

## **Murder, mystery and suspense with *Cambridge English Readers***

Richard MacAndrew has written five murder mystery stories in the *Cambridge English Readers* series: *Inspector Logan*, *Logan's Choice*, *A Puzzle for Logan*, *The University Murders*, all set in Edinburgh, and *The Lahti File*, set in Finland.

We talked to Richard MacAndrew about the books, about Jenny Logan, his Edinburgh detective, and about his choice of Edinburgh as the backdrop to four of the stories.

**Q:** What attracted you to the genre of murder mystery when you started writing for the *Cambridge English Readers* series?

**RM:** I've read crime fiction since I was a teenager and it's what I read most. It seemed a natural place to start.

**Q:** Do you have a favourite mystery writer? And a favourite fictional detective?

**RM:** My favourite fictional detective is Nero Wolfe, the creation of American writer Rex Stout. Wolfe is enormously fat and unbelievably eccentric. He keeps a vast collection of orchids on the roof of his house in New York. He only works when he has to and he never leaves his house on business. All the legwork is done by his sidekick, the quick-witted, wisecracking, Archie Goodwin. Unfortunately the stories are difficult to get hold of nowadays. I started collecting them about 35 years ago and I recently managed to track down a copy of the only one I hadn't got.

**Q:** How important do you feel setting is for a detective story? And why did you choose Edinburgh as the backdrop to the 'Logan' stories?

**RM:** The setting of a story contributes so much to its atmosphere. The great thing about a city is that it can show so many different 'faces': green open parkland, busy streets, grim industrial areas, wealthy residential districts to name a few. I chose Edinburgh in particular because it's one of my favourite places: it has most of the advantages of a city and few of the disadvantages. I've lived there; and even though I now live in England I go back to Edinburgh two or three times a year.

**Q:** How did you go about developing Logan's character?

**RM:** This may seem strange but when I started writing I had no clear picture in my mind of Jenny Logan's character. I knew that she was young, and I had a basic idea for the plot. Everything else evolved as I wrote the story.

**Q:** Why did you include the relationship between Logan and the journalist, Tam MacDonald?

**RM:** I knew Logan wasn't married but it seemed natural for her to have a boyfriend. The fact that her boyfriend is a journalist gives her access to useful information not always available to the police. However, it does worry her superiors in the police force that she might let slip confidential information. Logan can see their point but they're not going to stop her living her life as she wants.

**Q:** How important is intuition in the work of a detective?

**RM:** Intuition is always important, balanced with an open mind and a degree of rational thought and logic. I'm sure it's true for detectives too. Intuition will help them find suspects; but only evidence will convict.

**Q:** All good detectives have a 'side kick': in Logan's case this is Sergeant Grant. How do the personalities of these two police officers complement one another?

**RM:** Logan is youth, action, boldness, insight; Grant is age, experience, knowledge, physicality. Despite the major differences between them, they develop a healthy mutual respect for each other.

**Q:** The structure of a detective story is obviously crucial, if the dénouement is to be convincing. How do you go about ensuring that you include exactly the right dose of clues, red herrings and background information about your characters without losing the sense of suspense?

**RM:** Yes, it's a difficult thing to get right and the author is often too close to a story to see its faults. I rely very much on my editors to give me feedback so that I can make improvements. The story that you read is rarely the first draft. Sometimes it's the third or even fourth.

*When your students read Richard MacAndrew's books, you can be sure they will be thirsty for more murder, mystery and suspense...*