

**HEAD SHOT by Otho Eskin**  
**Author Q&A**

**1. Tell us a little about yourself, how and when you started writing.**

After I finished college and law school, as well as a short stint in the Army, I joined the United States Foreign Service; half in D.C. and half serving abroad, traveling and participating in negotiations. When I retired, I knew that I would need to go into another career - I tend to be a bit of a restless person.

I took piano lessons (though don't ask me to play now, I would only embarrass myself). Next I took painting and drawing classes; I never really enjoyed painting much, but I loved drawing, mainly with pencil and charcoal. Although, now that I think about it, I did use my painting skills once in connection with a play I wrote. The play takes place inside of a private art collection, and I did the paintings myself - close to thirty of them in various styles. It was fun to see my works there on the stage, and once the show was over I gave most of the paintings away to the cast and crew. I also took flying lessons at the Dulles International Airport in Virginia - I had to go an hour to Virginia because DC is a no-fly zone. I did get my license, but never actually flew on my own: It was great fun, but an expensive hobby, and I knew by the end I was never going to pursue flying seriously.

So: not a painter or a pianist, a pilot or a sketch artist: what to do next? Well, I've always loved the theater, and went to a lot of shows growing up. I took some courses and workshops, and eventually started writing full length plays. I guess you could say that's when I caught the writing bug. My plays have been produced in New York, D.C., and in small professional theaters across the country, as well as in professional theaters abroad in Europe and Australia.

**2. Did your subsequent career as a playwright whose plays were performed in DC, NY and theaters abroad also help you in writing HEAD SHOT?**

My career as a playwright very much so helped me write HEAD SHOT. A number of scenes in HEAD SHOT take place in a theater; one of the incentivizing incidents of the novel is the murder of a famous actress Vickie West, Marko's ex-lover, inside of a theater. During my years of playwriting I was able to participate in the production process, from casting to rehearsals, so I spent a lot of time wandering around all kinds of theaters; on stage, backstage. I've drawn on that for HEAD SHOT as a lot of the investigation of Vickie's murder takes place in the theater. Marko investigates Vickie's dressing room; a body is found in the backstage closet; in the scene shop, Marko finds himself cornered after responding to a message and he is shot at. The other thing about playwriting is that it's all in the present tense, and I chose to write the Marko Zorn stories in the present tense, so I feel very comfortable writing in that style.

**3. Was there any particular author whose books and characters have had influence on your writing?**

There are many, but the one that comes to mind immediately is John le Carre and his espionage novels. He's an excellent writer who obviously draws on his personal experience - the first novel I read by him was *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* in 1963. The James Bond model had never appealed to me; I was drawn to the opposite, and found that in George Smiley. There is a bit of Smiley in Marko Zorn in that they are both unconventional spies. Marko is soft spoken, indistinguishable, non violent, and achieves his goals through intellect and skill - some of which is derived from the essence of le Carre's Smiley character.

#### **4. What made you decide to have five strong women characters in HEAD SHOT?**

I like strong women. And my experience has always been with strong women. The women in my family are strong and independent, the women in my professional life have always been strong, impressive individuals whom I admire greatly. It wasn't so much a decision, as much as it was the reality of my experience. The female characters in HEAD SHOT are interesting, complex, flawed, passionate people who are an integral part of the story.

#### **5. Who is your favorite new character in HEADSHOT?**

I like all of the characters in HEAD SHOT of course, but I guess Nina is my favorite new character. She's a multifaceted human with a complex history. You see her as a student, as a woman, as the head of a country in turmoil. She is poised and intelligent, she speaks for herself. Marko very much likes Nina because of this too.

#### **6. Revenge is the motivating force in HEADSHOT. Can you tell us why this is such an effective plot device for you?**

Revenge is a major element in the novel - it's throughout like a red thread. What appeals to me about revenge is it's something that any reader can immediately relate to. Even someone who is peaceful and would never harm anyone, when they read about something horrible that happens they will most likely have some sense of cosmic justice, some sense of wanting that the villain won't get away with it. It's a natural, instinctive reaction.

#### **7. What is your favorite thing / the hardest thing about writing crime/thrillers?**

The hardest part about writing a thriller is juggling all the characters and personalities that need to compliment, challenge and surround the main character - as well as holding the tension. I had a whole conception of who Marko is as a character, what his back story is, but then had to create the characters who surround him and populate the novel. And when you have a book that is so plot driven, every page has to move the story forward. It's like stretching a rubber band further and further, to the almost-breaking-point, but making sure it doesn't snap until exactly the right moment.

**8. What are you most excited for readers to discover in HEAD SHOT?**

I'm excited for readers to find out a little bit about the world of diplomacy in HEAD SHOT, as well as a little bit about the world of embassies and how they connect with one another - it's not something you read about in a lot of novels, and it's something that I know well from personal experience that I'm excited to share. I also think that readers will be intrigued by the world of the theater that exists in HEAD SHOT - directors, stage managers, props, shadowy corners and dramatic lights - it's a very exciting setting.

**9. How did you succeed in making the suspense and pacing in HEADSHOT so page-turning?**

It's a writer's device. You try to open a chapter with something exciting and mysterious that is going to intrigue the reader, and then you end the chapter with a question or a cliffhanger. Short chapters to keep the pace going and keep the tension. The reader needs to NEED to know what's going to happen next, and be surprised by it as well.

**10. Is Marko at all like you?**

Basically, no, Marko is not at all like me. He's a person who has a very complex background, is a very moral person who is conscientious of his professional responsibilities (except, of course, when he's not). But, he is able, when necessary, to resort to real violence - when it's necessary to achieve his ends. I'm not like that at all.

What we do share is a love of art - his art is very rare and expensive, mine is of course not - and we share a fondness for sports cars (again his are more expensive than mine). He likes cool jazz. So our tastes are similar, but our basic personalities are not the same.