

An Exclusive Interview with Crime Writer

Zoë Sharp

By Sonia Kilvington



Unconventional crime writer Zoë Sharp began her writing career at fifteen. She has written eight thrillers featuring tough Ex- Special Forces soldier Charlie Fox. Her novel *First Drop* was a best seller in England and America and was nominated for a Barry Award for Best British Crime Novel. Zoë is also a photojournalist and she lives in Cumbria, England.

Fourth Day, the latest in the series, is set in a Californian cult. Charlie Fox and her partner Sean Meyer are hired to extract Thomas Witney, who infiltrated the cult five years earlier, in an attempt to prove its charismatic leader; Randall Bane, was responsible for his sons death.

When Charlie goes undercover, her identity is soon exposed and under the influence of Randall Bane, she finds herself revealing some disturbing secrets of her own.

Charlie Fox is famous for her “killer Instinct” do you feel a sense of responsibility when you write violent scenes?

I don't feel that I glorify violence, by any means, but it's a part of the character, and a part of the stories I write. If it's necessary to move the story on in some way, then I don't shy away from putting it in there. But, there's a big difference between graphic and gratuitous. A much lower level of violence is gratuitous if it doesn't serve a purpose other than the author attempting to titillate or shock his/her audience.

A reviewer did once accuse Charlie of having a somewhat casual attitude towards violence in the books, but I feel that's a very superficial view – instead, she has a very *matter-of-fact* attitude towards it, stemming from her professional outlook. She's capable of great violence, if circumstances combine to make it unavoidable, but that doesn't mean she finds it easy, or that she enjoys it, either. In fact, it's her capacity for violent behavior that has caused her most internal conflict during the series. Female characters with the ability to kill are not the norm in crime fiction, even today. The tough-guy heroes are expected to shoot the villains and knock back whisky in the bar at the end of the day, but women who kill are often portrayed as ice-cold assassins or psychos, and I wanted Charlie to be something more than that, something very human.

Early in your career you received death threats. Has this experience inspired your writing?

Definitely. It was a sobering experience, and set my mind off down the road of “What if?” You really need to explore the ‘what if’ route if you're going to write any kind of fiction. You take a small fact, an incident, and extrapolate from there. It also made me learn a good deal of self-defence, and it was while I was taking classes that the character of Charlie became fully formed.

***Fourth Day* is set in a cult, and we think we know what**

to expect, but you challenge the stereotype. Do you enjoy questioning your reader's perceptions?

Thank you for that! I've never liked doing what's expected of me, I suppose. And I did enjoy turning the usual run of events on its head a little. I mean, when you read the jacket copy and you see that Charlie's going undercover into a California cult because its charismatic leader is suspected of murder, you think you know exactly where it's going. If that was the case, I would have got bored writing the book, and I'm equally sure that people would have got bored reading it. I did a book called *ROAD KILL* (number five in the Charlie Fox series) where Charlie goes to Ireland with a group of bikers on a road trip. I wanted to challenge two sets of stereotypes with this book. Convention says that if you ride a motorcycle, you must also run a meth lab, whereas the only laws the vast majority of UK bikers break on a regular basis is the national speed limit, and by making their only contact with the police a negative one, it creates an overall lack of respect for the law.

Also, I wanted to present a picture of Ireland (and in particular, Northern Ireland) that was something different from the usual sectarian violence and paramilitaries. I had a lot of fun with that book. (And it will be available again next Spring, in trade paperback format from Busted Flush Press!)

Having just returned from a successful book tour in the states, how did the Americans take to Charlie?

Charlie has always seemed to strike a chord with American audiences. They have a liking for kick-ass heroines, so she fits right in. And to my surprise the new Busted Flush edition of *KILLER INSTINCT* (published in May) has just received a really great review from *The New York Times*. It seems to be attracting more attention over there than it did in the UK when it first came out in 2001.

I loved *First Drop*; it was a rollercoaster ride of action and excitement. Do you have a personal favorite in the series?

That's always a tough question, and my answer is usually:

The next book – the one I have yet to write. I view myself as a craftsman rather than an artist, and I'm always working hard to improve my craft. If I ever finish a book and think, 'that's it, that's the best thing I'm ever going to write, I will never write anything as good as this again,' then it's probably time to stop. I always hope I can go a little further, stretch a little more, with the next one. Contrary, aren't I?

With the current trend of female leads in action films such as Angelina Jolie in Salt, would you be interested in seeing Charlie Fox on the big screen?

I'd love to Charlie make the move from page to screen, but it's one of those things over which the author has very little control ...

Any suggestions as to who could play her?

That's another tricky one. The purist in me says I'd love it to be a complete unknown, as with the Swedish version of the Stieg Larsson Millennium trilogy, because then there are no preconceived ideas about the face behind the character. But the realist in me would prefer the biggest box-office name the producers could attract!

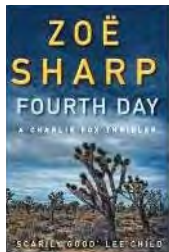
Seriously, if you allow your work to go for TV or movie adaptation, you accept that you sign away just about any say in what they do with the character en route. I'd just hope they would remain true to Charlie's fundamental beliefs and traits, and leave it at that. Anything else is a bonus.

I enjoy reading your blog site at www.murderati.com. I noticed you reply personally, to many of the questions posted there. Do you enjoy this contact with your readers?

It's always a challenge, meeting my regular bi-Thursday Murderati deadline and coming up with something relevant and entertaining. I usually have no idea what I'm going to write until hours before it's due, which is sometimes the best way. And if people take the trouble to comment, the least I can do is take the trouble to respond.

I do enjoy being part of the Murderati crew, and it is a great way to interact with readers. I love going to conventions, library and bookstore events, readers' or writers' groups, anything really. I'm always happy to talk books and writing, and feedback on my own work is invariably useful.

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Fourth Day is available in hard back. It is published by Allison & Busby. ISBN: 978-0-7490-0815-4

For more information on Zoë Sharp Visit her website www.zoesharp.com You can read Zoë's blog at www.murderati.com

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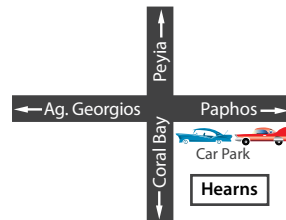
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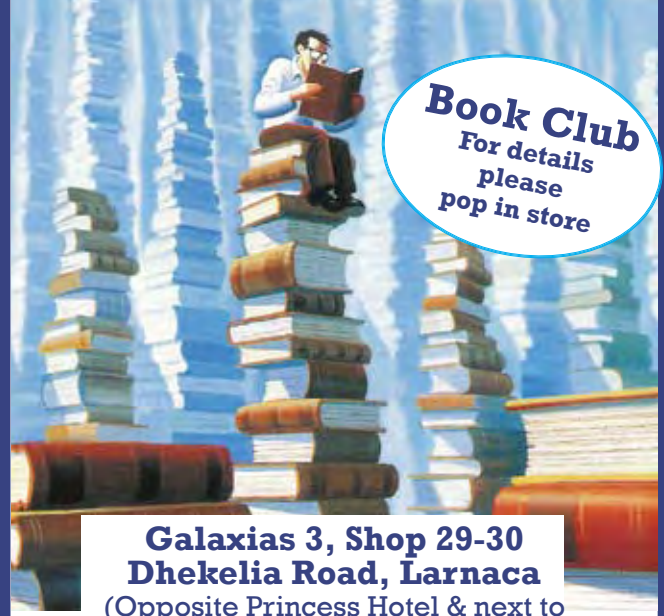
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