**Q&A with David Michael Williams**

**What is *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* about?**

Here’s the quick explanation: five teens get pulled into another world and have to play hero in order to make it back home.

*The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* is what’s called a portal fantasy, but the heroes of my story have a bit of an advantage in that they know how fantasy quests work—or at least they think they do.From the start, I described this book as *Galaxy Quest* meets Dungeons & Dragons.

Here’s the official hook:

**WIZARDS & WANNABES**

As the first day of high school creeps closer, five friends agree to one last LARP before splitting the party and ending their geeky game forever.

But the real adventure is just beginning…

Mistaking the teens’ costumed characters for actual warriors, a sorceress summons Sir Larpsalot, Elvish Presley, Brutus the Bullheaded, Master Prospero, and Tom Foolery to her world to complete an impossible quest. To succeed, they must become the heroes they only ever pretended to be.

And if they can’t find a way to win, it’s GAME OVER for real!

**What is LARPing, and why did you choose to focus on it?**

LARP stands for Live Action Roleplaying, where players dress up and physically portray their characters in a game, as opposed to table-top gaming, where players move miniatures across a map and roll dice.

Think of it as “live-action D&D.”

I love fiddling with fantasy clichés and smashing stereotypes when I can. Making my main characters larpers gave me the chance to write protagonists who are keyed into the tropes and “rules” of how fantasy adventures work.

Even though many larpers are adult, larping could be seen as something uncool at the characters’ ages, so larping also works as a metaphor for finding their identities. Does maturing mean they have to stop playing make-believe? Is it time to grow up and move on?

**Whom is the book about?**

There are five heroes in *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot*, Midwestern teens who become their larger-than-life alter-egos when they larp. Here’s a little about each of them:

LORENZO / SIR LARPSALOT

Lorenzo Lopez would much rather larp than worry about starting high school or saying goodbye to his best friend. As Sir Larpsalot, human paragon, he is eager to prove himself, though his heroics could tear the party apart.

ASHER / ELVISH PRESLEY

Asher Brzezinski plans one final larp for Good Company before his family moves away, but everything goes wrong. As Elvish Presley, elf minstrel, he has played many roles, but never before the damsel in distress.

MAK / BRUTUS THE BULLHEADED

Makayla Schmidt unleashes her inner tomboy when she larps, though she also has a secret reason for playing. As Brutus the Bullheaded, minotaur berserker, she buries her feelings beneath a tough exterior—until she can’t.

TRENT / TOM FOOLERY

Trent Hawthorn thinks larping was fun while it lasted, but he is ready to grow up and meet girls. As Tom Foolery, a dwarf clerogue, he must remain a geek a little longer if he wants to keep himself and his brother alive.

JON / MASTER PROSPERO

Jonathan Hawthorn doesn’t care if the others call him a know-it-all because it implies he truly knows everything. As Master Prospero, human magus, he will do anything to complete their quest, even if he has to do it alone.

**Where does *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* take place?**

This might sound crazy, but there are actually three worlds in this book.

The teens start out our world, what they think of as the *real* world (1). On the outskirts of the unassuming city of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, they roleplay as their characters in a *pretend* world of their own creation called Mezzo-Earth (2). Eventually, they end up in another world altogether—a world with magic (3), and that’s where the real adventure begins.

**Who will enjoy this book?**

*The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* is a young adult (YA) fantasy novel. My target audience is male readers age 13 to 17 (though female beta readers also enjoyed the story—especially the take-no-crap tomboy Makayla Schmidt).

Truth be told, I wrote this story for teens who, like my son, don’t typically get engrossed in books. It’s a fast-paced, action-packed adventure with a lot of humor and a lot of heart. You don’t have to be a fan of fantasy to enjoy *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot*—though you might become one while reading it!

Reportedly, half of YA fantasy readers are adults, and my adult beta readers found plenty to like in this book, especially those who grew up gaming and/or reading fantasy novels.

**What is *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* “rated”?**

I’d say it lands somewhere between PG and a soft PG-13. There is no swearing; instead, the characters used invented curses in the Minotaur tongue. While there is violence and a hint of romance, none of the scenes are gratuitous or particularly graphic.

