

The ROMANCE SCI-FI WRITER

BY SIOBHAN FITZPATRICK

One of the lowest points in S.E. Smith's life inspired one of the happiest. Three years ago, the Fort Pierce native and former computer support specialist who had worked for the St. Lucie school system 15 years, walked into a meeting and was told that she and 29 other educators were being laid off immediately because of budget cuts. "What hurt the most was the way they handled it. It devastated my self-esteem, my identity," she says.

Two weeks later, the school district rehired her. She accepted the position, but the experience had scarred her. "It showed me they had control over me, my future, and that didn't sit right with me."

Her husband, Steve, told her to get a hobby, so she decided to try to write a book, something she had never done before. "I had all these stories in my head," she says.

She found her genre in science fiction, "I have always had a fascination with the stars and the universe since I was a child. I would lay out at night on the driveway and imagine what was up there. It only seemed natural that I would gravitate to writing about what I love," she says. "And, my technical knowledge definitely comes in handy."

In a few short months she crafted four books, but it wasn't until her sister read one of them and loved it that she had the courage to share her stories with the world. Smith approached a small publishing house, but it turned her down, and she decided to self-publish on Amazon.com.

That was in March 2012. Less than three years later, the prolific author has made both the *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-seller lists for her books *Dragons: Dragon Lords of Valdier Book 7*, and *Hunter's Claim: The Alliance Book 1*. She was named Amazon's No. 1 international best-selling author for 14 more of her books. In addition, she won the 2014 Romance Convention's Reader's Crown Award.

What makes this all the more >>



The prolific author, S.E. Smith, does most of her writing in her book-writing in her home office.



The protagonists of Smith's stories are always strong women.

remarkable is that Smith didn't learn to read until she was 11 years old. "I didn't learn how to read until the sixth grade. I always had difficulty with it. But once I found a book I loved, it was as if a light switch clicked on and I couldn't get enough of it," she says humbly.

Today, she has become so popular that a major New York publishing house has approached her to sign on with it. She turned it down. "They would want me to do things their way," she says.

Clearly, she made the right decision because she netted a little more than \$1 million since debuting her initial four books, with Amazon's 30 percent share. Not Surprisingly, she retired from her school district position this past June.

So just how has she been so incredibly successful, particularly in a field that is not known for its moneymaking potential? And, with so many sci-fi books out there, just what makes her books so appealing?

"I think it's the relationships I create with the characters because they are telling me the story. I just listen to them. I never know what's going to happen next. When I'm stuck, I ask the characters what to write, and they always 'answer' me" she says. "I find myself laughing out loud, or crying, because I am feeling what the characters feel and when I finish the story I feel good. Then I know my readers will relate."

And they do. She receives fan mail from all over the world, and when she went to an Indie Romance Convention this past summer in Denver, readers from all over flew to meet with her. Their goal was to have a few words with the woman they so admired, the woman who dreamed up these amazing worlds of faraway warring galaxies filled with Martians, cat-like creatures who seem more human than feline, and many otherworldly characters who interact with strong yet vulnerable human women who inevitably fall in love with men or men-like creatures, while overcoming great odds.

And they do get steamy, which Smith admits is another draw to her books, although she is careful to point out that they are not listed under Amazon's erotica section. Possibly because the couples are always monogamous and endearing, and true love is celebrated.

To date Smith has published 31 books, which would be impossible for many fiction writers, but she finds writing easy and enjoyable. She says that constantly publishing new books

Name: S.E. Smith

Age 52

Family: Husband Steve and four children, three boys and one girl

What/who inspires me? Actually everything around me is an inspiration. When I hear music, read an article, see a painting or someone, even hear a name, it can be an inspiration for a new story.

As far as who inspired me to write it would be a combination of my sister, Linda, and my husband, Steve. Both of them have been incredibly supportive in me discovering who I was and what I am capable of.

What are my hobbies? Writing was until it became my career, but I would still consider it a hobby as well. I love to read, travel, go to the movies, and camp, as well.

What no one knows about me: That my class rebuilt more than 100 computers and donated them to needy families.

People OF INTEREST

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— S.E. Smith

is one of the reasons for her outstanding success. "The key is continuing to release stories on a regular basis and developing a good relationship with the readers."

Another key to her success she says is utilizing social media. She has a professional assistant who helps with this, a fan who contacted her and offered her extensive social media skills for free. At the time, Smith was already using social media, but says her assistant, whom she insisted on paying, has brought it to a whole other level on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and other sites.

And now she is venturing into audio books, which Amazon asked if it could set up. "They see me as financially viable and said they would pay to have my books produced or audio," she says.

Her family is helping out too, with her daughter designing jewelry with pendants of the books' main characters, while her husband offers his unconditional support, although he has never read one of her books, which does not bother Smith in the least.

"Unless it is an instruction manual or some other educational medium, Steve doesn't read it. He says there is too much in this world to learn. We love going to the movies, so that is where he gets his relaxation. Perhaps when one of my books comes out as a movie I'll be able to get him to go!" she says with a smile. *PR*