

Greg Enslin: Author Interview Questions and Answers

Attached below are my responses to a gaggle of the Author Interview Questions. If you have any questions or need any clarifications, please feel free to contact me. Thanks!

Greg Enslin

1. **"Do all authors have to be grammar Nazis?"** I'm probably going to get into trouble for this one, but I think authors should be able to invent words when they see fit. Sometimes the perfect word doesn't exist yet, and if anyone is going to be out there inventing new words, I think it should be the people who use words for a living, right? Besides, Shakespeare invented a whole boatload of words, like "addiction" and "eyeball." And even though I've invented words a few in my career, I still ask my editors and proofreaders to mark the words, which gives me a chance to double check.
2. **"What makes this particular genre you are involved in so special?"** I think thrillers and suspense novels are one of the most interesting and exciting genres out there--an author can go so many places with a suspense novel. I'd like to try my hand at writing a "swords and dragons" fantasy series, but I think Tolkien and Martin have already perfected that genre.
3. **"How important is research to you when writing a book?"** I do a lot of research before I start writing. I think it's important to be confident about what you are writing, and that comes from researching a topic or location.
4. **"What works best for you: Typewriters, fountain pen, dictate, computer or longhand?"** I do all of my writing on the computer. I have a great setup with two screens, one for my document and one for the internet and research. I also swear by

Scrivener, a software package designed for writers. I'll never compose in Microsoft Word again!

5. **"What inspires you to write?"** I really get my inspiration from the world around me, including lots of tiny little interactions that probably would mean very little to anyone else. I heard somewhere that writers are professional observers, and I'd have to agree with that--many times, I hear or see something that makes me think, and I jot it down in my notebook or on some random scrap of paper to squirrel away for later. Or, lately, I'll make a voice note of something. Last year I overheard a great conversation at a Panera among a group of teenagers--at some point, I have to weave that into one of my books. Just last week, there was a guy at a diner I frequent, telling a story about his four escaped buffalo. Seriously, you can't make this stuff up. I wonder if he saw me scribbling down every detail I could remember.
6. **"How hard was it to sit down and actually start writing something?"** Sometimes it can be difficult. Sometimes you just have to sit down and start writing, even if you're just writing about what you want to write about. If that doesn't work, I will sometimes type out a list of things I want to accomplish with my next book or start outlining where I'd like things to go. If that doesn't work, I'll just take notes about what's going on in the world around me.
7. **"Do you think writers have a normal life like others?"** Well, like I said in my previous answer, I think good writers are good observers, watching the world around them and taking notes and reusing that in their work. I'm certain there aren't too many other professions that see going to a party as a work assignment that requires them to bring along a pen and a notepad in case they hear anything interesting.
8. **"Do you set a plot or prefer going wherever an idea takes you?"** For most of my stories, I have a good idea of where the plot begins and ends. I'm working on a series of books right now and I'm planning 10 or 12 books in the series. I have the first two

written, the third is in the works, and I have a pretty good idea of where it's headed. But mostly I have "milestone scenes" in my head, and I'll need to connect those together with lots of scenes that hopefully will flow organically from what has come before. I'm a "plotter" when it comes to laying out the story's highlights, but then I tend to be a "pantser" when it comes time to fill in the blank spaces between the major scenes.

9. **"Have you ever experienced "Writer's Block"?** How long do they usually last?" I'm convinced that what people call "writer's block" is either a lack of direction--the person has too many things they want to work on and can't figure out which, paralyzing them--or they are stuck on a particular scene and can't figure out how to solve it. Many times, I get stuck on something and it becomes a puzzle to solve. On my fifth novel, "Black Ice," I had a particularly complicated murder scenario that I needed to resolve in a particular way, but I was stuck on a few of the details, including the victim's cell phone. Finally, after procrastinating for a few weeks, I just sat down and started "free" writing, just jotting down every single possible outcome from the way the story had developed. By doing that, I got a sense of which solution would work best.

10. **"Do you proofread and edit your work on your own or pay someone to do it for you?"** I always pay someone else to edit and proofread my work. Even though I try to make the copy as clean as possible before it goes to the editor, she always catches a ton of things I missed. Early in my career, I couldn't afford to pay anyone and just went to press anyway and I've paid for that--people complain more about typos in my older books than in the newest ones. Over time, I've gone back and re-edited most of the titles, paying a professional editor to pour through each book and pick out all the problems.

11. **"Have you ever left any of your books stew for months on end or even a year?"** I have one series, the ten-book series I mentioned, that's been in the works since 1996. In fact, one of the biggest challenges in updating the series was coming up with a "big event" to take the place of "Y2K." Remember that? It was a looming threat when I started my series, which at the time was going to be a trilogy of very big books. Now it's turning

into a ten- or twelve-part series, and the "big event" is a supposed asteroid strike. Even though NASA and others assure the world that we are safe, some people are convinced the asteroid will wipe out humanity.

