

## Interview with E.W. Bonadio, author of *The Masada Stones*

*E.W. Bonadio was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the adopted home of Edgar Allan Poe. Growing up in an inner city working class neighborhood near Baltimore's inner harbor, the author's experiences served as the impetus for his humorous memoir, "New-Age Renaissance Man." From an early age, he learned to live life according to his own terms, observing the menagerie of sights, sounds, and interesting characters that crossed his path. Those experiences served as a template for many of the characters used in his writings. Bonadio picked up the author's pen late in life when in 2000, he wrote his first novel, a supernatural police thriller titled, "Voices." He now has four published works for sale commercially. The author has also written numerous short stories, poems, and essays. Some of his poems are compiled in a book titled "Illuminations." His children's book, "Marin and the Dragon's Golden Treasure," tells the story of a boy who must make a fair trade with a dragon to save his village from destruction. E.W. Bonadio lives in Arizona. Married with two grown children, E.W. Bonadio presently serves as director and COO for a privately held national contract engineering services organization.*

**Tyler:** Welcome, E.W. I'm glad I have the opportunity to interview you today about your newest book, "The Masada Stones." To begin, will you explain for us what the title refers to?

**E.W.:** The idea for the story came from a conversation that I had with a Jewish friend. We were discussing suicide, which was considered a sin in Judeo-Christian teachings. He mentioned Masada and how nearly 1000 Hebrew rebels chose suicide over capitulation during the siege of Masada. I began researching the story of Masada and came up with an alternative history that would not denigrate that sacrifice made by the zealots. Masada is also an Israeli national monument of great significance and I felt compelled to keep the story clear of objectionable material.

**Tyler:** Will you tell us more about the cause of the Hebrew Rebellion and its aftermath when Rome squelched it?

**E.W.:** That is an easy question. According to my research, the Romans had easily conquered the lands surrounding the Mediterranean, including Judea. Although there was peace during the time of Herod, control slipped as Rome squeezed the colonies with new taxes to pay for further campaigns of conquest. What followed were three Hebrew rebellions. It was during the second revolt, when the main temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, that the most fanatical leaders of the rebellion planned their continued resistance from the heights of Masada.

**Tyler:** What is the myth of the Masada Stones. How are they powerful? Are the stones themselves a fictional element or were they historically believed to be powerful?

**E.W.:** Skorsky learns of the myth from his mentor, Professor Simon Yorkin. The story was passed down to Yorkin as a boy by an old rabbi in a Nazi run work camp. The old man had been held captive by the Germans in order to obtain information about the alchemy. The stones are purported to contain a compound that when mixed with liquid, drives mad, anyone infected. In their madness, the afflicted would rage against any living thing in a fight to the death. As a matter of history, the story of the stones is entirely made up, but in the novel, it is the engine that drives the mystery. Until very late in the story, Aaron is unsure of the validity of the scrolls and the potency of the stones.

**Tyler:** What is Professor Skorsky's theory about the Masada stones and why do they become important to so many other people in the novel?

**E.W.:** Skorsky was a college student when he first learned the story of the stones. Using the myth and a promise of help from his mentor, he becomes a respected archeologist. For nearly thirty years, he hones his craft, waiting for the chance to dig at Masada and to uncover truth from within the myth. But once Skorsky gets the chance, he finds himself embroiled in a battle between the Israelis and Palestinians who have become aware of the potential of the power in the stones. If the alchemy within them is still potent, the Israelis hope to use it as a weapon of assassination against the Arab leadership. Once they learn of the plot, the terrorists attempt to expose the Israeli intentions. Conversely, Skorsky's nemesis, an Israeli professor, covets a promotion. Believing Skorsky is in his way, he attempts to keep Aaron from gaining notoriety from the dig at Masada. There are also those in the Israeli government who wish to salvage the story as the great sacrifice by Hebrew zealots against the might of a Roman legion.

