



*I recently had the opportunity to sit down with author Mike Bond and discuss his latest book *Assassins* as well as the importance of fiction to military professionals. If the interview piques your interest, I encourage you to check out his book [here](#).*

*Q: Mike, what do you think is the most important aspect of *Assassins* and could you tell us why you decided to write it?*

*A: I wrote *Assassins* to share what I've learned in the last thirty years of conflict between the West and Islam. From my teenage years I've been acquainted with Middle East wars, and have seen much unnecessary tragedy and many mistakes, ways in which we could have protected ourselves better, both diplomatically and militarily.*

The preface to *Assassins* is from the famous quote of Sun Tzu: "One who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet with

defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated.”

Experience has taught me that we have often been insufficiently aware of how our own actions in the Middle East have made things worse, nor do we always understand the true motivations or history of our enemies. This is a situation that I hoped *Assassins* might somewhat help to rectify.

*Q: Why did you decide to write a fictional account of the rise of Islamic terrorism instead of a nonfiction book that could easily be found on a current events shelf?*

A: Fiction allows us to live an experience, not simply learn about it. Fiction connects with the emotions, whereas non-fiction deals primarily with the left brain, the intellect. It is what we have experienced that we know best, and most trust. Many of my readers tell me that I have changed them, that they will never be able to see things as they had.

That is my intent. I try to place my readers so deeply in a situation that they feel they have lived it themselves, and remember the experience as their own.

By this experience, which to them has become their own, my readers are better able to understand war and to deal with it effectively. And it is that deeper awareness that allows us all to make better decisions, to judge more clearly, to avoid problems before they happen.

*Q: There's a saying you should 'write what you know' and you have an intricate knowledge of the Middle East. How much research and/or personal experience went into the writing of this novel?*

A: *Assassins* is mostly my personal experience, and of those whom I know and trust. Most of what happens in the book is familiar to me, often for years. The places I describe are actual, usually because I've been there. I don't believe in made-up fiction, which is no different

from fantasy. Fantasy belongs in science fiction, not in novels about life. And by describing things as they really are I am hopefully able to bring my readers the same depth.

*Q: As a military professional, I recognize the need to read for my development. Do you think fiction is as important as nonfiction for a person's development?*

A: As we know, survival in warfare is often due to instinct and repetitive training as much as taught knowledge. Repetitive training allows us to respond proactively in a nearly automatic way to stimuli, to danger. It is a way of keeping fear and confusion under control. And to me, instinct is essential to survival in many dangerous conditions. I would not be here today if I hadn't trusted my instinct, often in instantaneous situations. And instinct comes mostly from experience, not from intellectual knowledge. When we try to run an operation by the book we risk that our enemy also knows our book and is waiting for us to utilize it.

The great strategic planners - and I think Genghis Khan may well have been the best - rarely go by the book. They face each new situation creatively, including knowledge of whether the enemy is going by *his* book. From ancient China through all the battles of the Greeks and Romans, through all the medieval wars and the constant conflicts between Islam and Europe from the 700s to the present, the winners were usually those who had overwhelming material or strategic advantage, who were better trained (e.g. the Roman legions in the wars against the Gauls), or who thought outside the box. Thinking outside the box is nourished by fiction, not non-fiction.

*Q: Do you have any advice for a reader that wants to start writing fiction, but doesn't know where to begin?*

A: Everyone should write fiction, if only to know himself or herself better. By writing fiction we dive into our own subconscious and get closer to it. Thus we can begin anywhere: think of a person or situation that is interesting to us and pursue the idea, without rules, without judgments, following the path with heart. As a kid I was fortunate to live at the edge of a

huge forest that I explored constantly. I often got lost and had to find my way home late at night, scared and alone. But I always had to see what was over the next hill, the next unknown. We can do that by writing fiction, by going in our heads where we've never been before. As you say, we should write what we know. But we often know far more than we think.

So read constantly but copy no one. To find our own voice in fiction is to find our own personal path in life. To explore is to learn, and to learn is to protect, and to protect is to love.

I am very grateful to *From the Green Notebook* for a chance to speak about these things. And I send my deepest wishes to every warrior, man and woman, to never stop learning, never stop thinking for yourself, never forget the immense gift, and the responsibility, you bring to everyone else.

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