

I've included some links in the text and here that may be useful:

The Style Guide which you may have once seen: [Style Guide 2003-2005 | BioMedia Project](#)

The main/most reliable BIONICLE Wiki: [https://biosector01.com/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://biosector01.com/wiki/Main_Page)

A digital preservation site: [BioMedia Project | BMP](#)

## Questions:

### **A Bit About Yourself**

- 1. How long have you been writing? And what got you into it originally?**
  - I've been writing since I was a kid, but I've been published since the early 90s. I was a children's book editor for several years right out of college, and after a couple of years I started moonlighting as a writer, first by ghost-writing for a popular series called The Saddle Club.
- 2. What are your favorite books? Tangentially, what have been your most inspirational books?**
  - Too many favorites to mention! I read everything I could find as a kid, then focused on a lot of SFF as a teenager, then majored in English Lit in college so mostly read the classics for a while. These days I read a lot of YA and middle grade books, partly to keep up with the industry but mostly because I enjoy them! Most inspirational books is a tough one, too – a few that come to mind are everything by Ray Bradbury, Frankenstein, Stranger in a Strange Land, Lolita, The Witches of Worm, Lord of the Flies, and Feed by MT Anderson.
- 3. What is your approach to writing? Are you more outline-oriented or more improvisational?**
  - Definitely an outline person here. I would rather work out the plot details and other important elements at the outline stage than have to fix stuff later in the process – saves a lot of time and angst! My outlines are pretty detailed, but there's still room for improv and adding/changing details as I go.
- 4. Are you drawn more to narrative, characters, or world?**
  - All three!

### **Introduction to Bionicle**

- 5. How did you originally find yourself writing for BIONICLE?**
  - I was doing a lot of work-for-hire projects at the time, and an editor from Scholastic approached me to find out if I'd be interested.
- 6. Had you heard of BIONICLE prior to your involvement with it?**
  - Yes, but only slightly
- 7. What year were you contracted to write for BIONICLE?**
  - 2002
- 8. What attracted you to the series?**

- I was intrigued by the totally unique setting and characters, and the chance to tell a new part of their story – it was a fun challenge to immerse myself in that world! I also enjoyed working with Greg Farshtey – his passion for the property really shone through and he was so helpful to me in getting up to speed on everything.

### First Impressions

**9. What were your impression of the [sets](#)?**

- Is this referring to the artwork of the characters and settings? If so, I thought it was pretty cool! Or does this refer to the toys/figures themselves? Either way, same answer!

**10. By the time you joined, Bionicle story content had been released in other mediums. What were your impressions of the [comics](#)?**

- Sorry, I don't recall my first impression of much other than the initial "look" of the characters and world – it was a long time ago!

**11. Did you ever encounter the online animated content from Templar Studios – the [first](#) or [second](#) Mata Nui Online Games or the [Mata Nui Online Animation series](#)?**

- Not sure

**12. How conscious were you of the [card](#) or [board games](#), the [canceled 2001 video game](#), or any of the other media released for Bionicle during the time you were involved with it (or since, if applicable)?**

- Don't remember, sorry

**13. What were your impressions of the original story bible?**

- I always love diving into a bible for a new-to-me property, and that one was no exception. It's cool to learn about a new world and figure out how to tell stories within that world.

**14. What were your interactions with [Bob Thompson](#) and the other story leads like?**

- Sorry, don't remember

**15. How closely did you work with [Greg Farshtey](#)? He's mentioned before that he gave a few recommendations along the way, but to what extent did you interact?**

- As mentioned above, I did work with him and remember him being very helpful and available for questions, etc. I'm pretty sure he helped in shaping the stories, though I don't recall much detail about that at this point.

### Writing the Books

**16. How long on average did it take you to write each novel?**

- I don't recall exactly, but books of that length generally would take me 1-2 months from initial story development through a full manuscript. (Edited to add that I see in the earlier interview you linked I said 2-3 weeks due to a tight schedule, so that's probably right!)

**17. Every contributor brought something new or different into this fantasy world. What were some of your favorite inventions and ideas that you added?**

- Oh wow, this is a great question and I really wish I could remember something to tell you! If you'd only asked me this oh, about twenty years ago... ;-)

**18. One of the most interesting aspects of the 2001 story is that pretty much every account of its ending varies, starting from when the Toa arrive at the temple Kini-Nui. Other accounts**

mention stone keys called Makoki Stones. One version of the story has the Toa getting their Golden Kanohi in their villages, another has their Kanohi turning golden at the temple. On top of this, some versions of the Manas fight deviated from the story bible and involved the destruction of control towers while yours featured a Manas Kaita. Meanwhile, the Shadow Toa fight in the official BIONICLE Style Guide and Greg Farshtey's BIONICLE Encyclopedia has the Toa recognizing that the Shadow Toa are aspects of themselves and absorbing them, where the book - more in line with its themes - has the Toa joining forces and each taking on a different Shadow Toa than their direct opposite. Could you shed light on some of these departures from the other media and why you were interested in pursuing these directions with these scenes?

