



100,000 WORDS

AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM POLLOCK

Young Adult, or “YA”, literature is incredibly popular these days. More and more YA titles are being published, and more and more YA books are being made into movies and TV shows. It’s a wide category, too, including everything from paranormal romance (*Twilight*) and dystopian* sci-fi (*Hunger Games*) to books about growing up (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*) and mental illness (*Thirteen Reasons Why*). But what is YA, and why is it suddenly so popular? We talked to Tom Pollock, author of the successful *Skyscraper Throne* trilogy.

What is YA, and what makes it different from whatever “non-young-adult” literature is?

I think the conventional view is that Young Adult books are books for teenagers. But most people who read YA are around 22 to 40! My personal view is that YA is books *about* teenagers rather than specifically *for* teenagers. And they deal with themes to do with transitions (= changes) and the kinds of concerns (= worries) that lie on the edges between childhood and adulthood.

The *Skyscraper Throne* books are urban fantasy plus YA...

Well, they actually sort of pick up genres as they go, so the first one’s a YA urban fantasy, the second one’s a YA urban-fantasy dystopia, the third one’s YA urban-fantasy dystopia post-apocalypse. YA and urban fantasy work together well because urban fantasy is about encountering a world which is at once strange and familiar, which you’ve seen your entire life but you’ve

never actually set foot in until now, and about finding your place in that world and trying to navigate its dangers. It’s a particularly elegant metaphor for growing up.

And what about your book *White Rabbit, Red Wolf*?

With *White Rabbit* I was trying to do several things. One, it’s a YA spy thriller. Two, it’s a character study. You’ve got to get a satisfying emotional experience from being inside the head of a character – in this case a 17-year-old maths prodigy* with a panic disorder. And then third is the structure of the novel itself, which is based on a mathematical theorem* which is important in the plot.

How do you go about writing a novel?

Theme is usually where I start, because theme is just a fancy word for “what’s your book about?” Then you create characters and situations that take those themes and make them concrete. That’s how you make it human, you write about it from the inside.

One idea’s not really enough to write a book. You need a handful that intersect* in the right kinds of ways. The ideas strike sparks* off each other, which generate more ideas, which generate more ideas and then suddenly you’ve got 100,000 words.

GLOSSARY*

dystopian – a vision of the future as bad or unhappy

prodigy – an incredibly gifted young person (e.g. the young Mozart)

theorem – a mathematical statement that can be proved to be true

to intersect – to meet and cross each other

to strike sparks – literally, to make light and heat from contact (“the sword struck sparks off the stone floor”)