

PRH WRITERS BLOCK

photos by Mike Revick



THE COOLEST GEEK



Eric Smith poses with his Nerf guns blazing in celebration of the Philadelphia geeky culture that brought him to where he is today.

Imagine being confronted by a Haiku-speaking ninja named Brave Orchid after your literati ex-girlfriend dumps you that same morning. Suppose, in that very same week, you're suckered into buying a destructive sugar-glider, dealing with a failing business and suffering from writer's block despite being an accomplished author. Local writer and self-proclaimed nerd from New Jersey, Eric Smith puts his first protagonist, Andrew "Ace" Connor, through this and more in his self-published debut novel *"Textual Healing."*

"I had this dream that I had written a book and I was this big-deal author - which is in a way still the dream - and my book was in a Barnes & Noble," Smith recalls. "Then I saw that it was on clearance for like, a dollar, and 'dream Eric' had this, like, nervous breakdown in the middle of the store, crying and everything. So, I then framed the entire story around this neurotic writer who sort of emotionally explodes."

Through each page, readers ride the emotional roller coaster Smith artfully lays out for Ace, keeping them guessing till the novel's end and laughing the whole way. While the plot is reminiscent of Nick Hornby's *"High Fidelity,"* it's Smith's unique and captivating cast that keeps you reading and constantly laughing out loud. We can see a piece of everyone we know in his story - which was fully intentional.

"All of my friends and family are in the book. I am exactly like him [Ace]. I'm very self-deprecating and make fun of myself a lot, and I can be just as silly. A lot of that is me. When it comes to the characters in the book, almost every single one is based on a real person," Smith proclaims.

While the tale of Eric Smith the writer is less dramatic, it's equally engaging. The charismatic writer's humble story-telling days began as a child, when he invented tales about best friends embarking on silly adventures.

"When I was a little kid, my parents bought me this electronic typewriter - a marvel of technology then - where you could type out a whole story on this tiny LCD screen and it'd print everything insanelly slow," he explains with a rueful laugh.

That dated gadget inspired more than sixth-grade stories. After all, we're talking to the guy who co-founded *Geekadelphia*, Philadelphia's leading blog for local geek culture news. His impressive roster doesn't stop there. Out of college, he interned at a magazine, doing marketing and social media. While getting his Masters, he was the full-time "editorial guy" for the *Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corp.* These days, he is doing marketing for *Quirk Books* and is an adjunct professor for Peirce College.

Despite his accomplishments, publishers wouldn't consider a writer who had never been published before. So, Smith took a leap and published his novel on his own. He even created a podiobook (where friends read the novel's lines in an online podcast) and relied on his vast connections throughout the city to promote his book.

The end result hasn't achieved best-seller status yet, but he did accomplish his primary goal. While Smith plans on writing a second novel some time in the future, for now he is reveling in his geeky glory.

"I love to write and got to tell a fun story. In the end, that was all that mattered." ■