



## Frequently Asked Questions

*How many books and stories have you written?*

NOX DORMIENDA was the first novel I ever tried to write. CITY OF DRAGONS is the third book I wrote and the second to be published. I'm currently completing my fourth novel, the sequel to CITY OF DRAGONS (tentative title: COUNTRY OF SPIDERS), which will be published in 2011.

My Roman Noir series comprises NOX (published July, 2008) and the forthcoming CURSED (publishing date TBA soon).

Miranda Corbie—the protagonist of CITY OF DRAGONS—also stars in “Children’s Day”, a short story in the upcoming International Thriller Writer’s anthology FIRST THRILLS (June, 2010, Tor/Forge).

I wrote “Convivium”, a short story prequel to NOX in 2008, which was web published on the respected e-zine Hardluck Stories and nominated for a Spinetangler Award.

*Do you write series only, or are you interested in stand-alones?*

While I'm extraordinarily lucky to have two series launching with Thomas Dunne/Minotaur Books—and hope to continue both for a long, long time to come!—I'm also interested in writing non-series books ... including a stand-alone thriller set in Humboldt County, and a graphic novel mini-series.

*How long have you been writing? How long did it take you to get published?*

I started writing seriously—meaning with an eye to pursue publication—while I was in graduate school for a Master’s Degree in Classics. I wrote NOX DORMIENDA in about a year. It took me about a year after I finished it and acquired an agent to find a publisher. But I've written all kinds of things—limericks, sonnets, screenplays, translations, essays, scholarly articles, etc.—throughout my life.

*Will you ever write a contemporary-set novel or story?*

The answer to that is hopefully! While I definitely have a passion for history—particularly the eras I write about, in addition to the English Renaissance and certain other places and times—I'd like to set a thriller in the contemporary world (albeit in the unique environment of rural northern California).

*Do you use real people in your books and stories?*

Because I've thus far written books based in history—Roman Britain in the first century AD and 1940 San Francisco—I both mention and use historical personages from the period I write in, as well as real places and locales. In *CITY OF DRAGONS*, most of the businesses mentioned were real ... as are the phone numbers mentioned in the novel.

I like to layer authenticity in my research, really transport readers to a place and time, and this level of detail—and use of actual places, events and people—both helps me to achieve my goals and inspires me while I'm writing.

*Your first book was called the first “Roman Noir” ... and CITY OF DRAGONS is set in the classic noir era and San Francisco, a city made noirishly famous by Dashiell Hammett. What draws you to this sort of style? Do you consider yourself a noir author?*

No simple answer to that one. I was born with a noir gene, I guess—I've loved both the era of American culture (1920s-40s) and the style and genre since I was literally a kid. Part of the attraction is due to the fact that I'm a Romantic—and essentially, that's what hardboiled and noir writing is ... a Romantic distillation of and reaction to urban and cultural angst, distilled into a style that varied from Hammett's terse declarative statements to more florid and lyrical styles.

And with film noir, of course, the idea of seeing poetry in a rainy, neon-drenched street ... quintessentially Romantic. I adore film as a communication medium—it's an enormous influence on both what I write and the visual style of my writing.

Also, some of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century wrote within the hardboiled/noir genres, and I think you are still accorded more room for both literary scope and social commentary if you write in these subgenres.

Noir has been a supreme creative influence on me ... though my writing doesn't fit the common paradigm of noir as being either hopeless or even fatalistic. Noir is both a content and a style—in literature as in film.

*Who are your specific influences?*

I read constantly growing up. Everything from comic books to Chaucer. And I've watched too many good and great films to count. My opinion is that everything you read or absorb influences you in ways you can't and don't realize ... writing is such an act of the subconscious, that you really don't know how the poem you read in the sixth grade is going to bubble up and effect you!

Consciously, though, Raymond Chandler, Hammett, Cornell Woolrich, Ross McDonald—and John Steinbeck, Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tennessee Williams, Ray Bradbury—are some of the heaviest American influences on my work. I grew up with British literature—

Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen, Dickens—and also read a lot of poetry, which has been a huge influence.

*What did you do before you became a published author?*

I was in college for a long time ... changed my major from Drama (I intended to become an actress after high school) to Film to English to Classics. I lived and studied in Florence and Rome during the 1980s. I worked as a trail guide for my parents (they owned a riding stable), an employment counselor and an advertising sales person (my biggest sale was to an escort service). I was co-owner of a comic book/pop culture store with my family. And I still work part-time at a university.

*Where did you grow up?*

Washington State, Florida, Colorado, San Jose, California, and Humboldt County, California. I attended college in Dallas, Texas, and also lived in Florence and Rome.

*How did it feel to win an award for your first book?*

I felt like I was going to faint. Or at least, how I imagine that feels ... friends thought I'd keel over on the spot! I was and am truly humbled by being nominated for the Bruce Alexander Award for my first book, and was incredibly shocked to actually win.

*What is your favorite thing about being a writer?*

The community. The crime-fiction community is an amazing, brilliant, generous, and supportive group of people, and the sense of belonging I feel is one I've never had anywhere before. Writing itself is completely exhilarating, but it's a solitary act ... and for me, comes alive when I'm able to share the experience with friends, colleagues and readers.

*What organizations are you a member of?*

Mystery Writers of America, International Thriller Writers, Sisters in Crime, Private Eye Writers of America, International Association of Crime Writers, Historical Novel Society.

*Why do you wear a hat? How many fedoras do you own?*

For my first book, my author's photo was shot in a film noir style, and I wanted to dress for the part. I collect fedoras—and have always loved vintage hats—and wore a 1940s grey Paramount wide brim for the photo. At my first major conference (Bouchercon 2007 in Anchorage), I was getting together with friends I'd met only online, so I decided to wear a fedora—making it easier for them to find me in a crowded room. From then on, it became a trademark!

As for how many fedoras ... I don't know exactly! Most of them are vintage. Past twenty, I lost count. 😊

*How did you learn to write? Any advice for pre-published writers?*

The best advice I could give anyone who wants to learn to do anything is to keep at it. Don't judge your progress according to anyone else ... everyone has their own path. Believe in yourself! For writers in particular, I think reading truly great books is the only school you truly need.

And join an organization like Sisters in Crime or MWA or ITW—every writer needs a support system, and all the collective wisdom and knowledge about the publishing industry is found in these wonderful organizations. Invest the time in yourself—you can do it!