

A CONVERSATION WITH MATT COYLE

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

Even as a kid, I love to read. Well, anything but school books. Like a lot of hard-shelled kids with gooey nougat in the center, I wrote terrible poetry in junior high. In college I took a detective fiction class and loved the idea of a PI being able to travel through different tiers of society just by following a clue. When I graduated, I started writing a couple different novels that went in and out of a drawer over the next twenty years.

Finally, about ten years ago when yet another one of the golf companies I worked for went under, I told myself I had to either take the time off to write a book or quit talking about it forever. I wrote the first draft of YESTERDAY'S ECHO in five months. About six drafts later, it was ready to be published.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

Aside from all the enjoyment I got from reading great mysteries writers over the years, the inspiration came from a line that had been bouncing around in my head for a while:

The first time I saw her, she made me remember and she made me forget.

I'm not sure where it came from, but it helped set the outline for my protagonist. This was a guy who'd had some good and too much bad in his life. There was regret and I could work with that. I think regret is very relatable.

Who hasn't done something they wish they could take back?

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

I worked in a steak house for ten years and some of YE takes place in a restaurant. I tried to give the reader a bit of the day to day without going into minute detail.

IS THERE ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

The protagonist has some of me and my background in him. Except he's taller, tougher, and better looking.

ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

There are bits and pieces of people I know or knew in a few characters, but there is one who is a composite of two people from my past. One third of the character is a restaurant owner I worked for who is a self-made man. The other two thirds are a boyhood friend I grew up with and dearly miss. He died of cancer seven years ago.

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

A shade more character driven.

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

One of my favorite characters is Turk Muldoon. He's Rick's best friend and sometimes his conscience. He's a free spirit and has a big heart, but is far from perfect.

WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

Peter Stone is the least sympathetic and probably my favorite character. He's smart, powerful, and malicious. He says things out loud some of us say silently in our heads. Yet, ultimately, his malevolent acts are done to protect someone else.

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

Making Melody Malana mysterious, dark, and still likeable.
Killing my darlings and getting someone from point A to B. Also, as it's written in first person, getting rid of as many "I"s as possible.

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

I didn't write the book as a "theme" book, but a theme emerged on its own: Redemption. What would you do to gain redemption and what will you do if it's unattainable?

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

I try to put an obstacle in front of my protagonist on every page. Some small-a problem in a relationship, or escaping an American Mastiff while running through a neighbor's back yard; some big-getting beat up by two mountain-sized men, or evading bullets. I try to keep constant pressure on the antagonist, both external and internal.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Raymond Chandler
Ross MacDonal
Ernest Hemingway
F. Scott Fitzgerald

Contemporary:

Michael Connelly
T. Jefferson Parker
Robert Crais

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

It starts after I finished my day job, around 5:00 or 5:30 pm. I try to get in three hours a weekday and more on weekends.

I start each session by reading through what I wrote the day before and revise. That gets me into the flow and into character.

I'm a blank-pager, so every day I have to come up with something new. Sometimes it doesn't make it past the next day.

I enjoy writing myself into a corner and trying to find a way out.

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

Put your ass in the seat.

If you're not writing, you're not writing.

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

Probably something I said to myself. Fortunately, I can't remember what it was.

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

Yes. I'm about a third of the way into my next Rick Cahill Crime Novel.

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

Put your ass in the seat.