

SJU Student Follows Dreams, Writes Book Series

Andrew West experienced a vivid, recurring dream for a year and two days—30 main characters, an apocalyptic world and a quest to save humanity. After capturing the story in over 8,000 pages West begins the process of publishing the tale into a book series.



After year-long dream, Andrew West to publish eight-part series

By Ellen Bartyzal and Julia Eckart



Imagine having a dream where you can't control a thing. You are placed in an apocalyptic world and vividly witness the experiences of people suffering at the world's end. It plays like a movie—you are there but you can't interact with the people and you can't control what happens. What would you do about it?

SJU junior Andrew West decided to write it all down.

“On Nov. 23, 2015, I had this just unbelievably vivid dream. I remember the people. I remember the conversations, the scenery, the architecture, their backgrounds, where they came from, how old they are, so on and so forth,” West said. “I woke up and I remembered it, and it was like watching a movie.”

For one year and two days, West continued having a dream sequence portraying the detailed story of a society on the brink of the end of the world. He wrote 8,360 pages and is currently working on editing the story down to an eight-book series called “Heaven’s Gate.”

The Dream

West’s dream is set in a time when humanity has used up all of its resources—natural and artificial—and the planet has five years left. The governments of the world collectively decide to set off nuclear weapons in the polar ice caps to create a nuclear Ice Age re-vamping and restarting the planet. As the world comes to an end, selective individuals of wealth, skill and power are chosen to take cover in bunkers around the world. The rest of the people will die as a result of the nuclear explosions, except for 30 characters.

These characters are the main focus of the series. They each navigate a mysterious tower hidden within the Amazon Jungle and try to reach the mythological Golden City known as Heaven’s Gate which floats above the tower.

These 30 characters must work through the eight floors of the Tower—each representing a deadly sin and human struggle that must be overcome—to reach the top in order to save humanity.

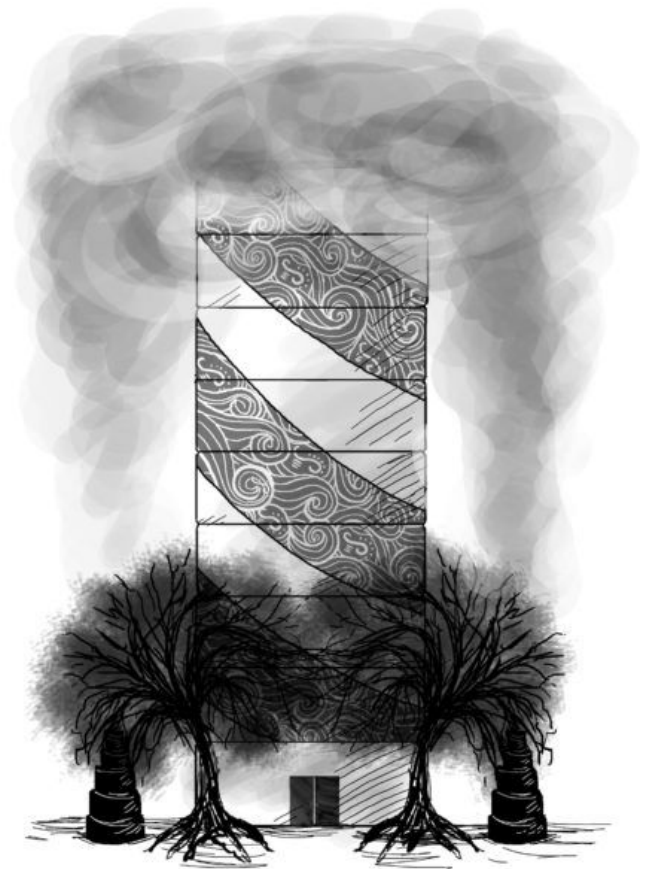
From Mind to Manuscript

West originally decided to write down this story because his aunt encouraged him to record dreams that seemed out of the ordinary.

“My Aunt Stella is very into this spiritual aspect of life and she ended up sitting me down when I was very very young and said...‘if you ever wake up and you have a dream that you just can’t get out of your mind, you need to write it down’,” West said. “So, that’s how it started.”

Throughout the year, West consistently set his alarm two hours early so he could wake up and write down everything he had dreamt the night before. He says if he didn’t do this right away, the contents of the dream would consume and distract him for the rest of the day. He says one of the most difficult parts of this journey was experiencing certain feelings in the dreams. If he had not previously experienced a feeling that one of his characters had in the dream, he would be put in their body to experience it.

