

## A CONVERSATION WITH JENNIFER MORTIMER

### TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, HOW AND WHEN YOU STARTED WRITING.

I always meant to write and studied literature at University but fell into a career in IT instead. I've worked in the UK, USA, Australia, and South America as well as New Zealand. I finally started writing five years ago when I had some time out from a string of quite tough executive jobs. *Trilemma* is my third book, and the result of both experience and the excellent teaching given by my tutor Mandy Hager on a creative writing course. I continue to work, and fit my writing into the breaks between assignments and the weekends. We are fortunate enough to have a home in France as well as New Zealand, so I get to spend a lot of time in Europe. I have an American husband, Paul, who is also a writer (of non-fiction), a daughter Chloe at University and a stepdaughter Ella at high school. We have a dog named Polly on whom the dog in *Trilemma* is based.

### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

*Trilemma* was inspired by several woman chief executives and women prime ministers in New Zealand. I wondered about their lives. In particular I noted that these women had no children so it got me thinking about what women give up to focus on a very senior career.

### HOW DID YOU USE YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE OR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TO ENRICH YOUR STORY?

I have used the truth-stranger-than-fiction I've experienced working in corporates around the globe as a basis for the work aspects of my stories. All of the dangerous and criminal events of course are fiction. I also use locations I'm familiar with in which to set my stories.

### ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

Not intentionally! My heroine is a career woman, as of course I have been, and she has very similar likes and dislikes to me. For example, she is very partial to good food and wine and doesn't like gyms.

### ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Hmm. I always tell my friends and family that it would be rude to put them in my books, and that it is only odd characters and characteristics that you recreate in your stories. I have to say that the odd enemy may have found their way into my stories as a villain or a fool. They say revenge is a dish best served cold.

### WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR NOVEL IS MORE PLOT DRIVEN OR CHARACTER DRIVEN?

I'd like to think character and plot are equally developed and equally important.

### **WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?**

The dog. Because she's a really lovable doggyish dog.

### **WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?**

Scott Peake, the consultant-cum-CFO. An archetypal character made up of all the consultants and corporate psychopaths I've hated the most.

### **WHAT PART OF WRITING YOUR BOOK DID YOU FIND THE MOST CHALLENGING?**

Getting the beginning right.

### **WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR BOOK?**

I hope readers enjoy learning about New Zealand if they don't know it, or that the descriptions resonate, if they do. I hope they enjoy reading about what life is like for a committed career woman at the top. I hope they find the mystery of who is stalking Lin engaging. But mostly I hope they really enjoy reading the book and come away feeling satisfied.

### **HOW DO YOU DIAL UP THE TENSION TO KEEP YOUR READERS ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEATS?**

There is a series of accidents, that may not be accidents, that help build tension. I think the chapters covering the climactic event and Lin's response are particularly tense, unexpected and exciting.

### **WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?**

I like crime novels where there is a strong element of mystery, colorful characters, and sharp dialogue. So, for me: Jo Nesbo, Kate Atkinson, Raymond Chandler, and Georgette Heyer are my models, but I also like and learn from Michael Connelly, Ian Rankin, and Elizabeth George.

### **WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?**

When I am working, I get to write only on the weekends, but when the assignment ends, I have new material for another story, and have weeks and sometimes months of free time in which to write it. I normally start with a character, a work story, a setting and a mystery, and I generally know the climax and how it's going to end. I find I can write the shitty first draft quite quickly, but my revisions take at least as long. My writing tends to be terse so I revise to expand rather than to cull. I sit on the couch in the corner of the living room, looking down on the city of Wellington and the sea and the hills, with my laptop protecting my lap from the cat. I procrastinate for hours but when I start writing I get wholly absorbed and I am happy.

### **WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?**

That in crime/mystery novels, you can never be too over-the-top. It used to bother me that events weren't that realistic, but people are expecting you to give them a story, not true life.

### **WHAT IS THE WORST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?**

That only character-driven works are worthy.

### **WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? ANY NEW BOOKS IN THE PIPELINE?**

I am in the final throes of revising a prequel to *Trilemma*, set in a castle in the south of France. And I have a first draft of the sequel, set in Sydney, Macau and Christchurch. And an outline for a novel based around Lin's friend Sally, also set in New Zealand, though up the coast. I'm going to write that over the summer break. I'm also about to start a new assignment at Weta Digital, so I'm hoping to get a new story set in the movie Visual Effects industry.

### **ANY FINAL WORDS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR NOVEL, OR LIFE IN GENERAL?**

New writers always ask, how do you get published? How do you make money out of it? I think I have a glimmering of the answer. The secret is: a great story, peopled with terrific characters, written well. So, keep writing and learning until you can do that!