



## A Conversation with James Dashner

**Q: Where did you get the idea for the *Infinity Ring*? How much research did you have to do as you planned the series?**

Scholastic had a general idea of the basic premise when they approached me about doing the series. I'm a huge lover of history, so I was on board as soon as I heard about it. Then I had so much fun taking that premise and expanding it into a much larger story, fleshing out the world, developing the characters, etc. It took quite a bit of research, which I actually enjoyed. There's something so fascinating about taking actual people from history and using them in a way that you never would have thought - as characters in your own story.

**Q: What inspired you to work on an interactive storytelling series instead of another straightforward narrative, and was it hard for you to leave the story in other authors' hands?**

I thought it would be fun to try something different. I'm a huge fan of all forms of storytelling - books, movies, TV, theater, video games, etc. And with the so much entertainment at the tips of our fingers, it's important to stay ahead of the curve and make sure that reading doesn't get left out in the cold. Anything that helps young people associate reading with fun is a positive step toward that goal.

At first I was a little nervous about involving other authors and trusting them with things I'd created. But every last one of those concerns went out the window when I met the other five authors. They are incredibly talented, think like me, and love the things I love. This series is going to be way too much fun.

**Q: What do you believe the biggest challenge will be for the other writers of the *Infinity Ring* series? Do you expect your vision of the series to change as it's developed throughout the books by the other contributing authors?**

I think the biggest challenge is keeping the style and the voice consistent. No matter how much we all think alike, we do have our own writing styles and visions of how to put what's in our minds onto the page. But on the other hand, it's also nice to make sure we never get in a rut. Each book will be fresh and bring something unique to the table. Most notably, in our brainstorming sessions, the other authors have come up with many cool ideas that I loved. It might not be easy, but it's going to be a great series in the end. I have no doubt.

**Q: What are the biggest benefits and challenges of writing a series? Do you know how the series will end? How many details will be left to the other authors?**

The biggest benefit is that after you work so hard on developing everything that goes into your story, you don't have to be done and gone.

Since I am writing book One and Seven, I am able to come back to the same world and continue the adventure. We do know the general ending, though many details might change along the way. The whole series will be a very collaborative effort between the authors and the people at Scholastic, and I have every confidence it will end up great.

**Q: Aspiring writers are often told to write what they know; since yours is a story that infuses adventure, history, and mystery into the story, how have you followed that sage advice?**

I guess I write what I know, or what I can find out through research. But much more importantly, I write what I LOVE. I think about it constantly as I go through the process: Would this be cool to me if I was the reader? Is this the kind of book I'd want to keep on my shelf? Are these characters appealing to me as a reader? Is this cool? Is that cool? If this or that happened, would that be cool? I use the word "cool" a lot.

**Q: Can you describe your writing process? Do you have any quirky writing rituals you feel compelled to carry out as you work? What advice can you give to aspiring writers?**

Every author has their own process and ways of doing things. It's important to me to write straight through a draft before I allow myself to do any editing of any sort. The first draft is always about the creative process, letting it flow, unleashing my brain. Then I go back and fix it up. One quirky thing about me: I love to listen to movie soundtracks as I write. I think very cinematically, and the music helps that. My two biggest pieces of advice to aspiring writers: 1. Practice, just like piano, basketball, or dancing. It takes lots and lots of practice. 2. Attend writer's workshops and conferences. They teach you so much, and you also meet people who may come around to help you get published.

**Q: The importance of family is a deeply rooted part of *A Mutiny in Time*. Did you always see this particular theme at the core of your novel?**

It was never something that I consciously decided to insert into the story. Nothing like, "I'm going to really show people how important families are!" But it just comes out naturally when you're dealing with human characters, especially young ones. Very quickly, I knew that Dak would be separated from his parents and that would become his number one reason for risking his life to work with the Hystorians. Also, as soon as I had the idea of the Remnants, I knew that Sera would be an orphan and have false memories of the family that she doesn't have. It just seemed a natural part of their journey. As family is for all of us.

**Q: What do you believe are the underlying themes or universal truths to be found in the *Infinity Ring* series?**

The strong bonds of friends and family. The inherent desire for good to triumph over evil. That all people have layers to themselves. That knowing our past is vital to a strong future. How fun history can be. And most importantly, I want our readers to be thoroughly entertained and have a strong desire to find another good book to read when they're finished!

*This guide was prepared by Rose Brock, a teacher, school librarian, and doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University, specializing in children's and young adult literature.*