**Bittern Books strikes distribution deal with popular Norfolk-inspired crime writer**

*Judi Daykin’s popular DS Sara Hirst crime series set in Norfolk is now available for the first time in print, through select Norfolk retailers and online via Bittern Books*

The popularity of e-books is steadily rising, but some occasions still call for the physical. Many shops in tourist hot spots like the Norfolk Broads see increased book sales during the holiday season. Crime fiction set in Norfolk is particularly popular, with authors like David Blake and Elly Griffiths building significant local fanbase. Until recently Judi Daykin’s popular DS Sara Hirst crime series, also set in Norfolk, was only available in e-book format through Joffe Books. After striking a deal with wholesaler Bittern Books, which specialises in supplying East Anglian retailers with local books, maps and guides, the first three books in the series are now available in print.

“I was aware of Bittern Books for a while, but as Joffe Books is my publisher, I couldn’t reach out directly myself,” says Judi Daykin.

A few months ago a retailer client asked Steve Haines, owner of Bittern Books, if he’d come across Judi’s work. Steve promptly downloaded ‘Under Violent Skies’, the first in her DS Sara Hirst series. Soon after, he approached Judi and Joffe Books to offer a physical distribution deal.

“I’m always on the lookout for new authors and e-books are a good source,” says Steve. “There are quite a few authors who have published this way but are not yet in print. My first step is to read their work, firstly to see if I think it’s any good, but also to assess if I think it will sell in Norfolk.

“As soon as I started reading ‘Under Violent Skies’ I realised it was a real page turner. Judi’s books are all set locally, using locations around North Norfolk that locals and visitors will be very familiar with.”

“It’s absolutely fantastic because now Bittern Books can help get my books into bookshops, not just online,” says Judi. “There’s something about seeing a book you’ve created on a shelf in a shop. It feels like validation.”

Judi’s central protagonist DS Sara Hirst is a police officer in her mid-thirties who leaves behind a successful career in the London Met to join Norfolk Police’s Serious Crimes Unit.

Judi’s novels have been praised for their sense of place. It was this element within her initial Sara Hirst story that led it to be shortlisted for the UEA’s annual writing prize.

“To me Norfolk is another character in my books,” says Judi.

Judi’s writing career began relatively recently. Prior to lockdown she’d spent most of her professional life as a working actor, touring the UK with her husband in various theatre companies. Although born in Yorkshire, she moved to Norfolk forty years ago. She has since spent much of her time working in and supporting local theatres - in particular, the Pavillion Theatre on the end of Cromer Pier, where she served as technician. At the start of the Covid pandemic all touring effectively stopped, and this led to many theatre closures nationwide. “The Pavillion Theatre has a unique status in that, not only is it still open, but it still runs an old-fashioned seaside variety show in the summer,” says Judi.

Lockdown led Judi to retire from acting and focus instead on another passion, writing. She was accepted onto the University of East Anglia’s prestigious Creative Writing masters course and her thesis would ultimately become the first Sara Hirst novel, which led to her signing a deal with Joffe Books

Judi’s time as a technician at Cromer’s Pavillion Theatre has also inspired her work. When mixing the sound during performances she would occasionally overhear unexpected conversations in her headphones. That led to an idea which became the basis of her third Sara Hirst novel, ‘A Brutal Season’. “One of the characters working as a theatre technician overhears a cast member confess to potentially committing a murder…” she says.

For Steve, working with Judi provides another opportunity to support local talent, making her work available in places likely to bring her a new audience. “We now have Judi’s books in stores all around Norfolk, including Waterstones and City Bookshop in Norwich, as well as many others around the county,” he says. “Early sales are looking good and we’re already getting a lot of interest.”

Bittern Books specialises in East Anglian books and maps, both as a wholesale business, distributing to retail outlets throughout East Anglia, and also selling direct through our website. For further details, call Bittern Books on [01603 739635](tel:01603%20739635), visit <https://bitternbooks.co.uk> or email [steve@bitternbooks.co.uk](mailto:steve@bitternbooks.co.uk) .

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