During the fifth book, that experience was suffocation.



“For some reason, [the character] ended up suffocating, and I was put into his body while it was happening so I could experience it and know how to write about it,” West said. “I was terrified to go back to bed that following night.”

Though this night of dreaming scared West, he says he thoroughly enjoyed the progression of his dreams and the excitement he felt throughout the process.

According to Laura Sinville, an Associate Professor with a PHD in neuroscience at CSB/SJU, dreams can hold valuable insights and lessons into our daily lives, but they are often lost when people can’t remember their dreams.

Dreams can easily be forgotten after waking up. That is because the prefrontal cortex is shut off in REM sleep, the dream stage. The prefrontal cortex controls short-term memory and filters what we remember.

To avoid forgetting, Sinville suggests writing dreams down.

“The best way to remember your dreams is to put a notebook next to your bed, and when you wake up, immediately write it down,” Sinville said. “Our dreams fade really quickly from the moment you wake up. So, you need to capture it right away.”

Friendly Support

CSB junior Grace Kilgore is a close friend of West’s who had the opportunity to study abroad and listen to this dream unfold. Kilgore admires his commitment and drive to getting his story published.

“Not once did I ever not believe Andrew,” Kilgore said. “We have been friends for so long so I trust him full heartedly and believe everything he had said.”

Kilgore says she thinks West is talented, but he doesn’t always let other people know it.

“I believe he should get so much more recognition for this than he is,” Kilgore said. “He’s incredibly motivated and he took this idea of his and just went with it—I don’t know if I would have the courage to do that.”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuYGsocChR0>

A Professor's Approval

Cindy Malone, an English professor at CSB/SJU, has witnessed West's journey towards publication. She believes West has made smart decisions in the competitive literary market.

"I think the path that he's chosen is a great one, because he is essentially self publishing," Malone said. "I think he's wise...he's working with others to refine the project, and getting the manuscript in the best possible shape while interesting others in the project on Wattpat [which] seems like exactly the right starting point to me."

Malone knows the publishing industry well. In the late 90's, Graywolf Press—a Minneapolis based publisher—presented to Malone's editing and publishing class about budgets, marketing, copy editing and acquisitions.

The publishing industry is very different today than it was 20 years ago, however. The internet and social media make it possible to self-publish, opening doors for authors who wouldn't otherwise be able to gain recognition. Sites like Wordpress and Wattpad allow users to share their stories and blog posts with the world, no publisher or agent necessary.

Although the ability to self-publish has its advantages for aspiring authors, it also poses challenges, Malone said.

“I’m tempted to say that at this moment the literary publishing industry is at a juncture and the future is hard to foresee...the challenges are different now than the challenges fifty years ago,” Malone said.

One of these challenges is the ability for self-published authors to gain recognition in an oversaturated market. The ease to publish online has resulted in a sea of authors, and those authors aren’t always able to reach their target audience.

“The difficulty with self publishing is—infelicitous word—discoverability, “ Malone said. “So many people have produced work and published it online that it can be difficult for readers who have interests that match the content of the book to find that book.”

Gaining a large readership online is a major advantage if one aims to be recognized by an established publisher. Works that generate public enthusiasm are more likely to be noticed by agents.

“One fairly rare but exciting possibility is that something self-published through digital format will get picked up by one of the big five publishers, so that is often the hope of someone starting out,” Malone said. “It can be very difficult to get one of the conglomerate publishers to take a risk on a debut novel but if the work that’s published in digital format generates excitement and buzz, then it’s much easier to interest an agent, and after that, a publisher.”

What’s Next?

After returning home from his fall semester abroad, West was able to contact Joan Holman, a Book Marketing Diva & Internet Marketing Guru, who agreed to work with him. With the help of Holman and two unofficial editors, West is currently working through the process of editing his 8,360-page story into chapters so it can be published.

The prologue and first three chapters of West’s first book, “Wrath Among Men,”are available to view on Wattpad, an online storytelling community that allows writers to share their work. [\[\[link to his page https://www.wattpad.com/user/WestOfLife\]\]](https://www.wattpad.com/user/WestOfLife). West is working toward publishing the series and hopes to release e-book versions of the first book on Amazon and Kindle by the end of summer, 2017.