more hours in, but my 3 year old son is home from pre-school at lunchtime, and it's near impossible to get any work done with him around!

When you have a germ of an idea for a novel, how do you begin to plan for the writing stage. Do you map events in advance, for example, or do you simply begin?

I only ever map events at a very high level. The initial idea for a Stryker novel will be the battle I want to write about. So for *Devil's Charge*, for instance, I knew I wanted to tell the story of the first siege of Lichfield, and the Battle of Hopton Heath. So they were my two plot anchors. I didn't, however, know exactly how I would get the characters involved in those events. Each day you sit down and write, and let the characters carry you along. The story develops organically.

Do you have any advice for our readers who may wish to see their work published?

The most important thing is to finish a project. Don't let yourself abandon a manuscript when the going gets tough. Writers tend to have loads of good ideas, and it's so tempting to jump to the next thing when the a piece becomes a bit of a slog, but you need to have some finished work under your belt if you're to attract an agent.

At Cyprus Well, we are keeping an eye on developments in the digitising of books, Ipads, Kindles, etc. As an author, how do you view these developments?

I view them as a natural progression. It's a bit of a concern, of course, because it's so difficult to know where the industry is heading, but it seems logical that e-books will ultimately replace paperbacks in the mass market arena. But what can we do except watch and wait?

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