
MEET

S.E. MCPHERSON

“Magic is real as long as writers keep dreaming it up and readers keep joining in. Books are real power, real magic—and they can change our world.”

S.E. McPherson | Speculative Fiction Author | She/They

S.E. McPherson has been a writer of fantasy and speculative fiction since she was eight years old, binding books with a hole punch and tied yarn. While she took a brief two-decade detour into the career of a marketing executive and won many boring business writing awards, she’s found her way back to storytelling and illustration. Her stories are drawn from her own experiences as a neurodivergent, bi person. *A King’s Trust*, a queer fantasy romance, is her first novel. Find out more at semcpherson.com.



Quick Facts:

Born and raised in Texas

Now lives in Minneapolis, MN

Published by Metaltail Press

Interests: TTRPGs, baking, illustration, sculpting, gardening, Tarot & witchery

Links:

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MY STORY

Magic is real, and I've come to it so late in life because I was focused on succeeding the way I was supposed to.

Good Christian girls from small Texas towns are supposed to find a nice man and marry young, have a child in their twenties, and sit quietly in a church pew.

Driven young women are supposed to get a college degree and advance quickly in their career, manage the men around them so they never feel challenged, lead with compassion but not *too* nicely, prove themselves and prove themselves and prove themselves so their ideas can be taken half as seriously.

I did all of those things. At thirty, I was the only female executive at a software company with a slew of marketing awards under my belt, an MBA, a wonderful husband, a straight-As kid with Pinterest-pinnable birthday parties, a thriving church community.

And my hair was falling out.

My chest never loosened enough to take a full, deep breath. When I dreamed, I dreamed of Excel sheets and board presentations, dentist appointments and overdue car registrations, doubts and disillusionment and anxiety.

As I was organizing my Google Drive (as one is wont to do on a quiet Sunday evening), I found an old doc called *Nightrunners*, a story I'd written in college between double majors and Honors college and two jobs and sorority office. I opened it up and started reading, and it was like pins and needles, a dead limb waking up.

Magic is real. I used to know that. I wrote it down on construction paper or lined notebook pages or printed-out serial chapters or microblogs and shared it with my friends, and they joined me in these places that didn't exist until I made them out of nothing, out of dreams.

I started to write again: two a.m., dark chocolate bar shedding little crumbs on the desk beside the long-cold mug of tea, Billie Eilish whisper-singing quietly so as not to wake the silent house.

And as my characters started to discover things, so did I. In the wee hours, after dishes were done and reports written, I pulled the threads of religious ideology and neurotypical frameworks and the complexities of love and gender and sexuality, and I found them all connected.

MY STORY

Why do the gods I write keep becoming villains, entirely obsessed with top-down hierarchical command in ways that threaten and destroy instead of creating and loving?

Why do my characters keep struggling to find enough power to fix things, only to keep finding more powerful people and structures determined to maintain the ugly status quo?

Why is it so, so easy for my characters to fall in love with men and women? Why, when I sit down to write, do I prefer to escape into the mind and body of a man for hours at a time?

I questioned everything at once. We left the church entirely as I started to deconstruct. My husband made the (gentle, obvious) observation that I was probably bisexual.

When I shared a book with beta readers and one of them thanked me for the neurodivergent representation in the main character, I had a good long think about what the hell that meant, since it seemed to me his struggle to navigate the “necessary” deceptions and bureaucracy of nobility were entirely normal and a perfect analog for my navigating corporate America. A late AuDHD diagnosis arrived.

Insanely, I quit my VP job to write.

The stories I write now are stories of disillusionment with the narratives of success, of finding family outside of blood and love outside of norms, of power fantasies where autistic pattern-finders fix the problems they see, of gods who may be powerful entities bent on controlling their worshippers or may be inventions of powerful people with the same goal.

They are *all* stories of love, though they may not always be romances. I love love. I love the way it stretches people past their limits, past their morals, past their expectations.

And I know love very well. When I write my supernaturally loyal, patient, and protective male love interests, I’m referencing my husband, who’s never faltered for a moment as I’ve become unrecognizable from the person he met so young. Together, we’ve found so much magic in the world.

