



Book Club Pack

'Lord Of The Dead'

by

Richard Rippon

Thank you for choosing to read the brilliant thriller 'Lord Of The Dead' by Richard Rippon for your book club.

To make your experience with the book as enjoyable and interactive as possible, we at Obliterati Press have prepared this package of blogs written by Richard, as well as some suggestions for discussion points for your club meeting.

Further to this, if your book club has any specific questions not covered here, Richard is willing to take part in an email Q&A with you. Please email any such questions to obliterati.press@yahoo.co.uk and we will forward them to Richard.

We're sure you will enjoy this superb crime thriller, and hope you will follow both Richard's future work and future Obliterati Press releases.

Now, over to Richard...

WHY MY MAIN CHARACTER HAS CEREBRAL PALSY (Originally posted on *Bibliophile Book Club* blog)

Before I started writing it, I had some ideas of the things I wanted to achieve with my novel. I wanted it to be firmly set in the North East, but I didn't want it to feel small-town. I wanted to create a pacey thriller, but have an interesting and unique premise. I wanted it to have a gritty noir feel, but have almost cinematic moments, which would make the most of the Northumberland setting. Most importantly, I wanted the characters, and particularly my protagonist, to be as realistic – but as different and engaging – as possible.

I hit upon the idea of creating a younger version of my Uncle Jim, a retired accountant who happens to have a razor-sharp intellect, a great sense of humour and a wicked turn of phrase, which I thought would work well on the page. He also happens to be affected by cerebral palsy.

Although I initially planned to simply transplant parts of his personality into an able-bodied person, it didn't feel right to airbrush his disability away, to just cherry-pick certain aspects of his personality for the convenience of the book. Disabled people are still woefully under-represented on TV and in literature. For example, around 5% of TV characters have a disability, compared to 16% in the UK. When they are represented, they're rarely given substantial storylines. I wanted my character to be front and centre – the lead, the hero – not the quirky sidekick behind the scenes.

And so, Jon Atherton was born. While I wanted to include his disability, I didn't want this to be the sole focus, I wanted it to be more incidental. Yes, it's part of him, but just one part. I went on to add some significant embellishments, until Jon stopped being a version of Jim, and took a life of his own.

Of course the fictional Jon's disability is something that has shaped him in part. He has memories of being bullied, and a complicated relationship with his parents that stems from this, but it isn't his defining characteristic. He's a bit of a lad – a sexual being, with a fondness for female company – and has an interesting psychological makeup, which makes him well-suited to hunt down killers. He's also not without his flaws. He's witty, but sometimes his sarcasm can be hurtful and inappropriate. He's been unfaithful to a wife who is still suffering from post-partum depression, and their relationship is still in recovery.

Atherton having CP presented a few practical problems. He probably couldn't be the cop I first envisaged. Instead, he'd be a university professor who specialises in serial killers. There'd be no chase scenes, or sliding over car bonnets in the pursuit of criminals. Instead, his input would be rely on his intellect, aided by a female partner, and police team who'd step in when things got physical.

Another problem was that I didn't know enough about the day-to-day implications of living with cerebral palsy. I felt like a bit of a charlatan. What right did I have to write with any kind of authenticity about what it would be like to have a lifelong condition such as CP? I turned to Twitter for help, and found someone who helped me better understand how CP feels, and the frustrations that can come with it.

In the end, I think my decision to introduce Jon Atherton was the right one. I'll never be the best-qualified to write with absolute authority about life with CP, but I can at least try to contribute a believable and compelling hero who happens to live with a disability.

bibliophilebookclub.com

WHY ALL MOVIES SHOULD BE SET IN THE NORTH EAST (Originally posted on *A Lover Of Books* blog)

With a rich variety of architecture and landscapes, it's no wonder the North East has been used so extensively as a film and TV location. Last year, Newcastle was the backdrop for the Palm D'or winning *I, DANIEL BLAKE*, and the city also makes an unlikely appearance in this year's *TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST NIGHT*, the latest in the long-running franchise. TV's *VERA* has shot seven series here, using the dichotomy between the city streets and the expansive Northumbrian countryside to great effect.

However, these are only part of a rich heritage of movie-making in the region. Both *PAYROLL* (1961) and Roman Polanski's *CUL-DE-SAC* (1966) took advantage of Northumberland's beautiful coastline. *ROBIN HOOD, PRINCE OF THIEVES* (1991) used Sycamore Gap at Hadrian's Wall and the first couple of *HARRY POTTER* films made extensive use of Alnwick Castle (as does the aforementioned *TRANSFORMERS* movie). *GET CARTER* (1971) and *STORMY MONDAY* (1988) used gritty depictions of Newcastle's city centre to bring their stories to life. *GET CARTER* also used the Trinity Square car park in Gateshead, and the staithes at Blyth (both now consigned to location heaven). Also in Blyth (and also now demolished), the power station was used for a number of interior shots in *Alien*³.

Children's TV has its own history in the North East. Of course, it's where Ant and Dec got their start in *BYKER GROVE*, but it has also been home to a long list of productions, from *SUPER GRAN* in the eighties, to today's *THE DUMPING GROUND* and *WOLFBLOOD*.

Of all of these, it's probably *PAYROLL* that resonates with me most, the tale of a wages heist that – of course – goes disastrously wrong. As well as shots of an older Newcastle city centre, we see glimpses of my own village and a couple of local pubs, as we're transported down a coast that's barely changed since 1961.

