

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Ward Larsen, author of *The Perfect Assassin*

How long did it take to write *The Perfect Assassin*?

It took roughly four years. It was my first project of this sort, and so there were a number of false starts. I've read a few articles about how individual authors organize their stories and set work schedules—enough to know that each one seems different. If nothing else, I was persistent. As I work on my next book, things are coming along much more quickly.

How did you get the idea for the book?

I wouldn't consider the book a single idea, but rather an amalgam of thoughts. I've drawn parts from personal experience, and parts from things I've read, both fiction and non-fiction. I'm also a student of current events, particularly involving world affairs. It gives a great supply of ammunition to keep a reader involved.

The book is, in places, highly technical and detailed. Are these details something you've learned from your military experience, or was there special research conducted?

A good question, but again it's a mix. When I was in the military, I held a Top Secret security clearance. I know how that system works. I've been out of the military for some time now, so much of my old information has been eclipsed, and some probably declassified. But for *The Perfect Assassin*, it wasn't necessary to dig into any of that. An incredible amount of technical data is available openly in the media, journals and libraries. The key is this--with a basic understanding of how things work, both technically and operationally, a good researcher can take a few scraps of technical data, and surmise the rest. How a new sensor or vehicle is used, what its capabilities might be--a magazine like *Aviation Week and Space Technology* makes a living out of connecting these kinds of dots. And having been on the operational side, I can tell you they're pretty darned good at it. That's how I researched *The Perfect Assassin*. I took bits and pieces of information, and tried to mesh them together in a common sense way.

How were you able to weave together many different characters and plot lines while keeping the story nicely paced and fluid?

Of course, you never want too many characters. I tried to make each distinct enough in manner, position, or location that there would be no confusion. The plot does have a number of vectors, but I think as the story draws to a close, they all manage to coalesce. The first draft was—well, a first draft. I worked a lot to cut down and simplify until everything seemed to fall into place.

Are the characters in *The Perfect Assassin* based on people you know?

No, not really. Most are a combination of characteristics I've seen in other people. I think a writer has to exaggerate the traits he wants his characters to exhibit, but still make them believable and human. For me, as a writer, I think I'd find it distracting and counterproductive to try to nail down a real person as a character.

Do any of the characters in *The Perfect Assassin* have an autobiographical basis?

No. But Freud might argue otherwise.

You have a keen eye for detail, without providing too much. When you are writing, do you visualize or map out scenes beforehand, or do you immediately put them on paper?

I don't map out scenes or locations. Spatial relationships have always made sense to me (and a vital thing when flying a fighter aircraft in a dogfight, by the way). I do reference maps and photos, and sometimes do "visual reconnaissance" of the settings I write about.

Do you have any other books on the horizon?

Yes. A lot of people have asked me if the character David Slaton will return. The answer is no, at least not now. I'm working on a novel, similar in style, but set in the closing days of World War II. I've always been fascinated by this period in our history—the final tragedies of a war that truly encompassed the world, and the dawn of the Cold War.