

A Q&A with Author Mark Greaney

Mark Greaney is the #1 *New York Times* Bestselling author of *Threat Vector* by Tom Clancy with Mark Greaney. His new thriller *Dead Eye*, the fourth installment in the Gray Man novels, is out from Berkley December 3rd, 2013. *Command Authority* by Tom Clancy with Mark Greaney is also out this December from Putnam.

Q: The Gray Man series is now in its fourth installment with the release of the new explosive adventure of ex-CIA assassin Court Gentry in *Dead Eye*. Did you think Court Gentry, a master assassin with a good conscience, would gain such a following when writing the original, the Gray Man novel?

A: When I was working on the *Gray Man*, my sights were set exclusively on becoming a published author, and I didn't really think about the story beyond the end of the first book. That said, I felt the Gray Man character should have a longer story arc than the one novel, so I alluded to his past and I set things up that could only be paid off in future books. As soon as my publisher reached out to me about continuing the series I had ideas ready to go. I wanted the Gray Man to tour the real-world hotspots, to have a rotating cast of characters along with a few recurring characters who come in and out of his life as he gets to the bottom of the mystery involving the CIA's shoot-on-sight order against him.

Q: What do you find is the most challenging part of writing a thriller and a continuing series?

A: The most challenging part of writing a thriller for me is deciding what to put in the book and what to leave out. So many times I get to the editing process of a manuscript and wrestle with cutting out details that might slow the book down, even though I think they are interesting. I see it as my job to give the readers a white-knuckle ride, while at the same time crafting a story that feels real and authentic. On every page I want to have just the right amount of depth of setting and characterization so that the readers care about the action, and as much action as possible without going too far over the top. It can be a tough balance to get right, but it's worth the effort.

Q: What is the most fun part?

A: The most fun part of writing thrillers, for me anyway, is putting my hero

into tense, nearly impossible situations, and then helping him find his way out. To pull this off I do a lot of research, and then try to reduce it down into a fast moving story that feels real. When I feel like I get all the parts working together it is an amazing feeling.

Q: You have degrees in International Studies and Political Science, so what got you into thriller writing and inspired you to create the Gray Man character?

A: I've always been a huge reader, as long as I can remember. I never had any interest in writing until I took a class in international terrorism in college and got the idea for a story. Nothing came of that, nor did much come from my next few writing ideas, but those first ideas planted the seed in my mind that I could write. I started to look at everything as a potential idea for a novel. It took me nearly two decades to actually finish a book-length work, but I really had a blast learning how to write so it was very much time well spent.

Q: In Dead Eye Court Gentry faces his most dangerous foe yet, a killer just like himself. How do you come up with new ideas for your novels? What is your writing regimen like?

A: I don't suffer from a lack of big, sweeping, ideas for books. It's narrowing things down and working out the thousands of small details that take the time and effort. I read a lot of non-fiction and I keep up with events, and for a contemporary series like the Gray Man that goes a long way towards coming up with new ideas. As for my regimen, most of my writing takes place in the morning, and at least once on each book I like to get out of town for a few weeks to go sit in a hotel room so I can work free of distractions. A large chunk of *Dead Eye* was written in a Crown Plaza in Alexandria, Virginia, and I've gone to Atlanta, Nashville, New York, and D.C. just to work on books.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your research for Dead Eye. What inspires you to choose where the action is going to take place in your books?

A: I knew the opening needed to take place near St. Petersburg, Russia and I branched out from there. I channeled Court Gentry's mindset, wondered what he'd do, considering all the threats against him in this story. After a month or so of online research I went to Northern Europe alone, and I

walked the streets as the Gray Man would, took ferries and trains and buses, just trying to experience the sights and sounds the way The Gray Man would experience them. I went to Russia, Estonia, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Belgium, and I'm sure the travel helped make the book much more authentic.

Q: You definitely have an insider's view on special ops, military operations and clandestine organizations. Do you have any experience as a special operative yourself?

A: None at all, unfortunately. I had designs on going into the Air Force Officer Candidate School after college, but this was during the big draw down of the military that took place after the Cold War, and I didn't make it in. Without having first-hand military experience I see it as my responsibility to take research very seriously. To that end I keep my training in weapons and tactics as up-to-date as possible. I shoot regularly—I own many of the weapons the characters use in my books—and I've taken classes in battlefield medicine and small unit tactics. I am also fortunate in that I have trained alongside many men and women who are in military or law enforcement, and my books benefit greatly from their experiences.

Q: The Gray Man is currently in production by New Regency Pictures with the screenplay written by Adam Cozad who also wrote the screenplay for the upcoming Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit based on the Tom Clancy character. If you could choose who would play Court Gentry who would it be?

A: Firstly, I don't get to choose, and that is probably a good thing for everyone. In the case of Gentry, specifically, his back-story is that he is the guy who slips into and out of situations unnoticed. It's honestly hard for me to see any famous "A-list" actor in that role. That said, "A-listers" sell tickets. There are many actors I like who I'm sure would do a great job. I like Michael Fassbender, Jeremy Renner, Bradley Cooper, and Tom Hardy. And although he might not be as well known, the terrific actor Phil Winchester, from the Strike Back series on Cinemax, can shoot, move and communicate better than any actor I've ever seen. He trained with the British SAS and he looks like a real tier one operator, so I could definitely see him handling the physical part of the role.

Q: How has your partnership with the late Tom Clancy influenced your solo writing career?

A: Working with Tom Clancy has been nothing but a positive experience. I've met so many interesting people in my research for Clancy books, and I consult with them about my Gray Man books, as well. I've learned to take my research to another level, and build stories with more depth and breadth. The first thriller I ever bought myself was Patriot Games by Tom Clancy, and I've never lost sight of how fortunate I am to have had a chance to work with one of the real legends in the genre.

Q: What can readers expect from Command Authority?

A: It's a classic Tom Clancy yarn with all the players. Russia's new leader threatens bordering nations, and President Jack Ryan works with NATO to curb the Kremlin's ambitions. John Clark, Domingo Chavez, and the rest of The Campus operate in the shadows in Europe against a nexus of criminal and intelligence interests. Meanwhile, Jack Ryan Jr. is on his own in London where he takes an assignment that leads him to a thirty-year-old mystery that involves his father and powerful members of Russia's elite.

Q: What would you do if you weren't a writer?

A: I worked in the international sales and marketing field for many years, and I enjoy travel and other cultures. I'm sure I'd be involved with international business in some capacity, and if I wasn't writing, I'm sure I'd spend the vast majority of my free time reading good thrillers.

Q: What are you working on now and will we see the Gray Man again?

A: Right now I am working on an original screenplay. It's not a Gray Man piece, but it is just as fast-paced and fun. There will definitely be a fifth Gray Man novel, I'm looking forward to getting started on it next year.