



An Interview with C.J. Daugherty

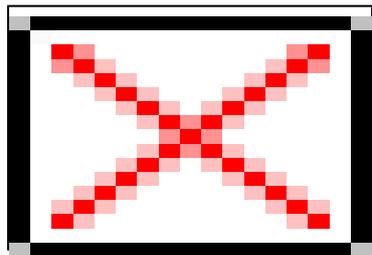
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C.J. Daugherty interviewed about her **Night School** series.



C.J. (Christi) Daugherty was born and grew up in Texas. Her first job was as a crime reporter, and the press release for her new book **Legacy**, the second in the already very successful **Night School** series, relates that she saw her first dead body aged just 22. An out and out Anglophile, she has lived in England for thirteen years now, and took and passed the test to become a fully fledged British citizen!

She's obviously won the trust of the British government as her CV also lists time at the Home Office.

These different experiences have all contributed to the **Night School** series, a psychological thriller set in the Cimmeria Academy, a secretive boarding school, where all is not as it seems.

Despite her Texan upbringing, boarding schools have always fascinated Christi. 'I grew up reading English school stories', she says, 'My grandmother gave them to me, and I loved them.' **The Little Princess** was a real favourite. I went to a very modern school in the city, which couldn't have been more different and the schools I read about were as fantastic to me as stories about magic. Now here I am living in the English countryside, and there are these beautiful old schools all over the place. I can't pass one without going down the drive to have a look! So I can say, I've really done my research. The library, the wood panelling, the chapel, even the gazebo in Cimmeria is all based on real schools she's visited, she says, and the descriptions in the book are loving enough that you can smell the polish! 'Cimmeria had to be a beautiful school,' she says, 'I made a decision to write about the school I wanted to go to.'

Any slightly romantic or fantastical feel to the school is balanced by the directness with which Daugherty describes the crimes that are committed there. 'My experience as a crime reporter made a huge impression on me' she says, 'We all grow up watching crime on TV but seeing the real thing, meeting mourning relatives, that's something I'll never forget. I wanted the crimes to feel real, not to glamourise them in any way.'

Similarly, while her young protagonists are highly intelligent, and athletic too as she is keen to point out, they are not supermen. Allie, the book's central character, suffers from terrible panic attacks, and Daugherty is careful to describe how she deals with these. 'It didn't seem possible that Allie wouldn't suffer side effects after what's happened to her' (her brother suddenly goes missing, leaving the family in shock) 'I was a compartmentaliser as a teen and suffered panic attacks myself - they are actually shockingly common - and if you don't know what's happening, you think you're going to die. It seemed completely logical to me that that's how Allie would respond, and I hope the descriptions of what happens and how she copes might help readers.'

She is, she says, an 'accomplished eavesdropper' and it's very important to her that her teen characters sound right,

which they certainly do. She describes shouting at the TV recently during an episode of **The Hour**, the dialogue was so anachronistic! Christi also readily admits to reading Cassandra Clare before embarking on her books? romantic scenes, in order to get those feeling right. ?She does such a good job!?

It will come as no surprise then that she was employed at the Home Office in their communication department. This was right after the 7th July terrorist attacks when, says Christi, ?The government realised they had been talking gobbledygook to the general public, and needed to change that, to communicate properly. I was a consultant on that, and advisor on social networking.? It meant getting top level security clearance, and meetings with counter intelligence, fascinating stuff for a writer! No wonder then that there is a real sense of insight into the machinations and power struggles that go on behind the scenes in Whitehall in the **Night School** books, or such a palpable sense of paranoia. By the end of **Legacy**, Allie isn?t sure who she can trust, friends or family. Isabelle, her headmistress, is a figure of absolute authority at the beginning of the first book, but badly compromised by the end: it?s a scenario fans of the BBC series **Spooks** will recognise! ?I wanted to address the idea of secrecy in government?, says Christi, ?and how sometimes it?s dangerous to democracy.?

Christi is planning to write five **Night School** novels in total, and readers can be certain that her characters? lives won?t get simpler, or safer, as the story develops. She?s keen to keep up the pace, and increase the threat levels to what is bound to be a thrilling climax!

The **Night School** books **Night School** 9781907411212 and **Legacy** 9781907411229 are published by Atom at £6.99 each.

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