

Interview with Debra Killeen, author of Legacy of the Archbishop

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar is pleased to interview Debra Killeen, who is here to talk about her new book, “Legacy of the Archbishop: Volume 3 of The Myrridian Cycle.”

Debra Killeen graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1985 and spent fifteen years working as a pharmacist in numerous settings—hospital, retail, and home infusion. She never found the right fit. Then, having reached her limit with managed “care,” she transitioned careers into clinical research and writing novels. Debra lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with her sister Diane and four exceptional cats—Scott, Finn, Isis and Osiris. “Legacy of the Archbishop” is the third volume in “The Myrridian Cycle” following “An Unlikely Duke” and “A Prince in Need.”

Tyler: Welcome, Debra. I’m honored to get to interview you for a third time. I certainly am curious to find out what has been going on in Myrridia since we last talked. To begin, do you want to give us a little background on the first two books of “The Myrridian Cycle” or do you think readers can read “Legacy of the Archbishop” without having to read the first two books?

Debra: I’m glad to be talking to you again, too, Tyler!

I think readers can read “Legacy” without having to read the first two books, but I think they’ll enjoy it more fully if they have read them. Each of the novels has a separate, main storyline, but there are continuing back-stories to all of the principle characters. The first book in the series, “An Unlikely Duke,” sets the stage. I took two characters from our modern-day world and put them into a medieval-type world, where Magic works, and the Church controls it. This explains a couple of the characters in the new book using modern words and phrasing, among other things. In “A Prince in Need,” these two characters remain in the Kingdom of Myrridia, where the king is slain, and they assist in finding his killer. Two other modern-day characters are added to the medieval mix, and one of them plays a pivotal role in the new book.

Tyler: Let’s get right to the plot of the new book then. I understand you’ve created a terrific villain named Aldric. What are you willing to tell us about him?

Debra: How much do you want to know? Ha ha. Seriously, Aldric is a man who studied to become a priest about twenty years before “Legacy” opens. Socially, he’s a commoner, so he had to fight to get into seminary school—think scholarship student at a prep school in our day and age—and he had to continue to fight to stay there. The fact that he was a highly gifted Magical practitioner helped his case, and by the time he finished seminary and was ordained a priest, he was ultimately

expected to move up the church hierarchy. Except for one little problem—he didn't get a, to his mind, good enough assignment for his first job. One of his biggest problems is pride.

Which brings me to another character, Edward Fitzroy—readers of the first two books will remember him. Edward is a royal bastard who, to Aldric's way of thinking, never had to work for his position in the seminary, and to be fair to Aldric, Edward did have it relatively easy. The two were bitter rivals throughout their training, and both had the strongest Magical gifts in their class. Needless to say, when Edward got a "cushy" assignment, Aldric pretty much lost it. I won't say more at this point.

Tyler: Did you enjoy creating Aldric?

Debra: I loved creating him. Aldric and Edward are two of my favorite characters because they're so much fun to write! Edward is annoying and irritating, and downright obnoxious, but he's one of the "good guys." Aldric is something of a mirror image to Edward, only when you get down to basic personalities, they're a lot alike (that pride thing, for instance). A few other characters point this out to one or the other of them from time to time, provoking angry reactions, naturally.

Tyler: What do you think sets Aldric apart from other villains or will make him attractive—well as attractive as a villain can be—from other villains?

Debra: Oh, Aldric can be very attractive when he wants to be—he can even be charming on occasion. One thing is that some readers will be able to identify with him. Again, he's the guy (or gal) who's had to work hard to achieve his position, and then, for example, some inexperienced recent college graduate comes into the workplace and is making more money. I've seen it happen. Besides, when you think about it, for Americans anyway, we're pretty much all commoners, and darned proud of it! Aldric is one of those people that other people will listen to, even if he's saying things that are completely insane. Think about it—sometimes I shake my head at what politicians say, and they still get reelected. He has a powerful personality, and he can be very persuasive when he wants to be.