And I’ll keep inventing more. Because it *matters*.

Stories that challenge norms, stories that center love when the world trends toward hate, stories that celebrate people who are not white, straight, abled men, stories that challenge and deconstruct—they have actual power. **Magic is real, and we make it.**

AUTHOR Q&A



Do you advise other authors to do what you did, quit your job to write?

That's the dream, right? But I don't think it's particularly realistic. I had the immense privilege of a very supportive husband and a financial situation that allowed for the (perhaps insane) choice to abandon an executive career for the wildly unpredictable prospects of an author, but I probably wouldn't even advise my younger *self* to do the same. I needed to see what success looked like in the field I chose and decide it wasn't what I was actually looking for. And I got some phenomenal material for future villains, minor antagonists, and systems that need to be broken in the process.

Do you intentionally incorporate your neurodivergence into your stories?

While I love that my stories include that representation, I don't actually have to do it intentionally. I spend weeks and months and years in the heads of these characters, so they're all going to have some aspects or quirks of my brain. There are other aspects of diversity that I *am* intentional about, but neurodiverse stories come naturally.

I love reading neurodivergent authors because you get a very natural sense of how we perceive the world differently. Also, seeing ND folks in different settings makes it clearer how "disability," for us, can be more societal than intrinsic.

What book made you realize stories had real-world power?

Ella Enchanted. I was in fourth grade and read the passage where she imagines herself swallowing "honey for sweetness and oil for smoothness" to make her voice persuasive. It was the first time anyone had ever described tone as a physical thing you could change, and for an autistic little girl who'd been told "watch your tone" so often, it was life-changing to have actual advice for how to do that.

I took a lot from that book—the search for agency, the deeply kind love interest, the importance of female friendship—but what I remember most was realizing I could control my voice, and how much that changed every aspect of my life at the time.

Why do you think stories are so important?

As a marketer, I built a career making companies money with stories. People make *every* decision based on the stories they hear, tell themselves, and believe. I've seen stories bring good but struggling companies into the black and I've seen stories elevate truly despicable companies to local legend status—they have immense power for good or for evil. That's even more true for fictional stories because people actively seek them out and opt

AUTHOR Q&A

in to consuming them, but they don't necessarily see them as vehicles for persuasive messaging. You always know an ad wants you to buy something, but fictional stories seep into your brain and shape your whole mindset differently.

“I'll always tend to tell darker stories because as soon as you start to talk about the complexity of the world and its problems, things get darker. But they always have a glimmer of hope because the world does, too.”

Do you approach writing with the intent of changing minds?

Nah, I approach writing with the intent of spending time in the head of a character that really intrigues me. I'm a “pantser,” so I typically have no idea what “lesson” a story is going to teach until it's long over. I just start with an interesting character or set of characters, give them each something to want, and then turn them loose on one another. They create the conflict and themes all on their own.

The books I've loved reading the most all have character-centered stories, and those are the ones that have expanded and enriched my view of the world the most. Maybe it's the pathological demand avoidance in me, but I can usually tell when someone's set out to write a moralizing book, and it doesn't impact me much as a reader. It feels like someone telling me what to do, which has never worked well.

But when someone writes a story from such a different perspective that every sentence of that POV challenges what I've considered “settled truths” about the world, that *hits*. It's why it's so important to read diversely. I hope my books are that for someone.

What is your favorite genre to write?

I always write speculative fiction because it's what I read—fantasy, sci fi, horror, dystopian—and because it's the direction my maladaptive daydreaming leads. But within that, I'm most drawn to fantasy. If you have the choice to create a world with magic or one without, why would you choose *without magic*? But not every story lends itself to a magical realm. I've written a dystopian alt-universe series that's completely without magic partially because I didn't want there to ever be an easy answer to the problems the two protagonists face.

I know I'll always tend to tell darker stories because as soon as you start to talk about the complexity of the world and its problems, things get darker. It takes a much more optimistic person than I am to write light, cozy fiction. But they always have a glimmer of hope because the world does, too.