

Jurassic Judgment Series FAQs with Author Janice Boekhoff

Does writing energize or exhaust you?

A little of both. Writing for me is this itch I need to scratch, like a restless energy inside me that needs to come out. Once I release it, I feel calm and peaceful—not quite to exhaustion. More like I've accomplished what I was meant to do for the day.

What are the common traps for aspiring writers?

The most common trap I see is when aspiring writers continually revise and revise their first manuscript. On rare occasions, an author's first book is good enough to get published, but most of the time it's a learning tool. Similar to the first pencil sketches done in the early career of a painter, an author's first book is meant to help them figure out their style, process, and where their craft needs improvement.

Did you ever consider writing under a pseudonym?

I did consider a pseudonym because my name is difficult. Then, I Googled myself and discovered there was only one Janice Boekhoff in the world, so I embraced my uniqueness.

Do you try to be original or to deliver readers what they want?

Obviously I hope to give readers what they want (dark circles under their eyes from being up all night with a good book), but I'm not a formula person. Trying to classify plot points as inciting incident or first turning point makes me cringe. In the books I read, I appreciate originality and I try to bring that to my readers. Therefore, whenever I feel the plot becoming predictable, I take drastic action—somebody is probably going to die (a character of course).

How many unpublished and half-finished books do you have?

I have one finished book that's not published (my very first book) because it needs a lot of work and one half-finished book that's also not published. Usually, if I start with an idea, I like to see it through, but once in a while the idea fizzles out.

Have you read anything that made you think differently about fiction?

The first series I read that affected me deeply was *The Mark of the Lion* series by Francine Rivers (historical Christian fiction) about a slave girl in ancient Rome. It transported me so completely that, after reading it, I felt like I had spent weeks with the Romans. Fiction can be powerful in terms of transporting us and opening up experiences we could never have on our own.

If you didn't write, what would you do for work?

I loved my previous profession as a Research Geologist, so I might pursue that again, but more than likely, I'd continue with my editing business so I could indulge my creative side every day.

What one thing would you give up to become a better writer?

Well, I should give up Diet Coke because I drink too much, but I probably won't. I suppose I routinely give up money spent on conferences and craft books, plus the time spent to attend and read them. Often I think about how nice it would be to give up the whole world and just sit

on a beach and write. But I probably wouldn't do that either because experiences are what a writer draws on to enrich their stories.

Do you believe in writer's block?

Yes, although my type of writer's block comes in the form of procrastination. When I sit down to write, I rarely sit there without any words coming, but I find it hard to get my butt in the chair. I'm a list person so I'll go fold laundry just to check it off my list. That's why I've started putting "write 1,000 words" on my checklist so I can follow through on the same commitment to my books. Also, I think that in naming writer's block we give it more power in our writing life than it deserves. I always try to remember that I'm in control over whether the words hit the page, not some nebulous thing called writer's block.

What inspired you to start writing?

I had always wanted to write, but I worried that I wouldn't be good at it. When I quit my job as a Research Geologist to stay at home with my kids, my body was busy, but my brain quickly grew bored. I started writing to entertain my brain without thinking about how good it would be, and I fell in love with telling stories.

What, in your opinion, are the most important elements of good writing?

Anything that helps the reader go deeper into the story and bond more with the characters. That's why I believe in having as little author intrusion as possible by using deep point of view. Deep point of view is where the reader sees the story deeply through a single character's eyes per scene. Thoughts are portrayed as statements so the space between the character's thoughts and the reader's thoughts is minimized. This helps the reader to fully immerse in the story world.

What comes first, the plot or the characters? How do you develop your plot and characters?

I'm a plot person. I latch on to a plot thread and then start writing so I can discover the characters. For me, characterization starts with what they would do in a given situation. Therefore, in the first draft, my characters aren't completely fleshed out, especially in the beginning. That's where I spend most of my revision time—at the very beginning of the story.

Your story is set in Costa Rica. Why did you choose that as the setting for your book?

Costa Rica is amazing! If you've never been there, you should absolutely go. But I chose it because I needed a huge island to hold a lot of dinosaurs in a jungle climate. I thought of Australia, but most of it is too dry. So I turned Costa Rica into an island by including part of Panama, expanding the Panama Canal, and digging a canal through Nicaragua.

What advice would you give to a new writer just starting out?

Remember your reason for writing. I write for the love of creating something new and because I feel closer to God when I do. Your reason might be different, but you have to find out what it is and never lose sight of it. Few and far between are the writers whose first book is a bestseller. For most authors, writing is about making slow and steady progress in the craft and in readership. Hold tightly to your meaningful reason and make sure you're in it for the long haul.