

# DEBUT thriller heads for big screen



## Sterling service from Edinburgh author's take on the modern novel

LIAM RUDDEN

**S**OMEONE has stolen the designs for the world's most advanced missile, and only one man can stop them... but he's too busy smoking, drinking and eating pizza.

Meet failed Royal Marine commando turned arms dealer Andy Harris and his drunken boss Bob Stone. Both are on their way to do some business at the Paris Air Show when they get bad news from Africa... and so the stage is set for *Stealing Fire*, the debut novel from Edinburgh-based author Craig Sterling, which claims to 'reboot thrillers for the 21st century, aiming nakedly at the film, music and video game generation.'

The author explains, "After years of reading dark-night-of-the-soul literature as a book reviewer, I got bored and decided I wanted to have a little fun. Lots of fun, in fact. So I set out to create a word that was the equivalent of my favourite rock tunes - the Faces, AC/DC, the Stones.

"When something got boring, I binned it. If it was funny, I grew it. If it didn't move fast enough, I cut it.

"I wrote the novel to feel cinematic, with short episodes that you could take and leave. I built it so that, if you had to, it could be read in short bursts. In that sense it's very modern but, as always, the story has to be strong enough to make you want to keep going.

"I want this book to be like the best night out you've ever had - outrageous, wild and full of good memories.

"If people find something more in it, then fine. I've already seen things from the book come true in real life; piracy in the Indian Ocean; oil disputes off West Africa; Russian commandos boarding freighters. For all our sakes, I only hope the book's main plot doesn't come true."

That main plot must, of course, remain a secret, insists Sterling, who worked as a copywriter and media executive in the defence electronics and bio-technology industries before turning his hand to writing - although he does continue to let slip the odd clue as he casts his mind back to the origins of the book.

"I started writing the novel on 1 July 2008 and finished it in February 2010, although the idea came to me ten years before," he recalls.

"The origin of the novel came from an idea an engineer friend gave me; lots of disaffected people now have the skills and technology to build pretty much whatever they want, wherever and whenever they want. That includes the world's most dangerous weapons.

"I just took that premise and ran with it based on my limited knowledge of defence electronics, air shows and what I was reading in the papers at the time."

No one is more surprised by the success of *Stealing Fire* than Sterling himself. The first print run, launched air side at Edinburgh Airport a couple of months back, quickly selling out. A second run has just hit shelves in bookshops around the Capital this week.

Sterling recalls, "The guys at Leamington Books, my publishers, have connections at the airport and had arranged distribution with WH Smith so the next logical step was a launch event.

"We had champagne and bemused travellers on early-morning flights getting handed copies of the book. It was amazing.

"Actually getting *Stealing Fire* published was unusually easy for me because I already knew the editors at Leamington from readings and parties I'd attended in Edinburgh.

"They asked me what I was up to and I told them I was writing a thriller. They asked to see it and three months later we were in business."

Not just in business, but with a sell-out on their hands.

"Four hundred copies of the novel sold in the first week. I was amazed - I didn't know my mum could afford to order that many on Amazon," Sterling laughs.

"Seriously though, it was very flat-

**PROMETHEAN TASK:**

Craig Sterling chose Edinburgh as home to write his first novel *Stealing Fire*

tering and told me that the words I'd repeated over and over to myself when I got up to write every day - darker, harder, faster, funnier - were not misplaced."

And funnier, he explains, is as important as any of the other three.

"You've got to have a laugh, haven't you? *Stealing Fire* is above everything else an entertainment or it's nothing. My readers are my customers and I want them to have a good time."

Born in Paisley and raised in Toronto and Vancouver, Sterling studied in England and the USA before travelling the world in a variety of jobs and fulfilling a life-long dream.

"I had always dreamed of coming to live in Edinburgh one day, to discover my Scottishness," he explains. "I know it's a cliché, but it's such a beautiful city. And the people are great."

It's also the perfect setting for a novel...

He laughs, "I think Mr Rankin and Professor McCall-Smith have got that one nailed. Actually, I picked up *Trainspotting* again today, and I think between those three guys you'd be hard placed to find a street that hasn't got a murder, tea party or drug deal set in it. Maybe Drumshough Gardens? Wait - I can feel a plot coming on..."

In the meantime, however, Sterling's cinematic approach may be about to pay dividends.

"*Stealing Fire* has been short-listed for a prize at the Rome Film Festival," he reveals. "If it wins, the film rights will be put up for auction."

Keeping him busy until then will be Sterling's second

novel, *The Prophet's Tears*, which features the return of *Stealing Fire* hero Andy Harris.

"He wakes up covered in his own blood and bent on revenge," teases Sterling. "Cue double murder, snakes' blood and heroin, and a beautiful girl who works for a bogus environmental lobby group..."

***Stealing Fire* by Craig Sterling is published by Leamington Books, £7.99**

