

'Don't be a writer if you can't deal with rejection'

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Ashwin Sanghi's much-awaited thriller, *The Krishna Key*, will be out this month. Both his earlier novels—*The Rozabal Line* and *Chanakya's Chant*—were best-sellers. The writer tells *DNA* about the long and arduous trek to becoming a bestselling author.



Ashwin Sanghi is an entrepreneur by profession but writing historical fiction in the thriller genre is his passion and hobby. He holds a masters degree from Yale and is working towards a PhD in Creative Writing. *The Rozabal Line*, his first novel, has stayed at the top of the bestseller list since 2009. This was a fictional take on the Jesus in India story. *Chanakya's Chant*, a contemporary political thriller with roots in ancient history, another bestseller, won the Crossword-Vodafone Award for 2010.

What got you started?

A visit to Srinagar brought me to a tomb called Rozabal. I was fascinated with the idea that the person buried there could be Jesus Christ himself. I spent the next year researching everything that I could lay hands on. At the end of that year, I had multiple threads and theories in my head. My wife suggested stringing them together and a further 12 months later, *The Rozabal Line*, my first novel, was born.

Your big break?

I could not find anyone to publish my first novel and I was forced to self-publish it. I was very lucky that one of the self-published copies reached the hands of Hemu Ramaiah, the founder of Landmark Bookstores. She was very excited by the story and passed it on to Gautam Padmanabhan, the CEO of Westland. Gautam was equally enthusiastic and decided to publish it. That chance purchase of a self-published book was my big break.

Who or what inspires you?

Almost anything and everything. I'm inspired by my father to be disciplined and focused. I'm inspired by Jeffrey Archer to write page-turners. I'm inspired by the Buddha to be a better person... The list is endless.

Tell us some myths about writing.

The biggest myth is that one must write something each day even if one is at a complete loss for words. It doesn't help to sit and stare at a computer screen endlessly. There are better ways that you can use your time. The second big myth is that your publisher will sell your book for you. It doesn't matter who you are, the best marketing and sales is always driven by the author.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Being taken seriously as a businessman because I'm a writer. Also being taken seriously as a writer because I'm a businessman. It was this preoccupation with my own self-image that prompted me to write under a pseudonym initially.

The best advice anyone ever gave you?

"Try, try and try again. But after the third try, you're better off trying something different."

The worst thing anyone ever said about you?

"You wrote a good book but it would have been even better if you had ended it on page 10."

What advice would you give a new writer?

Be thick-skinned. Don't be a writer if you can't deal with rejection, criticism or adversity. The trek to becoming a bestseller is a long and arduous one. Be prepared for an obstacle course.

What can we expect from you next?

When I had just finished writing *Chanakya's Chant*, I had started work on a manuscript that would describe post-Independence India through the eyes of a business dynasty. I wrote about 40,000 words and left it to complete *The Krishna Key*. I intend to revisit that story.