- I wish I could, but I'm sorry to say I don't remember at this point. I will say that a book for a middle grade audience (which these primarily were, though I realize that due to the popularity of Bionicle they would have reached beyond that) requires a clear and reasonably defined plot that will make sense to 8-12 year old readers. So my guess would be that that played into those kinds of decisions to some extent. (And as I've mentioned, Greg did have input into the books so that might have been part of it, too.)

**19. In 2001, in addition to seeking out their Great Masks, we are told the Toa also went on hunts to find collections of Noble masks as well as the aforementioned Makoki stones. Were you ever advised on these when you were writing the first book, or did you only ever have to work with the Great masks?**

- I don't remember

**20. Were there ever any limitations, be it from the Lego or Scholastic sides of things, that were placed on your writing?**

- Well, there are always some limitations! Scholastic needed me to make the story suitable for the audience in terms of language and reading level, and also the books needed to come in within a certain length range (i.e. word count). And of course Lego wanted the stories to work within the world of their property, which is standard when writing for licensed properties (as I've done for many others, from Disney to various other movie/TV properties to websites/video games to even other Lego projects). That said, I still had a lot of creative freedom. And while some writers don't like IP work because of the restrictions, I have always found it a fun challenge.

**21. What stories (either yours or others') did you draw influence from when writing for Bionicle?**

- None that I recall, but again, that was a long time ago! (Outside of the material Lego supplied about Bionicle, of course.)

**22. One of the most distinct elements of your books was the characterization of the Toa, and how each of them bounced off of each other. What was it like expanding on the personas of these Toa?**

- That part was fun! It was a little daunting at first to work with such alien characters, but the more I delved into the world the more they started to come to life in my mind. It was important to figure out the ways they were all different from one another (as well as ways they were similar/the same) so they would feel real to readers and make those readers feel invested in the stories.

**23. Did you have any favorite characters to write for?**

- Pretty sure I did, but sadly I don't recall specifics at this point. Sorry! (Edited to add that according to that earlier interview I mentioned Kopaka, so we can go with that!)
- 24. Which character did you find most challenging to write?**
- I don't remember any being more challenging than the others.
- 25. What did you think of the Lewa/Le-Matoran dialect "treespeak," and what was your approach to writing it?**
- Sorry, I don't remember
- 26. Although other Bionicle media had explored the world of Mata Nui already, yours was the first to explore it in prose format. What were some of the biggest challenges from taking this world and conveying it in words?**
- That's pretty much what we writers do – although not all worlds are quite as "alien" and unique as the world of Bionicle! I leaned pretty heavily on the style guides and other background material provided to me to help me put the world into words. As I recall, Greg was helpful in this aspect too since he knew the world so well.
- 27. Your books frequently explored some of the comic scenes in greater depth, and your stories often expanded on unexplored subjects hinted at in the comics. Having studied how the comics and books weave in and out of each other, I've always been thoroughly impressed at how you told a story that stands on its own but also rewards comic readers. What was it like identifying and constructing narratives that could build on and enhance the framework of the comics?**
- Your question perfectly describes one of the fun things about working with this sort of property, and one of the challenges as well – creating something new, and something that can stand on its own, while also trying not to disappoint or bore more "advanced" fans. (And thanks for the compliment by the way, it means a lot coming from you!!)

### **Adapting Existing Story Content**

- 28. What was it like novelizing scenes from the comics?**
- Sorry, don't remember much about this specifically
- 29. How did you pick which comic scenes you'd novelize and what you wouldn't?**
- Ditto
- 30. Jumping forward a bit - the fourth of your novels was an adaptation of the first BIONICLE movie to be produced. What was it like writing a novelization of that screenplay, and how was it similar to/differ from adapting the comics?**
- Novelizations are fun but definitely different from creating an original story. In many ways they're easier for obvious reasons, though it is a different kind of challenge to tell the story in a way that works in a book without deviating too much from the script/film. I remember as a kid reading novelizations of movies I'd seen – and I ALWAYS noticed if they didn't match! After having written many novelizations over the years I now realize there are a lot of reasons for that, most notably the conflict between publishing and film schedules – if the publisher wants the novelization to be in stores when the film is released, you often have to go to press well before the film is finalized, so if things change at the last minute... oh well! ☺

**31. Out of curiosity, do you know why the Mask of Light book wasn't marketed as a BIONICLE Chronicles novel, even though it was part of that series? (And despite the fact the book published immediately after it – *BIONICLE Chronicles 4: Tales of the Masks* – was.)**

- I don't, sorry, those sorts of decisions are/were above my pay grade

### The Future of BIONICLE

**32. Speaking of *Tales of the Masks*: Starting near the end of 2003, Greg Farshtey became the primary writer for BIONICLE novels. Did you ever keep up with the stories after Mask of Light? If so, what were your thoughts on them?**

- I don't think so

**33. What was it like handing the writing torch off as you did?**

- Just part of the business! I knew Greg would do a great job since he was so passionate about the property.