12. **"If you had the choice to rewrite any of your books, which one would it be and why?"**

It's funny you should ask this--I'm actually in the process of rewriting my first book, "Black Bird." I love the plot and characters, but I've always felt the book is too long. I paid my editor to edit and proofread it late last year, telling her to "aggressively" cut out anything that was repetitive or unnecessary. Now I'm going through and cleaning up her marks, making sure to keep things concise. It will be re-released later this year with a new cover.

13. **"What is your take on the importance of a good cover and title?"**

Covers are incredibly important, especially when selling in the Amazon store, where all you have to sell your book is a small thumbnail of your cover and a very concise description. I tell new writers to find a professional cover designer. Titles are funny--I usually settle on a title early, although on my "alternate" 9/11 book, I ended up changing the title near the end. During the writing process, the book was called "Rewind" because the main character is trying to go back and keep 9/11 from taking place. I ended up changing the title near the end to "The 9/11 Machine" to clearly tie the book to the events of that day.

14. **"Have you ever designed your own book cover?"**

My sister has done most of my covers, although for my newest novel, I designed what I think is a pretty nice cover, simple with bold lettering. Typefaces and white space can be very important.

15. **"Do you believe a book cover plays an important role in the selling process?"**

It is crucial, especially on Amazon. You really only have one chance to make an impression, and I've learned over time that your fonts have to be large enough to be read when the covers are shrunk down.

16. **"Do you attend literary lunches or events?"** I've only started attending events in the last year or so--before that, I would go to book signings and events to make sales. In 2015, I attended several writing conferences, and it was a different experience, rubbing elbows with people I had heard of and taking courses on the "craft" and the business of being an author.
17. **"Do you read and reply to the reviews and comments of your readers?"** I try to reply when I can, especially to reviews on Amazon. Due to some comments I received last year, I implemented a "report a typo" function on my website for readers who wanted an outlet where they could share with me any proofreading mistakes they thought should be corrected. I also try to thank people who take the time to leave a long and well-thought-out positive review. On occasion, I will ask them if I excerpt it on my website or on future book jackets.
18. **"Does a bad review affect your writing?"** Not anymore. It used to, back when I had only a book or two. Now, I think of the eighteen books I've written as quasi-children of mine, out there trying to make their way in the world. Some will make positive, lasting impressions, and some might be arrested for panhandling in Times Square. I can't control people's reactions to my books--all I can really do is try to put the best work possible out there. But I do read all my reviews, good or bad, in case there is something I'm not aware of in my work, like a crucial error or an unintentional slight.
19. **"Any advice you would like to give to your younger self? Any advice you would like to give to aspiring writers?"** I know it sounds pat, but just get writing. It's easy to say "I want to be a writer" -- it's MUCH more difficult to carve out some time from your work day and your Facebook and your Twitter and just stare at a blank page or a blank screen. I would say "get writing," followed almost immediately by "start by outlining." That's the only way I know of to get rolling, and it gives you a clear road map of where you are going and what to work on next. With an outline, writing becomes a question of tackling a series of short stories that, when strung together, become a coherent work.

20. **"Which book inspired you to begin writing?"** The Stand, by Stephen King. It showed me what could be accomplished, if you took the time and made the effort. And I must confess--I read several poorly-written books in high school and college, and they seemed to lower the bar for me. I figured if those authors could find the time to write a lackluster book, so could I. Maybe mine would be better!
21. **"Have you ever incorporated something that happened to you in real life into your novels?"** All the time. I have lots of notes from things that have happened to me over the past, and I try to work them in where appropriate. Now I just need to figure out how to incorporate that buffalo story!
22. **"How realistic are your books?"** My Frank Harper mysteries are set in my home town, a small town just north of Dayton, Ohio. Everything is very real--all the streets and parks have the same names--but I changed the name of the town and some of the businesses. It allows me to have an "alternate" version of my town, changing things where I want to or to service the story. My 9/11 book is pure science fiction.
23. **"What books have influenced your life the most?"** Most of Stephen King's early stuff, along with books by Peter Straub, Edgar Allen Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, H.G. Wells, David Brin, Asimov, Lee Child, Elmore Leonard, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, and Gene Wolfe. The Litany of the Long Sun by Wolfe was amazing, as was David Brin's Uplift Series.
24. **"Are there any books that you are currently reading and why?"** Right now I'm reading up on "accelerated evolution," the concept that mankind is undergoing an evolutionary shift as we develop the ability to transform ourselves instead of waiting for evolution to do it for us. I've also been reading a bit on Ray Kurzweil's "Singularity."
25. **"Is there anything you are currently working on that may intrigue the interest of your readers?"** I'm working on several things now:

- More books in the Frank Harper mysteries series--I have a pretty clear road map for three more books in that series, with more possible titles beyond that, depending on how these are received. I'm working with a five-book "arc" for the character. The next book will be called "White Lies" and should be out this year or next.
- I just finished a book entitled "Crush," about a young woman trapped inside her vehicle after a car accident. She's stranded, injured and alone, and must fight her way back to civilization--or die trying.
- And I am working on my long-gestating near-future series centered on an elite government organization that carries out much of the military research done by this country. While the organization is secret, a situation arises that may force the group out of hiding to battle an overwhelming threat.