

TIME WARP

BY BRIAN SCHWARTZ



A PLAY ON WORDS that stemmed from the quip: If you know the future, it's easy to be a prophet, "Time Travel for Fun and Prophet" is a science fiction humorous novel co-written by Terry Willey and Carol Baker.

As long-time fans of Douglas Adams (author of "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Universe") and Terry Pratchett (known best for his comic fantasy novels set in Discworld), along with the British comedy troupe Monty Python, it is easy to see how the Paso Robles couple became inspired to pen a science fiction novel that blends elements of humor and romance.

In 2019, with aspirations to get the ball rolling, the couple signed up for National Novel Writing Month and wrote 50,000 words of what would become their first published novel.

The story is about an unwitting plumber named Dan, who accidentally gets pulled into a vortex and starts jumping through a variety of different time periods, learning to survive time travel with the help of a more experienced fellow traveler named Freddie. Dan and Freddie band together while Dan learns the ropes and tries not to get killed as he bounces around history when an unexpected romance blossoms.

Willey and Baker have worked in various theaters as writers, actors, stage crew, and directors. They've also collaborated as directors and writers on several one-act plays. In addition, Willey spent five years in a comedy improv group.

When it comes to writing stage plays and screenplays, the focus is primarily on dialogue and action. The transition to novel writing required the couple to create an initial draft overflowing with details, including settings and nuances—the "fiddly bits," as Baker calls them. Their strategy was to include as much detail as possible, then whittle it down and refine the story to the essentials in subsequent drafts.

As a self-proclaimed "seat-of-the-pants" writer, Willey allows his characters to drive the story itself, admitting he never knows where it might lead. The main conflicts in the story didn't become evident until well into the writing. Together, the partners adopted a collaborative editing approach, which allowed them to enhance and build upon one another's ideas. The duo believes the story benefits from embracing some organic fluidity rather than following a rigid structure. During the writing, even their best-laid plans got completely derailed because of something unexpected the character did or said. This, they explained, was exactly what kept the job of writing both fun and challenging.

Just as experiences over time change who we are, the characters in the story grow over time while confronting moral dilemmas, largely influenced by the unique personalities of the writers themselves. According to the authors, what we write reflects how we see the world, which in turn reflects the world we experience. Ultimately, it's about not taking ourselves too seriously and finding the humor in life.

For more, check out "The Time Travelers Companion," a short story you can find on the authors' website at CineHunden.com. As their fictional universe expands, the authors welcome reader input on deciding the next destinations to transport their unlikely heroes. An audiobook is also available. **SLO LIFE**