Another thing—Aldric has a following of a couple dozen people. Not all of them are evil, as becomes evident throughout the novel, yet they are loyal to him. Many of them are also social outcasts, and Aldric did something in their individual pasts to help them. Of course, Aldric has his own agenda, but there's no changing the fact that he has helped people.

Tyler: And who is the archbishop that the book's title refers to?

Debra: That's a little tricky, and it varies from time to time. Mostly, I believe that it's Francis McHenry, the Archbishop of Myrridia at the opening of the book, but in some ways it also refers to Edward Fitzroy, his successor. Francis is passing the torch of church leadership to Edward, for better or worse.

Tyler: Debra, what is the "legacy" the title refers to?

Debra: It's twofold, which I think is why I keep going back and forth as to which archbishop. First, there's Francis's legacy as the former archbishop, and he leaves a journal behind that's a little more than just his memoirs. This journal actually ends up in Chris McCabe's hands, rather than in

Edward Fitzroy's, and some interesting things are revealed. The "legacy" can also refer to Edward himself, especially in regard to the predicament in which he finds himself by the end of the book, but I won't say more about that just now. It would spoil the ending!

Tyler: What about our old friends from the previous books—such as Chris McCabe, who traveled to Myrriidia from our own modern day world? How do older characters fit into the story?

Debra: Most of the characters from "Duke" and "Prince" have stories that are continuing to evolve. That's one thing that I find enjoyable about writing a series instead of a stand-alone novel. I get to revisit with people that I've known for some time. (Nine years and counting for some of them!) Chris gets into some serious trouble in the new book, between his investigation into McHenry's death early in the book, and then later, when he comes face-to-face with Aldric. I will say no more on that point—I want the readers to discover it on their own.

Elijah Holmes has gotten a title, against his better judgment, and Nicole Carpenter, Chris's former fiancée, gets a lot closer to Aldric than she might have wished. But by doing this, she plays an important role in this book.

The unfortunate thing is that sometimes some characters have a more minor role in one book vs. another. Such as Allyson Claybourne in this case. But, she is one of the pivotal characters in the 4th book in the series. Chris will take a "back seat" in that one, but then he's earned a rest after this installment! Robert Claybourne on the other hand, doesn't get much rest until the 5th book in the series. I don't always know when I start writing each book who will have the biggest parts to play, but it works out in the end.

Tyler: Debra, did you set out to write a whole series of books and plan them out ahead, or did each one just lead to the next? I ask because I'm always fascinated when authors of series don't have us follow one repeated main character but really make us believe in their fictional worlds because they keep expanding that world by using so many characters like you are doing.

Debra: Tyler, that's an interesting question. When I began writing, about nine years ago, I had one idea for a book and I wasn't even sure that I could write an entire novel. I'd done some short stories back in my school days, but nothing that was terribly good. So, could I tackle a novel? Well, I gave it a shot, and by the time I reached the end of "Duke," I knew I wasn't finished. I knew at that point that there would be three books in the series, and by the time I was done with "Prince," I knew it would be five. And there it stays. (It was inevitable really. I don't know how much you know about the practice of pharmacy, but in that profession, tablets are usually counted by fives. J)

Tyler: Okay. Let's get back to "Legacy for the Archbishop" specifically. I understand Helen is arrested for heresy in the novel. Will you tell us about the circumstances surrounding this event?

Debra: Well, this goes back to Edward Fitzroy's personality. He wants Francis McHenry's death investigated, and since Chris and Helen were involved in solving Christian Lattimore's death in "Duke" and Reginald Claybourne's death in "Prince" —they're his "go to" people. But since his relationship with Chris is a little, shall we say, antagonistic, he wants to ensure cooperation, so he has Helen arrested. Edward feels he's not far off the mark, since he believes Helen's cousin, Father Michael Pembroke, *is* a heretic. Things are rough for Helen, and Chris, during her incarceration, but it backfires on Edward, what with Helen being a feisty woman.