**Tyler:** Tell us about Professor Aaron Skorsky. Why do you think readers will find him an interesting main character?

**E.W.:** Aaron Skorsky is a complicated character. He is accomplished in his field, but in spite of his success, he still feels incomplete. The finding of the stones, or at least the truth in story relayed to him by his college mentor is the one thing that drives him. As he nears his fiftieth birthday, Skorsky realizes he is at the end of his career as a field archeologist. He is a terrific sleuth when it comes to antiquities, but Aaron is also a poor judge of character and intent. Only in his dreams can he seem to find reality and a chance for love. The one trait that makes Skorsky believable is pragmatism in the face of his own vulnerability. A reluctant hero, Aaron Skorsky is a modern day everyman.

**Tyler:** Will you tell us about the villains of the book and why the Masada stones are important to them?

**E.W.:** Mohammad is the main villain in the novel. He is a young Palestinian terrorist, an up and comer in the resistance against Israeli domination. Through his spy, Mohammad reports that the Israelis are planning mass assassinations of the leadership by using the ancient alchemy found in the Masada stones. Mohammad is the last hope of his handlers and they will stop at nothing, including kidnapping and murder to expose Israeli intentions. The Jerusalem terror cell is a small group of young Arab terrorists with the zeal of first century zealots. They also have a desire to be free from domination.

**Tyler:** I understand there's also some romance in the novel. Can you tell us about the love interest without giving away too much of the plot?

**E.W.:** As I said, Skorsky is a vulnerable human being. He also has had very little time for romance. As the excitement of finding the scrolls overtakes Skorsky, a bond develops between him and a young coed. Her flirtations arouse him to near breaking point and he begins to crave another chance for intimacy. It is the coed's mother, a rich widow wooed by his nemesis that also captures his imagination. As the novel moves along, he becomes uncertain of his chances with either of the beauties. Skorsky's poor judgment almost gets him into serious trouble with both the mother and the university. As I said, his romance skills are less than stellar.

**Tyler:** E.W., would you compare "The Masada Stones" to any other books or are there any other works that have been big influences on you?

**E.W.:** I am influenced by anything related to history, myth, archeology or adventure. I really like reading Wilbur Smith and Clive Cussler. I'm also a Dean Koontz and Stephen King fan, although I have not read their most recent works. I devour history books. I guess that if I were to relate my work to another writer it would be Bernard Cornwell who wrote the "The Pale Horseman" and the Richard Sharp novels. History seeps from every page of his books. Don't laugh, but I think the book that influenced me the most in writing "The Masada Stones" was "The DaVinci Code."

**Tyler:** I was thinking "The Masada Stones" sounds like it's similar to "The Da Vinci Code" or even the Indiana Jones films. What do you think makes it stand apart from those types of works?

**E.W.:** I jokingly call my book "The DaVinci Code" meets Indiana Jones. My main character, Aaron Skorsky is sort of a poor man's Indiana Jones. He has none of the swagger or adventurism of Indiana, but what he does bring to the story is a believable character, someone who you want to root for, even though he's a bit of a weenie. I liked the

sense of mystery and diversion in “The DaVinci Code.” One of my ideas came from the cylinder puzzle from that book. What makes my novel different is that I try to interject believable tension and conflict between the Arabs and Israelis and how they react to perceived threats.

**Tyler:** Why do you think readers today should be interested in the rebellion of Israel against Rome nearly 2,000 years ago?

**E.W.:** That is not the point of the book. Surely, I do want to educate and entertain the reader with a sense of history, but only about 15 percent of the book relates directly to the first century siege. I must say that the story of Masada is an interesting one. I am a huge fan of the Israeli people and their culture. As an Italian, I am also interested in ancient Roman history. I even wear a Roman coin from the time of Severus Alexander on a chain around my neck. My middle name is Alexander (after Alexander the Great), a shameless attempt at divining greatness. Oh well, maybe I’ll write my next book about him.

