

Alistair Birch

Author QA

- **Why did you start writing books?**

After remarrying in 2015, I found confidence to replace anxiety and gave writing a go, though I didn't start seriously until 2019. My first published book is a collection of silly and poignant rhymes, so a far cry from the thriller genre. Following on, I had an idea for an action thriller. 10 pages became 20 and then 50... Each time I reached a landmark, I knew I could do the same until I had a full manuscript. I'd become a runner, going to marathon distance by then, so knew I could drive it forward to a finish.

- **Do you write every day?**

No, and if I'm not feeling it, weeks can go by before I put words down. I have a day job in IT which keeps me very busy. But, when I do feel like writing, I set myself small goals e.g. write 500 words most weekday evenings and up to 2000 on a weekend. But I schedule downtime too when needed. If I have a deadline, then I'll know my required daily word count, so I aim to be 20-50% over each week to build a pot of spare time.

- **Do you work to a plot or do you prefer to see where the idea takes you?**

I'm definitely free flowing so don't do much plotting. If I have an idea along with the start and end then I just write. There is a caveat. My current work in progress starts in 1932 in Germany, so I can't just make it up without some fact checking first, though this happens as I get to specific scenes.

- **How long does it take you to write a book?**

The quickest was 3 months, though at the time my wife was working shifts, so I had plenty of evening and weekend time to allocate.

- **What's the worst thing about writing a book?**

I'm not sure really, though I have painted myself into a corner before by writing something and then finding a plot hole I couldn't fix. That isn't bad, but it is frustrating when it happens and you have to go back and fix.



- **And what's the best thing about writing a book?**

I find writing quite therapeutic. Where else can you kick the legs out from underneath a fictional character with no consequences? Readers generally like that too, especially if they don't see it coming.

- **Why did you choose your particular genre?**

I read and enjoy thrillers, so that was always going to work for me. When the idea for my first action thriller popped into my head, my mind went straight to novels like the Da Vinci Code, and I thought, I can do that, though obviously I've written different stories.

- **If you had to write in a different genre, which would you choose?**

I've touched humour with my rhymes, so possibly something a little sillier. A while ago I contributed to a charity anthology with a short story farce. That was fun to write.

- **Which book character do you wish you had written?**

Waleran Bigod from Ken Follett's The Pillars of the Earth.

- **What do you think are the best and the worst about social media?**

The best is when someone takes the time to post, share, review or send a direct message saying that they enjoyed your work. I've found some great friends in the running and writing online communities and some of my best friends are people I haven't even met. The worst is the sniping and aggression which some users show.

A few questions, just for fun:

- **If I joined you on your perfect day, what would we be doing?** A wide range of things. We love exploring and trying out new experiences, so the perfect day is hard to define. I love the sea and beautiful countryside, but I can have fun in a city too. Days out to places like Camden Market or the Norfolk beaches both hold appeal. And if we have a nice deli sharing lunch followed by a show - live music, comedy or sport, then I'm happy. But, for this to be a perfect day I'd need to share with people I care about.

- **What's your signature dish?** We make homemade meals frequently rather than grabbing a jar of sauce - my jambalaya is a family favourite. I don't make it enough, but I like making my own pasta or bread.

- **If you could be anyone for the day, who would you be?** Possibly in the head of one of my favourite authors - Ken Follett for character development or Matthew Reilly for his intense action scenes.