Tyler: Since Chris and Helen have had to “solve” mysterious deaths in the past, would you consider your novels as mysteries of a sort? Do you intend to make the reader guess “whodunit” along with the characters?

Debra: Oh, yes, these first three books definitely have a mystery element to them. I’d say that “Duke” is the closest to a “whodunit” though—since the murderer isn’t revealed until the end. With “Prince,” it becomes clear fairly on as to whom the guilty party(ies) is/are, though I hope it’s entertaining to readers to discover the why of it. “Legacy” begins with elements of a murder mystery, even down to a search for clues in a monastery, but well before the ending it becomes apparent who the murderer is.

Tyler: Debra, since this book is about an archbishop, will you give us some background on the religion of Myrridia? For example, there are bishops and archbishops and in this novel, Robert is knighted at Easter. Are the people of Myrridia Christians or even Catholics, or is their religion, since we’re in a different world, different from the religions of our own Western civilization, despite the similarities of Myrridia to medieval Europe?

Debra: Good question, Tyler.

This goes back to before I started writing “Duke,” when I was still plotting out the general storyline. Back in the Dark Ages (the 70’s & 80’s), when I was in high school and college, I read a lot of fantasy, and in most of those series, magic and religion had an antagonistic relationship. So I thought, well, what if the church not only accepts magical practice but goes one step further, and controls it? I was off and running.

The characters so far are Christians, although that’s going to change in later books. This church is strongly based on the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, although I don’t use the word “Catholic” specifically. While I was doing research on magic, I came upon a wealth of information, and I came to the realization that magic will work with any religious system—it comes down to the individual practicing the religion. All of the major religions have their mystics, after all. It was a matter of me developing a system that uses recognizably Christian forms, such as the major archangels. Of course, with this church in charge of magic, the practice of magic has gotten rigid. So there are people in this world trying to move away from the church—part of the ongoing back story.

Tyler: Let me see if I can trip you up with this question then. If the Myrridians are Christians, how did Christianity get started in Myrridia? Did an outsider from another world come and convert the people, or did Christ himself live in Myrridia?

Debra: Ah, ha! I’ll give you the explanation I currently have in my head. This world is what I like to think of as a “spin-off” of the world in which we live. Other people, including scientists, have theorized that every time someone makes a decision, in another world, they make the opposite decision, and an alternate world then exists. I don’t pretend to understand all this, mind you! Anyway, at some point between Mohammed and the current century (the 11th), there was one of those decisions. Even though the place names are different, this world is a lot like ours. And to answer your second question—no, Christ didn’t live in Myrridia. He lived in the Holy Lands—more will be explored in a future trilogy I’ll be writing in this world, where many of the current characters will go on crusade. I’m still researching and setting up the additional geography. But

Christ does exist in this world's religious systems, as do some other familiar names, and Christianity spread in much the same way it did in our world. Of course, I'm going to have a lot of fun with the Gnostics in the new series, too. Religion truly fascinates me. How's that?

Tyler: Great answer, Debra, and now you're making me impatient to read your future trilogy, but back to "Legacy for the Archbishop." The novel is also filled with a lot of magic since Aldric is an evil sorcerer. Will you tell us about how you chose to depict magic in your novels without making it over the top, thus destroying the reader's willing suspension of disbelief? How does magic fit into a religious culture, and what are the laws you set up for Myrridia to govern how magic is used?

Debra: Tyler, you ask some great questions!

This maybe has more to do with my own personal interests. I find all religions fascinating to study. But let me go to your first question before I go off on this subject.

I try to make the major magical workings as visual as I can, without going "over the top." It was a little challenging with the magical duel in this novel, partly because Aldric and Edward have such strong personalities and partly because they're both powerful magicians. But I think I succeeded. I've tried throughout the series to keep a little bit of realism in the magic, but just take it a little bit past reality. Some of my early readers have commented that the magic feels real to them, so I must be on the right track.

