

Anne Zoelle Interview

Questions and Answers

(questions courtesy of Novel Publicity)

What is your favorite color?

Anne Zoelle: I could make this list 12 names deep (red, violet, fuchsia, green, black, sunflower, charcoal...), but thinking about the turquoise-aqua of the Caribbean Sea makes me instantly happy, so I'll make that my pick.

Favorite food?

AZ: warm chocolate-chip cookies—they are delicious, homey, and warm the spirit.

Favorite place to travel?

AZ: Spain. Everything about the country and the people is wonderful.

Where do you write?

AZ: I love to meet other writers around town (cafes!), but in my home I tend to “cubby” myself in so that I can't see any of the chores I need to get done. So, spots that are well lit, but hemmed in, are my favorites. And each spot must have hot, black tea available. :)

What are some of your favorite reads, and how have they informed the type of fiction you write?

AZ: I grew up reading stories like *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Phantom Tollbooth* that were full of adventure and wit and fun. I swallowed the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* books whole, and the denizens of Narnia were old friends. Friends introduced me to Anne Rice, Robert R McCammon, then Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, and I read the first four *Harry Potter* books and loved them. I waited impatiently for every book thereafter and just totally fell into the rabbit hole of magic adventure.

I love adventure stories and speculative fiction, but I also love mystery and romance. And though the Ren Crown series has very little active romance, the possibility of it is always lurking in the background. :)

Robert Jordan's way of burying tidbits everywhere—ones that can't be understood for large swaths of story or that hint at things far in the future—and Agatha Christie's way of setting up clues where everyone has a motive and means, were both very influential in the way I like to structure fantasy stories. I like to build the Ren Crown books in such a way that new things can be discovered or “ah-ha!” moments connected on re-reads. Even if only one reader picks up on something, it is such a fun thing to structure out a small puzzle and bury it in a deeper world.

Do you have any tips or tricks for aspiring authors that you've found useful?

AZ: Figure out your best time(s) of day to write and guard them. There are times that you are more likely to be “on” or that you burst with ideas—do not let other things get scheduled during those times except in emergency or “rare” situations. Block off the time on your calendar, set boundaries with friends and family, turn off all but your emergency notifications (there are ways to set those on your phone), go somewhere like a cafe or library where no one can find you... Whatever it takes, use your best, creative hours for writing. I've found that I can get more done during 1 of my best hours than in 3 of any other chunk of time.

Sometimes we can't work during our peak hours for some reason or another, though. Maybe those are the hours where you can't get childcare, or where you are forced to be in another situation, or at another job. If that is your situation, carve out a different block of time when you can write and write in that same block of time every day. Get your brain practiced in setting up for those hours. They might not be your peak hours, but continual daily practice in using them will focus your mindset toward them.

Any ideas on how to stay focused?

If you are having trouble focusing or getting distracted (with any task!), I've found it useful to remove all outside stimulation. Get a few of those folding display poster boards and set them around your computer. Wall yourself off from the world so that it's just you and your document.

Like any job, there are days that...are...just...endless. But writing things that interest, invigorate, and, occasionally, surprise you, is a gift you give yourself. Love to write, or write what you love. :)

What excites you about releasing a new work? Is it getting that first print copy in the mail, the cover design, or something else entirely?

AZ: Seeing a book available for sale—on the bookshelves and online—is always a rush. I've released 14 books and it hasn't gotten old yet. There is sort of a “fear rush” tangled in there, too—now that the book is out there and out of my control...will readers like it?

Now for a deeper dive. . . Do you find that some of the themes or settings in your writing are directly related to your likes and dislikes in real life? If so, could you tell us a bit about one you loved writing about?

AZ: Those qualities are always very important to my characters, in all the genres I've written. In standalone works, they tend to be main characteristics that the plot revolves around—the characters learning to trust each other—but everything is more lightly touched upon; a more thematic thread running throughout. In the Ren Crown series, I've had a chance to go deeper and to explore both sides of the equation—the beautiful nature and blooming of trust and loyalty, and the dark side of ignorance and enabling that can be realized as well. The main character, Ren, is very trustworthy and loyal, and exploring the positive and negative aspects of this in her, and in the people around her, has been very interesting to write.

