

Spies, treachery, and a lurking assassin – it's Brexit by the book

Suffolk writer sees Britain's EU exit as the perfect background to an intriguing mystery

FEATURE

By BARBARA EELES
barbara.eeles@liffepublishing.co.uk
@SPSudbury

Truth, they say, can be stranger than fiction. It would have taken a truly vivid imagination to invent the chaos that has swirled around Britain's intended exit from the European Union.

But whatever Brexit conspiracy theories you can come up with, thriller writer David Laws is confident he has gone one better.

He is as sure as he can be that in his new novel, *Exit Day*, fiction will

remain stranger than truth. "I pitched my book several stages above what was likely," he says.

Publication of the political thriller has been timed to coincide with the run-up to Britain's momentous break with the EU.

David declines to reveal too much of the plot but simmering in the mix are spies, corruption, and treachery ... plus an assassin stalking the Prime Minister.

"Everyone has a conspiracy theory about the manoeuvres over Brexit," says the journalist and author from Lavenham.

"But this is the conspiracy theory to cap them all ... you'll never guess this one."

"Of all the undercurrents in the Brexit controversy, this is the one scenario you would never expect."

The book does not take sides in the in or out debate. "I'm sitting on the fence politically as an observer, not a protagonist," says David.

"I'm not a particularly political person. I think that helps because, if you are too partisan, I don't think you can see the wood for the trees."

But like many, he has watched the unfolding Brexit drama with incredulity. "It's extraordinary that, after two-and-a-half years, we are in the same stage as when the referendum result

was announced, with no preparations for leaving."

Whatever the outcome of the real negotiations, he has no fears it will make his book appear out of date.

"I've used Brexit as a dramatic backdrop and it works whether the country stays or leaves," he adds.

He also believes the fantasy world of *Exit Day* could provide a welcome escape from nerve-racking business of the real Brexit.

"It's an issue that has divided the country," says David. "Friends have become enemies. In families, it can get nasty over the breakfast table.

"It occurred to me it was a fertile subject for a thriller"
David Laws

We need some relief."

David has always had a nose for a good story.

Journalism is his lifelong career and, from the time he read a novel about a reporter, he never wanted to do anything else.

By age 12, he was writing his own magazine and selling it to schoolmates.

He has worked for national newspapers for 50 years and now does sub-editing shifts for the *Sunday Express*.

"As a journalist, Brexit tops anything else for controversy – it dwarfs everything else, although there was also quite a lot of controversy when we joined

in the first place," he says. "It occurred to me this was a fertile subject for a thriller

and I had the germ of an idea already.

"I started writing it 18 months ago but the idea gestates in your head and, before that, I was making a lot of notes and getting the structure."

Exit Day is David's second novel. The first, *Munich*, also had its roots in a controversial historic event – the signing of the Munich Agreement with Hitler before the Second World War.

Both books involved extensive research, including visiting places featured to soak up the atmosphere.

For *Munich*, he managed



PLOTTING: Writer David Laws checks notes while working and, left, in the cockpit of a Tiger Moth during research for *Exit Day*.



to get inside the grim-looking building, now a music school, where Hitler met British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and other European leaders.

The room where the infamous document was signed had barely changed since 1938.

With *Exit Day*, meticulous groundwork was key, and not just investigating venues.

Harry Topp, the hero of *Exit Day*, flies a vintage biplane which plays a crucial part in the action.

So, to get a true feel for the situation, gliding enthusiast David got some hands-on powered flight experience in a Tiger Moth and a Jodel light aircraft.

Harry is a journalist. "Someone asked if he's me ... he isn't," says the author. "He's a complete fantasy figure. You need someone to unravel the mystery and that has to be either a detective or some other kind of investigator."

Setting part of his stories in Suffolk is important to him. Main character Harry lives in Bury and the action begins when his flat in

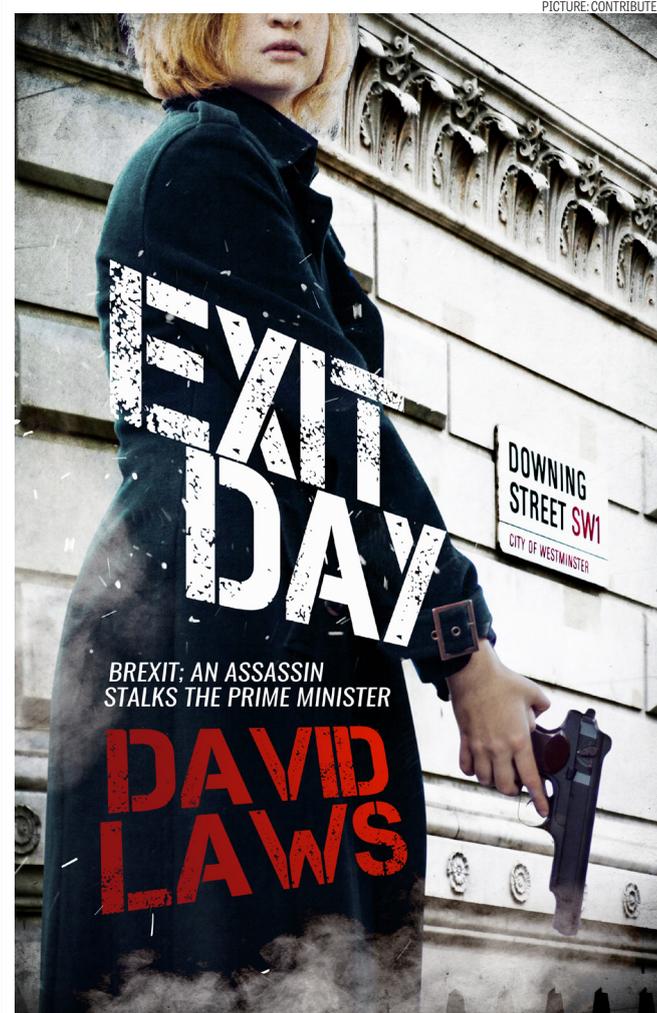
Cannon Street is burgled. Then an ex-girlfriend turns up with a toxic gift – a list of secret agents with fingers deep in the Brexit pie.

The first shock is to find one of his friends on the list and, from then on, he is drawn into a web of spies, traitors and fanatics.

David's legwork also took him to Cambridge and London. "I had great fun doing the research in London, walking the pavements and visiting the places involved in the story," he adds.

"Then I had to work hard creating my characters. Working on a book is thoroughly enjoyable. I'd say it needs a great deal of perspiration and a little inspiration."

David is giving a talk and signing copies of *Exit Day* in Bury St Edmunds Library on Wednesday, March 13, at 10.30am, in Lavenham Library on Tuesday, March 26, at 2.30pm and in WH Smith, Market Hill, Sudbury, on Thursday, April 4, from 10am.



DRAMATIC: The book cover.