As far as magic in a religious culture goes—well, this is just my personal opinion. I think it's a matter of perspective or terminology. Most religions have some sort of magical aspect to them. People may prefer to think of it in terms of miracles rather than magic. Many people believe in angels, regardless of their religious affiliation—angels are considered by some to be magical entities and by others to be visitors from alien worlds. Who's to say? I don't have all the answers, but I'm having a great time imagining how religion and magic can work together and putting it into the books.

As far as your last question goes—in Myrridia, of course, the church makes and enforces the laws governing magical practice. And this church isn't open to change, and least not at the time these stories take place. That doesn't stop people from trying to bend or break the rules, though. Aldric is the extreme example of someone breaking magical law in Myrridia. He's powerful and he has a personal vendetta against Edward and Myrridia's church.

Tyler: Debra, you mentioned that Myrridia is similar to medieval Europe. Have you done much research about the Middle Ages that have informed your depiction of Myrridia?

Debra: Tyler, writing has given me the chance to indulge in a passion of mine—history. When I was much younger, my two favorite subjects were chemistry and history. Quite a combination, yeah? Anyway, obviously I studied something close to chemistry in college, but I took a few history courses, too. I've done a lot of research on the Middle Ages over the past several years, and I'm always looking for books and on-line articles that cover odd little tidbits that can find their way into the books. It's a dirty job, but I've got to do it! Ha ha.

Tyler: Debra, you always have plenty of excitement and plot twists in your books—lots of lies, deceit, danger, romance. Will you tell us a little about how you create the plot for your novels and keep the story moving? Your readers often comment that they can't put your books down.

Debra: Tyler, one of my goals as a writer is to entertain my readers, and the things you list are entertaining to readers (and myself!). I admit—my favorite is doing all of the political intrigue. From my perspective two of the most important things that contribute to that are plot and character. Before I start writing a novel, I do a general plot outline and develop the characters. With the series, it's good to have a few characters already there, so to speak, but it's just as much fun to come up with the new players. My plot outlines are not usually all that detailed, but I always know how I want to begin the book and have some sense of how it will end, with several of the major plot points already mapped out. Having said that, characters have been known to surprise me on occasion, and the story may go off in a direction I didn't plan at the beginning. In those cases, it typically works out for the better. Although I will say I did have some trouble with the ending of this book—in the specifics—but I had some critical input from my editor and first reader, who said—what about—? I won't spoil it here, though.

Tyler: Debra, how many more books will there be in “The Myrridian Cycle” and will you give us a little preview of the next one?

Debra: There will be two more books in this series. The 4th book, currently titled “Earldom Under Siege” (although that may change), opens with a royal wedding and the return of a character from “Prince,” Cecelia Falkes. I knew when I was writing the magical duel in “Prince” (and so did Allyson and Juliana) that Cecelia wasn't done. She's out for revenge on Allyson and Robert, and she's got plenty of help, since Nicholas Severinson, the King of Wyckendom, a new character in “Legacy,” is only too ready to invade Myrridia. Of course, Cecelia's spirit is initially surprised to find herself in the body of a man. There's some additional Dark magic in this one and an exploration of Pagan magic as well. A lot more “lies, danger, deceit, and romance” as you aptly put it above.

Tyler: Wonderful, Debra. I hope you'll come back to discuss that book too. I'll save my questions about Pagan religion and magic in Myrridia for next time then. Thank you for allowing me to interview you today, Debra. Before we go, will you tell our readers about your website and what additional information they may find there about “Legacy for the Archbishop”?

Debra: Certainly. My website is www.myrridia.net. I'm working on getting the site updated. An excerpt from “Legacy” is there, as well as information about my upcoming convention appearances and where the books can be purchased on-line. Thanks so much for the interview.

Tyler: Thank you, Debra. It's been my pleasure.

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