**34. In 2008, we witnessed the biggest answer to a question that had been hidden since the beginning of the story: It turned out the island of Mata Nui was actually the face of Mata Nui - the trees, volcano, beach, etc were camouflage covering a gargantuan space-faring robot whose crew were the Matoran, Toa, and Turaga. Moreover, it was revealed that the Bohrok were functions of this robot, meant to clean the island off so that Mata Nui could continue his mission. Were you aware of these twists when you were writing the story?**

- Ooh, I don't remember, but that's super cool! It does sound vaguely familiar but maybe we only had hints of this? Sorry, wish my memory was better because I'm loving your questions!

**35. If you were, were there other hidden mysteries you were privy to when you were writing?**

- See above

**36. Were the Rahi, Rahkshi, or Makuta said to have had a purpose in the true nature of this robot?**

- See above

**37. Were there any story ideas or concepts that you were interested in using but couldn't for whatever reason?**

- Probably! I always have more ideas than can fit in one book/series, and given the detailed nature of the Bionicle world I'm guessing we (meaning me, my editor at Scholastic, and Greg) probably had to winnow things down to something that would work in these types of books.

### Original Drafts

**38. We would be remiss if we neglected to touch on something that was discovered a while back. Some [comparison between the Hungarian and English versions](#) of *BIONICLE Chronicles 1: Tale of the Toa* (courtesy of a user named Vrahno) suggested that the former had been translated from an earlier manuscript of yours. In this earlier manuscript, the visions of the Toa were emphasized more, Kopaka's Kaita dream sees him freeze and someone talking to him, Pohatu admires his reflection, and Lewa indicates he doesn't want to get his hair wet. These and other changes have given some fascinating insight into the development of this story. What was the rationale behind some of the changes between drafts?**

- This is interesting, it would be extremely unusual for an earlier draft to be used for a translation deal AFAIK, but I don't have any specific knowledge of this. There are always changes made between drafts for a wide variety of reasons.

**39. Out of curiosity, do other "original" manuscripts still exist of these stories?**

- Probably not, given computer updates and such, unless the publisher still has them somewhere. I'm not even sure whether I would have printed out a physical copy to mail to the editor, or if it was already digital at that point – publishing has changed A LOT in that respect over the past twenty plus years! (For instance, at my first job at a major NYC publisher in the early 90s, we felt super cutting edge and fancy because we had ONE computer for the entire department of about a dozen people! Hard to believe looking back now, lol!)

**40. As alluded to before, there's a much higher emphasis on the Toa's dreams, with the implication that someone is directly talking to them and foreshadowing of the entire 2001-2003 story. There are also the enigmatic words that remained for the final version of the books: "The knowing will come." Were all of these ideas tied together? What was the in-universe reason for featuring these, and what was the metatextual reason for them?**

- Oh wow, such an intriguing question and I have to say again I have no idea! Curse my pathetic memory.... Sorry!

### Final Questions

**41. Were there any other stories you would have been interested in exploring in this universe?**

- I'm sure there were, any fully developed world has the potential for endless stories!

**42. In the multitudes of stories and books you've published since, how has your work on Bionicle influenced your writing?**

- Working with the unusual world and characters in the Bionicle universe definitely required me to stretch my creativity in a new way. Doing that was absolutely helpful in everything I did after that!

**43. What stories and projects are you currently working on?**

- I'm working on an original middle grade novel inspired by some of the works of Ray Bradbury. At the same time, I'm keeping busy with some projects for other people, including a book series based on an online game about horses set in a magical world – very different from the Bionicle world, but interesting in a whole new way!

**44. Which of your series do you think fans of BIONICLE would be most drawn to?**

- Hmm, that's a difficult question since Bionicle fans come in all shapes and sizes, so to speak! The youngest fans might like my chapter book series (co-written with Ellen Vandenburg) called ASTRONAUT GIRL. Middle-graders are often voracious readers, so they might like a variety of my stuff, from a duology I did a few years ago called Junior Ninja Champion (which has a lot of fun action, just like BIONICLE!) to some of my horse-themed stories (most recently one titled NOWHERESVILLE) or dolphin books (HEART OF A DOLPHIN and others) or just about anything else I've done. Adults looking back at BIONICLE with nostalgia might also appreciate tie-in novels I did for the TV shows LOST and ALIAS (though I'm not sure they're still in print).

**45. What tips would you have for aspiring writers?**

- Read! Seriously, this is always my #1 tip, because the more you read other writers (any kind! Whatever genre or format you enjoy!), the better writer you'll be yourself. You also have to write, of course. A lot of people talk about wanting to be writers, but it's only when you put words to paper/computer screen that you actually BECOME a writer. Believe in your work, but don't be afraid to seek or benefit from constructive criticism, especially from editors, agents, or other writers. And while publishing can be a tough industry, the good news is that there's a whole internet full of information about it that wasn't available back in the day!

**46. If you could invent your own Bionicle Rahi horse, what special abilities would it have, and what would it look like?**

- Ooh, another interesting question! I might give it wings – or maybe special hooves to allow it to climb rocks and such. Or both! And it would probably be turquoise, or maybe bright red, and have spiky metallic Lisa Simpson hair for its mane. Hmm... so many possibilities....