



A former St. Mary's biology major turned computer engineer has turned again, this time into fantasy book writer, and his self-published book is drawing positive notice from reviewers round the country. Given that the fantasy was inspired by the transformations of Monarch butterflies, maybe it makes sense that Nick Ruth would be involved in a transformation process of his own.

When he graduated from St. Mary's in 1982, Nick Ruth little guessed that one day he would write a fantasy adventure. He went to work for Scientific Abstracting Company in Bethesda, eventually becoming a senior editor. Then he took some computer courses at night and landed a job at the Social Security Administration in Woodlawn, where he has been ever since as a network administrator.

In 1995 he and his wife Sheila had a son, David, and that's when things began to change. Nick began reading David the "Magic School Bus" books, and David demanded to hear them over and over. "To keep himself interested, Nick started embellishing the stories, inserting his son into them, and David became so excited that Nick was inspired to write an entire adventure just for him." Scene followed scene, and soon he had over 200 pages.

David's interests entered the book in other ways. Nick reports that his son became interested in insects, and the family embarked on a project of raising Monarch butterflies. "Every year," Nick says, "we roam the fields and abandoned lots, examining milkweed plants looking for Monarch caterpillar eggs. We raise the eggs until they transform into butterflies, then release them. One year, we even tagged the butterflies for Monarch Watch, an organization that studies the migration of the Monarch butterflies."

The story unfolds when a young boy named David discovers a wizard held captive in a monarch butterfly's body. Houdin, the imprisoned wizard, is condemned to endless reincarnations through the butterfly life cycle. The wizard is able to let David know, however, that help is needed to stop the evil Thane, who is turning everyone's dreams into nightmares. In addition to the story, the book includes a glossary of resources and information about monarch butterflies.

In the words of one reviewer in Heartland Reviews, "The author does an excellent job of incorporating life science...to teach without being obvious about it."

The book was not originally intended for publication. However, Sheila was excited by it and they sent it unsolicited to several publishers. When it was

Monarch Butterflies Inspire Fantasy Novel Biology Alum Nick Ruth Invents a World for His Son



Nick Ruth and David sing karaoke at a family gathering. David's fascination with insects led his father to create a fantasy novel, *Dark Dreamweaver*, which features a wizard trapped in the butterfly life cycle.

turned down, they consoled themselves with the thought that Harry Potter had been rejected over 40 times before making it into print. Not willing to wait that long, however, they finally took matters into their own hands and published it themselves.

Dark Dreamweaver has been positively reviewed by *Midwest Book Review* and *Heartland Reviews*. It has received a "highlighted title" designation from Independent Publisher and has been selected as an American Booksellers Association Book Sense Children's Pick.

When asked about the influence of his St. Mary's education on the book, in addition to his biology major, Ruth looks back to his theater classes and the time he spent working on plays, scenery and lighting.

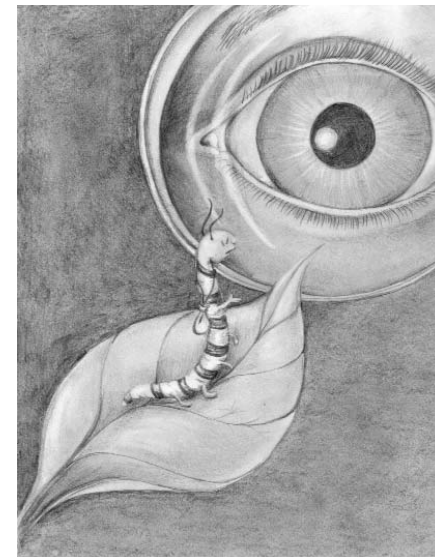
He reports that David is so thrilled about the book that he wanted a sequel,

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and Nick has one, which he believes is better than the first. He and Sheila are exploring options at the moment. And of course, David wants yet another book. Nick is thinking about it.

The book is available through Amazon.com and can be found in certain Borders and Barnes and Noble outlets.

Dark Dreamweaver Excerpt



The lion spoke, "Something is coming." A fluttering noise began growing in the tunnel behind them and as David watched in horror a huge black bat soared out of the darkness and latched onto the mountain lion's neck. Behind the bat came hundred of other bats.

Kira yelled, "Run!"

They all broke into a stumbling run but soon found that they outran the light from the single torch and were in darkness again. The bats were all around them. David could hear the clang of Kira's machete and Aradel's sword as they swung and hit the rock walls surrounding them. He waved his arms and knocked a fluttering bat to the ground....

"Houdin, what do we do now?" David screamed as the tunnel grew dark again and the loud fluttering of the angry bats swelled. But Houdin was silent. David concentrated on mindmelding with the wizard, but for the first time in a long time he couldn't do it. He could feel the sweat on his face even though the cold breeze was still whistling down the tunnel. He tried to remember the spell that Houdin had just told him for creating a bright light, but in his panic he couldn't find the right word. A bat fluttered by his head. The sounds of battle from his friends began again. David squeezed his wand and a pale glow grew around them. He looked down at the amulet hanging around his neck and gasped. Houdin was gone! In his place was a green chrysalis with gold stripes.

Oh no, he thought, I'm on my own.