Having a first person POV character who the reader can see has good intentions, but who is sometimes blinded in those intentions, and simultaneously trying to show how other people—especially people in executive and judicial positions—might be terrified of

her, has also been a great challenge. It's very interesting to explore how different people see a character—and how to carefully show that—writing from within a single POV.

When you sit down to write, what's the first thing you do?

AZ: I set up my space. Routines are important for getting into the right headspace for me. Athletics in college was a great teacher for that. I have a particular order in which I set up my space—my tea cup goes a certain way, my headphones get pushed to a particular setting, my phone goes somewhere just outside of view, I always take a deep breath after I open my document. It seems a little ridiculous, but it works—when I finally scoot my chair to the table and turn on my music, 85% of the time, I'm ready to rock. The other 15% of the time requires a little more, but I have procedures for that too. :)

You've been an author for a while and written three books in the Ren Crown series. What was your initial inspiration for Ren's character?

AZ: The initial spark of story started off as a romance, strangely enough, with the first written scene being about a quiet girl who likes books, animals, and art having a very outrageous meeting with the BMOC at school. When I went back to the origin story—getting that quiet girl to that point—the tale blew up into this massive thing that I'm still trying to wrangle into a five story arc. I could easily write twelve...

For all of the wrangling, and the hundreds (maybe thousands at this point?) of world and character documents, I don't regret going back to the origin story. I love writing the five layer world and I love writing Ren. In my previous writing endeavors, I tried to do something new in the craft of each successive book. With this series, I get to explore new techniques every week.

The world of magic in Ren Crown is really intricate. Could you explain how timekeeping works in the series? Without giving too much away of course!

AZ: The timekeeping is based on a 24 hour astrological clock. The 12 signs repeat, but with an added descriptor of Rising or Falling (for all but Sagittarius) as the hands travel around the clock. A reader asked for clock details a few months ago, and I mocked up a

quick illustration for her that I posted on my website (link). We discussed how there are a lot of different types of clocks even in our world, and she made her own version, which I love!

Of all the characters in the Ren Crown series - could you highlight one that was easy and fun to write and why?

AZ: I could write scenes with Constantine all day. Raphael, too. They are both at turns antagonists and fierce allies to Ren, which is a combination that is very dynamic and fascinating to explore. There is always something new to discover with each of them and they never quite say what they mean. Makes for a fun writing experience. Bellacia is in that category as well, for very similar reasons.

What about a character that was more difficult or reared their ugly head at the worst time.

AZ: I've had people say they wish there were more scenes with Will after the first book. My problem is that he is always on Ren's wavelength and is a pretty darn good guy, so there has been little conflict to explore so far in Ren's POV. Outside of Ren's POV and the major plotlines, sure. But these books would be 2,000 pages long if I did that (tempting!). Writing interesting scenes can be hard when you have two characters who always agree. I love Will, but he's just too darn supportive. I use him a lot for when I want to add worldbuilding. Ren and Will can talk forever—it's just that the stuff on the page is supposed to support the plot not just be there for the author to have a good time playing “what if” (*whistles innocently*).

Another character that can be trouble is Alexander Dare, one of the main characters, who is always a step ahead of everyone else, and also very self-controlled. He has a lot of power, and it's hard to keep him from being overpowered at times. Trying not to give away too much concerning his motives, but still have him be a driving force, can be agonizing to plot.

Of course, just writing that makes me want to open my laptop and start typing, so maybe not...

The first three books in the series are out - do you have more plans for Ren Crown, or will you be moving onto other projects?

AZ: I am finishing up the fourth book in the series, then I'll have one more book to write to finish the main arc started in *The Awakening of Ren Crown*. After that, I have a slew of other novellas and novels that I'd like to do inside of the world, some with Ren and her friends, and some outside of them. I have three ideas sketched out and woven into the main plot of the books already (which will probably be pretty obvious to some readers, especially in retrospect), I just need to carve some time to write them. Quick, someone give me a portal to a dimension where time stops for everything but writing. :)

About the Author:

Anne Zoelle has loved books about fantasy, magic, math, wit, and imagination since devouring *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Phantom Tollbooth*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and the *Chronicles of Narnia* as a child. Split between the midwest and west coast, she writes books for all ages, as well as for furry monsters, sentient libraries, and adventuring aliens.

Anne Zoelle is the pseudonym of a USA Today Bestselling Author. She is currently working on the fourth book in the Ren Crown series.