

LEE WEEKS



Sunday Times bestselling author **Lee Weeks** was born in Devon of Welsh parents. She went to far too many schools and left at the age of sixteen with one GCSE in Art. She started travelling at seventeen and spent the next seven years working her way around Europe and south East Asia. Amongst other things she was an au pair in Sweden, a disc jockey in Germany and a night club hostess in Hong Kong. Her thrillers are centred on her detective Johnny Mann. Lee spends a lot of time researching her books as some of them are based on real events such as the civil war in Burma and the plight of sex trafficked children in the Philippines. She has had many experiences in life, heroin addiction being one and was almost a victim of trafficking herself. She has written: *The Trophy Taker*, *The Trafficked*, *Death Trip* and *Kiss & Die*.

Cyprus Well caught up with Lee last week when she came in to film a reading for our new Writer TV slot, and we got the chance to ask her a few questions about her work and the general writing world.

Have you always wanted to be a writer? Can you pinpoint the time when it suddenly got serious, and you sat down in earnest to write your way towards publication?

I wrote from really young: poetry mainly until I went travelling at seventeen and I started journals. In the fifteen years in London when I was busy surviving a difficult marriage and raising two kids I never wrote a thing. When I moved back to Devon I joined a writing class and wrote a story based on my travels in Hong Kong. I threw in a few fight scenes and a love interest in the shape of a detective named Johnny Mann. I sent my manuscript off to someone for appraisal and she sent it back saying I had written a thriller and that it didn't work because my protagonist was a 'victim' but that she really liked my 'love interest'

detective. I thought – yeah, fine, but that's not the book I've written and I shelved it. When my marriage turned terminal later that year I knew it was 'now or never'. I rewrote the first three chapters putting my detective at the helm and sent it off to the agent, Darley Anderson. I had read about him in a writer's magazine and found him in the Writers yearbook. He got straight back to me and took me on.

Can you tell us a bit about your writing environment and habits – is there a particular place or time of day you like to write, do you write a set amount of words a day, for example?

I write in my office, at a long red desk. I have old guns, ornamental fans and photos of my family around. I write all day and every day until something stops me. I wake up at about 6. I start writing at about 7.30 after I deal with emails etc. I write until my dogs bug me enough to take them out – about 9.30. I come back at about 11 and work until I go to the gym at about 5. I work when I come home until I go to bed. But 'work' is a loose term. I might be researching physically or mentally – looking up gruesome medical facts or scouring YouTube for some footage of bar girls. Or I might be answering questions like these. At different times of day I will write differently. In the morning I get the majority of the words down – I usually do about two thousand. In the afternoon I will write in the missing bits. In the evening I tend towards descriptive passages. Each one of these differing energy levels is really useful.

How do you plan your novels – how much do you know about the likely timelines and connections between different parts of the plot?

Because my plots are complicated I help myself with cork boards all over the office with timelines and character traits pinned everywhere. I plan my novels meticulously because I know what happens when I don't! The more I plan, the more I can allow myself the luxury of never getting stuck or confused or floundering and perhaps missing a deadline. From start to finish a book takes on three active parts: the conception and planning first. This is when I might squeeze in a holiday as part of my research. The 'doing part' is second - the hard slog, satisfying but consistently hard. And lastly, the editing and the 'tying-up' of ends. The last part is when I am convinced I am going mad!

From your website it's clear you have led an interesting and at times quite dangerous life! To what extent does your own life and experience sneak into your novels, perhaps in setting or characterisation?

My life and experiences feature in everything I write. My life is an invaluable source of material to call on. My sense of adventure sends me for stories all over the globe and my reckless nature keeps on testing the hot spring to see if it's really hot. I will always force myself into uncomfortable situations to be able to write accurately about them. But not everyone is like me and not everyone likes the way I write. Lee Child says he does no research whatsoever. He makes it all up – and he does a great job. Matt Hilton had never been to America when he wrote the first five books of his series about Joe Hunter set in America. We are all different, catering for different tastes. Because I write from the heart and some of my personal experiences have been extremely difficult I give an insight into mental and physical suffering that some people will find too much and others love. If you don't have life experiences and you want to write from the heart you have to research rigorously, listen to people meticulously and have a great imagination – it can be done.

Are there writers you particularly admire and books you'd recommend to our readers?

In my own genre: John Burdett, Karen Slaughter, Jeffery Deaver, Chris Carter and Val McDermid.

At Cyprus Well we're keeping an eye on what seems to be a digital publishing revolution, with iPads, Kindles, etc. How do you view these developments, both as a writer and a reader?

I know that my books have done well in the E format, so I can't complain. I prefer to read my books in the traditional manner but I am delighted if technology reaches a new audience, it can only be a good thing.

Finally, what advice to you have for any of our readers who want to be a published writer?

Do not over-edit before you finish the first draft of your MS. Over-editing kills the pace and doesn't move the plot forward and often you have to go back again and loosen it. Leave it fresh and fast. When you are writing your story, continually ask yourself questions: why, when, what, how, where? Be able to answer every one of these convincingly. Why does he feel like that? How does she know that? etc. Give your story depth and make your characters three dimensional by giving them a history. Make a Q&A for your characters. E.g. What's your favourite colour? Where did you go to school? Who was your first love? Write a short synopsis of your story before you start. It will help cement the theme (jealousy, revenge, greed etc) and create a general outline. It will clarify your intentions for your story and it will be invaluable when you get lost! Be businesslike about it all. Don't keep rewriting the first three chapters for twenty years – remember 'fast and fresh'.

Thank you, Lee!



[Kiss & Die](#)

Lee Weeks

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