

2008/June MICHELLE PAVER - Publishing News

“A year is a long time when you’re ten years old,” says Michelle Paver, author of the bestselling *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* series (Orion), explaining why she has rigidly kept to her schedule of a book a year for the last half decade. This month will see publication of the paperback of Book 4, *Outcast*, followed in September by the hardback of the penultimate title in the sequence, *Oathbreaker*. “A book a year doesn’t sound too bad, until you start to do it, *and* you try and do two or three months of publicity as well - some years I’ve had to incorporate trips to the States, the Far East, Scandinavia into my timetable, not mention all the work in the UK.” Although she’s notched up a lot of miles, Paver has yet to visit all 36 territories where her books are sold, and has a real hankering to go to the Faroe Islands to celebrate the fact that she has a Faroese edition in her collection of foreign editions.

Four years ago, at the very outset of this saga, Paver told me that she had worked the whole six-book structure out and knew what was going to happen right up to the last page of the last book, and I wondered if the journey was still going according to plan. “It is in the sense that the plan wasn’t *that* detailed, and the interplay between the different characters wasn’t something I knew everything about - which was just as well because characters change as you get to know them. Renn, the girl, was much more stubborn than I’d given her credit for and was just not going to stay at home when her friend was threatened, so that meant a major re-think of the plan for *Spirit Walker* and she has become a much more prominent figure.” But this was, says Paver, always going to be a *bildungsroman*, the spiritual journey of the main character, Torak, and that hasn’t changed at all.

Paver has always done copious amounts of research for her books, with many trips to remote parts of the globe to find out just what Stone Age life was like, all funded by the worldwide success she has had. Could she have written the series any other way? “I could have written stories, but they wouldn’t have been *these* stories and I don’t think they would have had the flavour and I don’t think they would have been as successful. The thing I get

again and again from children's letters is 'I felt like I was having the adventure, like I was there'. I think that's because I *have* been there a lot of the time. I swam with the killer whales in Tysfjord in northern Norway, researching *Spirit Walker*, when they'd just been feeding on a shoal of herring and the water was full of tiny sparkles from the herring scales; that was a detail I'd never seen anywhere else and you wouldn't get out of reading books."