It's exactly this contrast – the noir of the city and the untamed countryside – which I wanted to capture in my novel, *Lord of the Dead*. In it, victims are abducted from the city and brutally murdered in the wilds of Northumberland.

There's a rawness to both environments. In the city, it's the noir vibe; it's the shadows, the dark alleys, the neon lights, the bridges and old crumbling steps. There's the sense that bad things could happen here. In the countryside, it's the

biting wind, the acres of oscillating marram grass, the ruined castles and cold rivers. It's beautiful to explore, but maybe not after sunset.

aloverofbooks.wordpress.com

Cave, Mann and Deep Red (Originally posted on *Anny Bonny Book Reviews* blog)

I wrote my new novel, *Lord of the Dead*, on the back of cigarette packets. Not literally of course – that would be just mad. What I mean is that it was written in a very piecemeal style and on the hoof, using snatches of stolen time. Anyone with a full-time job and a family knows how hard it is to find spare time for a hobby or passion. And so, my book was written on the bus, to and from work, or an hour here and there after the kids had gone to bed.

I wrote in notebooks, on scraps of paper, or in emails that I'd send to myself. Sometimes I'd write a few hundred words in one go, other times just a few lines. Sometimes, weeks would go by and I'd not have written a thing.

The result was inevitably patchy. Names – or their spellings – would mysteriously change from one chapter to the next. Plot strands would begin only to be completely abandoned. Once, a character was spectacularly killed off, only to appear in much better health later on.

Time for research was scant. I relied on Google and Twitter; the latter providing a forensic expert and someone living with cerebral palsy, who graciously helped to answer my stupid questions online. Close friends – a cop and a nurse – helped to keep things real when it came to police and hospital procedures.

When I grew closer to finishing, my patient agent – a former editor – helped me make sense of the mess, and told me what was working and what wasn't. After multiple reworks, revisions and redrafts, it grew closer to something resembling a novel.

Over almost two years of writing it, I had a number of inspirations. Michael Mann's 1986 film, *Manhunter*, featured a killer who'd watch the families who would eventually become his victims. Brian Cox – as Hannibal Lector – has a great line: "Have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will? It appears quite black." I became interested in writing a killer who revelled in the night, felt empowered and emboldened by it. It was the starting point for the character and his motivation. I wondered what aspect of the night and darkness might fuel his fantasies. I also loved the idea of someone who was a watcher. I wrote my villain as someone who liked to surveil the cops as well as his victims, and was always one step ahead, and ready to strike.

I became obsessed with the *Manhunter* soundtrack. A difficult-to-find collection of electronica and eighties pop-rock. Similarly, I was listening to Nick Cave's album, *Push the Sky Away* on endless loop. There were a number of tracks that seemed to resonate with what I was aiming for. Songs like *We No Who U R*, *Water's Edge* and the title track, had a beautiful, hypnotic and ominous quality that I'll forever associate with *Lord of the Dead*. Later I saw the video for *We No Who U R*, with a shadowy figure wandering through a forest at night, which could have been depicting my antagonist himself.

As a teenager, I became a fan of horror movies and decorated my bedroom with gory posters from *Fangoria* magazine. When I was writing the book, I bought a blu-ray of an old favourite, Dario Argento's *Deep Red*, which I'd previously owned on bootleg VHS. Back in the day, the 'video nasty' scandal had led to a number of titles being banned outright, and others severely cut by the *British Board of Film Classification*. Me and my friends, who preferred our horror unadulterated, would buy copies by post, videos that would have terrible image quality, colours that bled into each other and tape-chewing tracking issues. *Deep Red* features a number of gruesome and ritualised killings and an antagonist who's hiding in plain sight. Both of these elements feature in *Lord of the Dead*, and although I don't think the book is an outright horror, it certainly doesn't shy away from the horrific.

As I write this, I'm pondering a sequel to *Lord of the Dead* and hopefully, I've learnt something from the chaotic way I tackled the first book. Planning is the key. Then, I'm going to take it one chapter at a time. 'Write one true sentence, and then go on from there...' was Hemingway's advice. I'd like it to have a subtly different vibe - the same, but different. It exists in the same world of course, but the main characters have been dramatically and permanently affected by the events of the first book. The villain needs to be completely different, something we've never seen before, and therein lies the challenge - and the fun.

annebonnybookreviews.com

Suggested Book Club Discussion Points

* The protagonists. The relationship between Prejean and Atherton. What does their sexual history add to their dynamic as the investigation progresses?
How does Atherton's status on the psychopathic spectrum alter their interaction, and his view of the crimes they investigate?

*Female leads in crime fiction. What progress has been made in recent years with regards the representation of women in crime fiction; i.e. as lead characters rather than victims, and what is Prejean's place in this?

*Disability. How, if at all, does Atherton's cerebral palsy affect our view of him, and those of his colleagues?
Think of other positive disabled leading characters in modern fiction, particularly crime fiction.

*Setting. Does the Newcastle/North East setting add a different dimension compared to crime novels set in other cities? Would the novel feel different had it been set in a different city? If so, how?

*Serial killer novels. How does a British serial killer novel differ from an American one, given that serial killers seem to be a primarily American phenomenon? Does the British setting give the subject matter more or less resonance than American equivalent novels? Think also in comparison to 'Nordic Noir' such as Jo Nesbo.



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