

## **A Q&A with Matt Johnson about his novel *Deadly Game***

### **1. The second in the Robert Finlay series, *Deadly Game* is published by Orenda Books in March 2017 – what can readers expect?**

In *Wicked Game*, Finlay faced a nightmare situation that threatened not only him but also his friends and family. In the sequel, *Deadly Game*, he discovers that a return to normal policing will not be easy. Posted to a new team formed to tackle a growing problem of slave trafficking in London, Finlay soon becomes involved in investigating the murder of a key witness.

And on the home front, Finlay's attempts to protect his family may have been in vain as Toni Fellowes, an MI5 officer tasked with investigating the attacks on them, discovers a covert secret-service operation that threatens them all.

*Deadly Game* is a spy thriller, a crime thriller and an insight into the world of people trafficking. The story tackles a very real and unpleasant issue that is closer to home than many of us realise as it transports the reader into the overlapping worlds of the Police, Intelligence and Security Services.

### **2. The [YouTube trailer](#) for *Deadly Game* makes the valid point that, although the book is fictional, the subject of people trafficking is not. Where did the idea for the novel stem from?**

*Deadly Game* starts in Romania, and is based on a gang who move young women from their homes to work in the sex-trade. As you mention, although fiction, the story has a sound basis in fact.

Sex slavery and the trafficking that supports it are not a new concept to Europe. In World War II, the Nazis set up 'Joy Divisions' in concentration camps that were filled with young Jewish women. These brothels were frequented by both the soldiers and the co-operative non-Jewish inmates. Across Europe, the German Army also set up many 'Soldatenbordell' where local women were forced into providing unpaid sexual services in return for avoiding the camps. Mass kidnapping raids were carried out in countries such as Poland and Romania, where young women were rounded up and then transported to become entertainment for the troops.

As the war ended, many Romanian soldiers who had been serving in the German Army returned to their homeland with an understanding of the money to be made by forcing women into the sex trade. As the forces of law got to grips with the criminal gangs, the method of providing girls simply changed from one of coercion to one of deception. In times of economic depression, hungry and desperate for paid work, it became easy to trick girls into applying for waitress, cleaning and other menial jobs in the cities. Once on the journey, the girls were doomed.

*Deadly Game* follows the journey of once such girl. I hope that, by telling her story, I may be able to raise a little awareness in people's minds that slavery hasn't gone away, and the chains on the victims, although less easily seen, are still very much in use.

### **3. The trailer is haunting and very moving. What inspired it?**

Unusually, the backing track provided the impetus for the idea. The voice is Bethan Chapman, the young daughter of a friend of mine. 'Wolf' is her own composition, and when I first heard it, I realised that the words described a very similar situation to the one faced by the young woman trafficked in *Deadly Game*. After that, it was a question of developing a trailer to support the music, instead of the other way around, which is what normally happens.

### **4. Give us an insight into your main character. What does he/she do that is so special?**

The main protagonist in both books is Robert Finlay, and I hope he's unlike any cop you will have ever met. Finlay is an ex-Army special-forces officer, but he's not an all-action hero. He's a thinker, a strategist, a planner. And he has his own resourceful ways of getting things done. Finlay is also very committed to his family, putting their welfare and security first in his thinking.

But Finlay is blessed with the ability to be resourceful, to look at problems and to come up with potential solutions that don't occur to his policing colleagues. As such, he's something of a one-off, a headache to his senior officers, but someone they nevertheless respect.

### **5. As someone so new to authorship, have you established a writing routine yet?**

I wish I had one! Having come to writing quite late in life, I have yet to think of it as my occupation. At the moment, it is a hobby that I fit into my day as and when I can. It was only after the success of *Wicked Game* that I started to think of myself as an author and then start to consider how or whether I should develop this hobby in a more professional way. That is happening, slowly, as I learn and as the editing team at Orenda help me develop.

## **6. Who is your favourite fictional detective?**

For me, this has to be Detective Chief Inspector Endeavour Morse, GM, made all the more real for me by the accomplished acting of the late John Thaw. Colin Dexter created an amazing character who appealed to so many. His beloved Mk2 Jaguar, his love of real ale, his wit, intelligence and taste in music. It all added up to a character with the kind of depth us writers can only dream of creating. I realise now, as I write this, that Dexter's decision to have the character known by his surname was probably influential on my decision to do the same with Robert Finlay.

## **7. The last two years, have seen *Wicked Game*, your first book, published, it being listed for a CWA Dagger award and then topping many best-seller lists. You must have been on a steep learning curve. What advice would you give to aspiring authors?**

I'm so new to this world that any advice I come up with should be read with that in mind. However, there are a couple of things I have picked up in the last year.

Firstly, to be aware this is a market where things are changing rapidly. The days are gone where the only way to achieve publication success is through the literary agent's slush pile. Nowadays, there are very many routes to seeing your work published. Do your homework, identify them and work hard to reach your goal. But bear in mind, once that goal is achieved; you cannot sit back and relax. If you do, the world will move on and you will face having to catch up once more.

Second, and at least as important – particularly if you self-publish – get your work proofread by someone who does it professionally and be careful who you go to, there are some charlatans out there. I messed up when I started and, after my first self-pubbed work was criticised, I was lucky enough to find a great proof reader. After that, trust in what a good editor can do for you. You will not regret it, believe me.

## **8. How long did it take you to write the two books?**

Stephen Fry once posed the question - if you write your first novel in a month at the age of 23, and your second novel takes two years, which have you written more quickly? He went on to explain his opinion that it is the second. In his words 'The first took twenty-three years and contains all the experience, pain, stored-up artistry, anger, love, hope, comic invention and despair of that lifetime. The second is an act of professional writing. That is why it is so much more difficult.'

My first novel was over fifty years in creation, and took over ten years from idea to first draft. My second took a little over two years. That said, I'm now more aware of publishing timetables and demands, so I've set myself a target of twelve months for book three.