**What does the title mean?**

Coming up with suitable titles can be a struggle, and this book proved no different. The very first character concept that came to mind was Sir Larpsalot. Initially, he was going to be the unrivaled main character, but as time went on, I decided to go with an ensemble cast.

And yet the name “Sir Larpsalot” says so much: this is a story about larpers and a tale that doesn’t take itself too seriously. So even though this isn’t Lorenzo’s story alone, I thought it was important to keep his avatar’s name in the title.

An unrepentant punslinger, I also wanted to sneak a double meaning into the title with the word “lost.” On one hand, no one has ever told this story before; by calling it a “lost tale,” it adds an air of mystery and seasons it with a high-fantasy flavor. On the other hand, the teens are literally lost in this strange, new world.

**Is this a standalone novel or the first book in a new series?**

From the beginning, I wanted *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* to be a self-contained, standalone story—no setup for a sequel, no cliffhanger demanding one or more follow-ups.

Why? For one thing, I worried that introducing too many subplots would sabotage my attempt to maintain a highspeed pace. For another, I didn’t necessarily want to commit to writing another YA portal fantasy. (I have so many other ideas waiting in the wings!)

Having said that, I always leave the door open a crack if I want to return to group of characters or setting. Do the friends drift apart in high school? Do they reconnect remotely when they go to college?

If reader demand and sales support a return to this story, I would certainly consider writing a sequel.

**What motivated you to write this book?**

A friend of mine and I collect superhero and supervillain names—the more ridiculous, the better—because we entertain the idea of creating our own comic books, one of which would have starred the impostor hero, Sir Larpsalot.

When the illustrator we had been working with bailed, we shelved our ideas, but I never stopped thinking about Sir Larpsalot. Could I adapt the graphic-novel outline into a true novel?

Coinciding with those thoughts was a desire to write a book my children could enjoy, especially my almost-teenaged son who isn’t necessarily drawn to reading. Ultimately, I decided to write a YA portal fantasy targeting his demographic: young boys who have been exposed to fantasy but aren’t normally motivated to pick up a (non-graphic) novel.

The book had to be fast, fun, and funny.

**What were your biggest challenges with this book?**

Too many ideas!

I tend to write complex, branching narratives that feature a wide cast of characters and intertwining subplots. I like using big words, playing mind games with the reader, and filling pages with foreshadowing and plot twists—none of which would have necessarily benefited this piece of YA fiction.

Throughout each draft, I also had to remind myself of who my readers were as well as who my *characters* are. It’s been a while since I was a teenager, so I had to step back into that stage of life. Fortunately, I live with a tween and a teen. Listening to them talk to each other and watching them interact with their friends came in handy, since I wanted the characters’ dialogue and inner monologue to be authentic.

**What did you like best about writing *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot*?**

The focus. By streamlining the story into a single thread and spotlighting only a handful of characters, I could keep the plot moving along and not get mired down in complex details. Which isn’t to say it wasn’t hard work!

I also did two rounds of feedback gathering—first with teens and then with adults. Hearing from YA readers so early in the process gave me confidence that the story was headed in the right direction. The characters and their struggles resonated. The feedback from my teen beta readers made the subsequent drafts so much stronger.

Thirdly, I had a lot of fun with the epigraphs at the start of each chapter, which not only served as a bit of fun vocabulary, but also a teaser about what was just around the bend.

**Were there any surprises along the way?**

By juggling five point-of-view characters, I initially worried there would be some weak links. To put it bluntly, what if one or more of the narrators were duds? And to be honest, I thought a few of them might end up unlikable. (\*cough\* Trent \*cough\*)

I grew to like them all for different reasons by the end of the first draft, and a quick poll with my beta readers revealed a pretty even spread across favorite characters and least favorite characters. Everybody seemed to find at least one hero to latch onto, and none of the characters were universally loathed.

**What is your next project?**

I have a few plans peculating:

* Creating an audiobook version of *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot* narrated by yours truly. (Gulp!)
* Publishing a collection of short stories that span the gamut of what speculative fiction has to offer.
* Working on a fantasy-themed, pixel-art webcomic about retired adventurers called *Curmudgeons & Flagons*.

You can follow my progress on these projects (and maybe others?) through my blog at david-michael-williams.com.