**Interview with Natalia Shcherba: "I always wanted to create a Slavic fantasy".**

If you think that only foreign vampire sagas have success with teenagers, you are very mistaken. In the former Soviet Union, Natalia Scherba is a very popular writer. We talked to the author of the series "Chasodei" and "Lunastras" (her new book is coming out soon) about Slavic fantasy and learned the main secrets of creating a bestseller.

- Before you became a writer, you already had a successful career as a designer. Wasn't it scary to go out into the open sea of writing?

- I always wanted to be a writer. But in my childhood, I thought that only a select few could get into this profession - the celestials (laughs). So I didn't think about it seriously, although at school I started composing something for myself. But no one really supported me in this - my parents, of course, said that I should do something more material. After school I became a designer, because in addition to writing I was also fond of drawings. In this business, by the way, I was very successful - I created jewelry for fur coats, circus and theater costumes, evening gowns ...

- I heard, by the way, that readers like to create drawings based on your books.

- Yes, that's true. You know, I realized I became a real writer when a girl gave me her own drawing that she was inspired by my book. It's interesting that her passion for drawing turned into her own business, and now she creates comics. I get those kinds of gifts very often - I have a collection of five thousand drawings from readers. I really appreciate that. It's always interesting to look at how people see the characters you've created.

- And yet, when you left your career as a designer, did you already have ready-made plots for future books in your head?

- I had an idea that later grew into the Chasodei series. I've always taken time seriously. I even wanted to invent the time machine (laughs). So in the back of my mind I had the idea of writing something on the subject. And then one day I was doing my work, and suddenly I saw some video clip on TV - there were medieval decorations and knights in armour. That's when I realized I wanted to write fantasy stories. Every activity started to bring me back to the idea. Let's say I was embroidering with beads, and I was thinking about some kind of story, and I was absorbed by my imaginary world. Apart from the theme of time, I immediately realized that I wanted to write a Slavic fantasy - that the heroine must necessarily have blue eyes, and that her name must be Vasilisa Ogneva.

- Speaking of female characters, you make them very strong. They don't expect much help from a prince on a white horse. This fits in very well with modern trends, I think.

- I wanted to write a book about a girl who becomes a strong character as she goes through life's various challenges. And yet my main message is that you have to grow up to be not only a strong person but also a kind person. And this is much more difficult. But my male characters are interesting, too. For example, Fash. Though I deliberately introduced him into the plot from the second book, because characters like him - dark, charming and with a dark past - always "pull the blanket" over themselves and slightly overshadow the main character.

- Who do you draw your characters from?

- I always thought that writers created them "from scratch," but then it turned out that wasn't true. Many traits authors copy from relatives and friends. But I immediately made it a rule that my characters must somehow grow on their own - influenced by the circumstances and events of the book. In general, when you write a book, there usually comes a point when the story with the characters somehow "write" themselves without your intervention. The main thing is to choose a general direction for the text, and not to let things go completely by themselves.

- So you understand Pushkin's anguish when he complained to his friend about Tatiana, saying, "What has she done, look, she's married!

- Yes, yes, absolutely (laughs).

- Tell me, why do you write about teenagers and not adults?

- Teenage years is the most vibrant period in a person's life. And then, I came to the conclusion that books do shape personality - and in teenage years we are most susceptible to different influences from the outside, including the influence of books. And I really like the fact that a teenager tends to do unexpected things, outside the box and rules.

- What books shaped you?

- There are many such books, but first and foremost I recall the fairy tales of Pavel Bozhev. He knew how to create a wonderful sense of magic in his works. I also reread Taisa of Athens by Ivan Efremov at various points in my life. And my favorite storyteller is, of course, Astrid Lindgren. She taught me that you should talk to a child as to an adult.

- What must a book have in it to be successful? Given the popularity of your novels, you definitely know it.

- I certainly do, but I'm not going to tell you (laughs). Okay, actually, it's pretty banal: The book has to answer questions that you yourself really care about. In "Chasodei," for example, I wondered what time is. And that theme held the plot - it was my research. And, of course, you have to write sincerely. Teenagers recognize falsity in a second.