**Tyler:** While the ancient rebellion may not be the point of “The Masada Stones,” it certainly plays into the situation in the Middle East today with Israel being reestablished as a nation and the tensions it has with the Palestinians. So would you say ancient history is still relevant to our world today?

**E.W.:** Yes, we are still discovering tombs in Egypt with descriptions of the past that revise previously authored accounts of history. As I said, Palestinians have the same claim as did the Hebrews of the first century. The Jews were not conquerors, but to modern day Palestinians, they are no different than the Romans of that time. Israel was conceived by the United Nations and carved away from the British protectorate of Palestine. Jews have a rightful claim to the land, as do the Arabs, and for that matter, Christians. You see, at one time, indigenous Indians were the masters of the Americas. Then the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English, Italians, and French arrived. See what I mean?

**Tyler:** E.W., what kind of research did you do in writing the book and what did you find to be the most difficult part of the writing and research? Did you actually visit the Middle East to do research?

**E.W.:** I have read the writings of Josephus and also a few books on Masada. The account of the archeological digs of the sixties by Yigael Yadin also served as a guide for the descriptions of the ruins and suppositions from those finds. Interestingly, I found a rebuttal to the story of mass suicide on the Internet. That helped to drive me in coming up with an alternative story. I found a connection to a German archeologist in Yadin’s book. That served to darken the tale by suggesting that the Nazis tried to uncover the myth before and during WWII. I have not visited the Middle East, but hope to some day. Egypt and Israel are my first two choices when I am able to find the time.

**Tyler:** E.W., I mentioned above that you’ve written several other books. Would you tell us a little bit about some of them? Do you see “The Masada Stones” as a major departure from your other works?

**E.W.:** My first book, a novel titled “VOICES,” is a police thriller with a Dean Koontz supernatural component. I took on the challenge in 1998 after reading a book, which received outstanding reviews. I plopped down \$26.50 and broke it open. Two days later I was severely disappointed, so I challenged myself to write a better novel. It published in 1999 and I never looked back. My second book was a compilation of poems that I wrote over many years. I considered it a vanity book and a great giveaway. The third book was a short story, which I published as an illustrated children’s middle grade book. It is a story about a boy who makes a trade with a dragon to save his village. It has a very strong moral component and as an added touch I delve into the myth of dragons in many cultures over the past centuries. I’m very proud of this work, as it was my first attempt at children’s literature. The last book is a humorous memoir titled “New-Age Renaissance Man.” It is the story of my coming of age and growing up Italian in the big city during the fifties and sixties. It follows my adventure into manhood and the trials and tribulations of marriage, fatherhood and all of that stuff. I must say that it was a fun adventure as I wrote of those steps and miss-steps in my quest for credibility (or greatness).

My true love is fiction and the novel, however dark or mysterious. That is my present direction. I have been exploring the craft, trying to polish my rusty voice. I’m certain that there are a few more novels in me and I can’t wait to get started. Until then, I will write short stories, essays, and poetry while cultivating the creative juices to bust out another entertaining book.

**Tyler:** Thank you, E.W., for joining me today. Before we go, will you tell our readers about your website and what additional information they can find there about “The Masada Stones” and your many other writings?

**E.W.:** Sure, my website is [www.ebonadio.com](http://www.ebonadio.com) and my books are available directly from me or through the usual suspects, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Borders, or my POD publisher iUniverse.

On my website, I post poetry, short stories and of course, a short bio on my personal and professional background. Oh yes, I also try to post a new quote each month. I call them Bonadio-isms. They are usually short and humorous, but always they are meant to make you think and, or smile.

**Tyler:** Will you give us a Bonadio-ism in closing?

**E.W.:** Sure, the one that’s on my website presently. It goes: When I was young, time was something that I always had plenty of. Now that I’m older, I find it harder each day to capture even a few minutes.

**Tyler:** Thank you, E.W. It’s been a pleasure to interview you today. Best of luck with your future writing.