

The Straits Times
Saturday, April 17, 2004

Musical Scares

Meg Gardiner's third crime-fiction novel will centre on an American Idol-type bad hat who goes ballistic

Type Face

By Neo Chai Chin

PERHAPS it was only a matter of time before crime-fiction writer Meg Gardiner wrote a thriller about shady dealings in the music industry.

Her husband used to play the guitar in a rock'n'roll band "for many years in California". She loves American Idol and is rooting for Fantasia Barrino, a finalist in the third season, currently on Channel 5.

One of the characters in her new book, *Jericho Point*, turns vengeful after being kicked out of an American Idol-like singing contest.

The book is Gardiner's third with gung-ho lawyer-writer Evan Delaney as the main character.

Her first two novels were *China Lake* and *Mission Canyon*.

In *Jericho Point*, Delaney gets herself implicated in crimes like money scams, identity theft and murder.

Gardiner, a former lawyer who moved to England nine years ago, was here on holiday with her husband, Paul Shreve, who is in the IT industry, and their two sons aged 16 and 14. They also have an 18-year-old daughter.

Your heroine, Evan Delaney, can talk her way out of almost every life-threatening situation. Is she like you?

She's faster on her feet and with her mouth. And she's younger and prettier. When I write, I have all the time to think about what I want her to say. So in the book, she says it right then.

She shares some of the same background as I do, so I can give her topics I know about and it would sound authentic. But I hope she's her own person.

What inspired Jericho Point?

I had a credit card taken once from the post, five or six years ago. I didn't know about it for weeks until Citibank asked: "Have you been in Manila?" Someone had stolen it and gotten a fake passport in my name.

You could say the book was inspired by the incident since it's always been at the back of my mind.

Identity theft could happen to anybody.

Why did you include the vengeful character of a reality television show contestant in the book?

Reality television shows – American Idol and Pop Idol – are very popular right now. It's great fun, but I'm embarrassed – we know these contestants' names!

They also set you thinking about what people will do for fame and love. In California, there are many celebrities and people who worship them.

Why did you start writing books set in Santa Barbara, California, only after moving to England?

We moved to England for my husband's job. All my children were in school and I didn't have to work. That's when I started to write.

Do you still visit Santa Barbara?

I'm there a couple of times a year as my family still lives there. We drive around, go to the beach, eat at all the wonderful restaurants and I try to pick out settings that readers would like to read about.

You taught writing at University of California, Santa Barbara. What did you try to impart to your students?

I taught legal writing and research, which is very dry and full of jargon. I tried to teach them to tell a story. In a legal case, there's always a story of a problem that happens between two people. Their job is to explain it clearly and persuasively.

Do you feel the pressure to outdo yourself with each new Evan Delaney book?

Of course I do. I hope I'm learning to write more exciting, more interesting, scarier and funnier books. It's pressure you put on yourself, but I feel I'm getting better every time. I'm just starting on the fourth book, so it's going to be a busy summer.