

Novelist promises twists and turns in hunt for a serial killer



Neal James says that his third novel has the most complex storyline he has attempted.

TWO Little Dicky Birds is the third novel from Derbyshire author Neal James, billed as an "incredible crime thriller" by publishers Pneuma Springs.

An accountant for 30 years, Neal, of Heanor, has already written more than 100 short stories and two other novels, and is planning many more.

The latest boasts a tightly- woven plot concerning a serial killer whose reign of terror lasts 15 years with 18 victims across the country.

It is not for the faint-hearted, and Neal promises it will offer even more twists and turns than his earlier thriller, A Ticket to Tewkesbury (2008).

He said: "The short chapters vary the pace of the story and a number of close squeaks through the book leave the reader wondering what different plot alternatives might have brought.

"I started with the guts of the plot and went on to see how it could be moved backwards and then moved forwards to see whether the killer will be caught out.

"With this one it's been a case of not being able to put it down once I've started and getting quite carried away.

"I tracked the plot and characters as I worked through, with the murders in red, the current timeline in blue, characters in yellow with other plotlines and subsidiary plots weaving in and out.

"It seems that the only person who can identify the killer has died; there's suspense right to the end!"

The novel's events unfold after Paul Townley, in a fit of rage, kills his father. The significance of that event affects the rest of his life as he resolves to make it his mission to rid society of the kind of person his father had become.

The 18 murders come back to haunt Detective Chief Inspector Colin Barnes after he realises he will again be faced with the serial killer who calls himself Petey.

Neal uses the nursery rhyme, calling to mind the two main characters of Peter and Paul, at the start of the prologue, and again in the epilogue.

And from the start of the book right up to chapter 13 there are three possibilities as to the killer's motivation and method.

From then on there's a dual timeframe and each paragraph starts with the day, date and year, the novel slowly gathering pace. The plot is interwoven with real events and locations, and travels the country from Sunderland to Cardiff.

Why is the killer travelling and how is he hiding?

With help from friends and professionals in America and his family, Neal's labour of love took around nine months to come to fruition.

Neal is the son of a miner and gained a degree before taking up accountancy.

He says his background provided the inspiration – and some plot lines – for his novels.

He said: "Although this is my third novel it is by far the most complex storyline I have ever attempted."

The 80-chapter work is published this summer.

Neal only became a writer after entering an international short story competition in 2007.

He didn't win, but coming in the top 10 inspired him to write professionally.