

INTERVIEW WITH SIMON BECKETT

Is *Stone Bruises* the start of a new series?

No, *Stone Bruises* isn't part of a series. It's a standalone thriller, the first I've written since before the David Hunter series, so I'm very excited about it.

Why isn't this a David Hunter novel?

I've always tried to keep a sense of freshness and unpredictability about the David Hunter books, because I think that's important for any thriller, whether it's a standalone or not. *The Calling of the Grave* was the fourth in the David Hunter series, and I wanted to take time to decide where Hunter would go next. It wasn't my intention at first to write a completely different novel, but while I was planning the fifth Hunter I found that ideas kept falling into place for *Stone Bruises*. It felt like the book I should write next, and that's what happened. In a way this marks something of a return for me, as I wrote four standalone thrillers before the David Hunter series (some of which are due to be republished in the not-too-distant future). Although *Stone Bruises* doesn't involve forensics, I think it's a tense and gripping story that will keep people on the edge of their seats. So I hope David Hunter readers will enjoy it.

Will there be more David Hunter novels in the future?

Yes, there will be. In fact I've already started work on the next one.

Did you do any research for *Stone Bruises*? If yes, what kind?

Stone Bruises certainly didn't need as much research as the David Hunter novels, which involve a lot of forensic and procedural details. For one thing I was able to draw more on personal experience for some aspects of this book. I used to do bits of building work myself, as well as hitch-hiking when I was younger (including in France). So that was all useful when it came to creating a realistic background to the story. But there were still some things I had to find out about. Sean is a French film buff so I had to look into that, as well as research things ranging from makes of old rifles to how to use a chainsaw. Sometimes they're only small details that'll take up no more than a line or two in the book, but I'd rather get them right. I think it all adds to creating a realistic atmosphere that readers can lose themselves in.

Is Sean's character based on anyone you know?

No, he's entirely fictional. I don't base any of my characters on real people, as I think that's asking for trouble. I do try to make them 'real' in the sense that they're vivid and believable, but none of them exist outside the pages of the book. Given the sort of things my characters are capable of, that's probably just as well.

How well do you know France? Do you visit there often?

I don't visit France regularly anymore, although I used to go over quite a lot. When I was a freelance journalist I had a few commissions that took me to various places over there. One trip was to the Limousin region to write about the French love of chestnuts, which came in useful as background for *Stone Bruises*. And as a student a group of us used to go camping in France every summer. It was mainly to the South, but one year we decided to hitch back from Lake Geneva. We split up to get lifts and two of us ended up in the middle of nowhere, stranded on quiet country roads where there were hardly any cars. We had to sleep rough on a couple of occasions, and at one point we ran short of water. So all that came in useful when I was writing the opening scene of the book, where Sean is trudging through the heat and sun after abandoning the car. It's not exactly autobiographical, but it wasn't too much of a stretch to put myself in his shoes.

Is there somewhere in France that you know of that inspired the farm?

I didn't base it on anywhere specific, as I like to create settings more from imagination. I sometimes take aspects from real places, but even then I tend to embellish them. The main thing for me is for people to be able to 'see' where I'm describing and feel it's authentic, regardless of whether it's real or not. Having said that, there was one experience I did draw on when I was creating the farm. I've mentioned before that I used to go camping in France when I was a student, and one year four of us found ourselves in a small French town with no campsite. What it did have was a wood, and so we decided – after sitting all evening in a bar, it must be said – to sleep rough in there. It was very dark and started raining, so when we found an abandoned old house among the trees we decided to shelter on its veranda. We were joking about how it was like something from a horror film, but it was less funny when I was woken up at dawn by someone gently pulling my sleeping bag off my head. I looked up to see this bearded man staring down at me. He didn't say anything and neither did I – I didn't want to provoke him as I was all trussed up in the sleeping bag. After what seemed an age he simply disappeared off into the trees, all in total silence. It turned out that my mates had all been awake as well, but they'd been too scared to say anything either. Of course, by the time the sun came up we were all laughing about it – the man was probably just a vagrant, and we were probably sleeping on his pitch. But it didn't take much imagination to see that it could have turned out very differently. And the idea of Sean emerging from the woods to find a run-down old farmhouse probably had its germination there.