

Penguin Press Release: August 20th, 2009

For Immediate Release: Penguin Acquires Mesopotamian Trilogy from 2008 Arthur Ellis Award winner

Adrienne Kerr, Penguin Canada's new commissioning editor for commercial fiction has acquired *The Witch of Babylon*, an antiquities thriller and first in **The Mesopotamian Trilogy** by D.J. McIntosh, winner of the 2008 Arthur Ellis Award for best unpublished crime novel, and shortlisted for the UK Debut Dagger Award. Kerr acquired the trilogy from agent Denise Bukowski and Penguin will publish in April 2011 on the anniversary of the looting of the Baghdad Museum

The Witch of Babylon features John Madison, a New York art dealer caught up in the aftermath of the looting of the Baghdad Museum. Echoing Dan Brown, the novel includes an elaborate puzzle that must be solved in order to locate a missing biblical antiquity and a spectacular lost treasure, as well as alchemy, murder, and the Mesopotamian cult of Istar. Alternating between war-torn Baghdad and New York, with forays into ancient Mesopotamian culture, *The Witch of Babylon* takes readers deep inside the world of Assyriology and its little-known but profound significance for the modern world.

The 2003 looting of the Baghdad Museum (Iraq's National Museum) is still a hot topic in the news. On August 9, in a feature entitled *Worldwide Iraqi Treasure Hunt*, The Toronto Star reported that a U of T expert was tracking priceless artefacts looted in the 2003 invasion and scattered worldwide. In the years following the invasion, most of the still-missing objects were too hot to handle internationally. But in time, they began to emerge, including the headless stone statue of the Sumerian king, Entemena in 2006, and a year later, a 4,000-year-old inscribed clay tablet, pulled from eBay's Swiss website minutes before the close of bidding.

Since that time thousands of priceless items have been seized or surrendered, according to the Star. As horrific as the original ransacking was, "it was only the initial catastrophe," reported Clemens Reichel, a Mesopotamian archaeologist at the University of Toronto and a curator at the Royal Ontario Museum. In the years since, Clemens said, industrial-scale pillaging of thousands of southern Iraq's unprotected excavation sites has resulted in the disappearance of another 500,000 artifacts.

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In *The Witch of Babylon*, after the thief of an important engraving is killed by potential buyers, his lawyers send John Madison a letter and USB drive with elaborate puzzles on it that serve as clues to the location of the engraving. In a race against time to find the engraving, with the killers close on his heels, Madison's quest takes him, against his will, back to Baghdad and an underground treasure trove unknown to the world. Penguin's marketing plans include an extensive online campaign with a code deciphering encryption game which visitors must "crack" in order to access extra content, and an interactive timeline featuring important historical events referenced in the book.

"This is an addictive read for fans of Ken Follett, Kate Mosse and James Rollins, said Kerr. "We know we have a writer readers are going to come back to and they won't be disappointed." Penguin Group (Canada) is the Canadian publisher of Steig Larsson's internationally bestselling Millennium Trilogy, featuring hacker heroine Lisbeth Salander. The posthumously published novels, two of which are currently raging across North American bestseller lists, have sold over 15 million copies in 34 countries and been called the biggest Swedish phenom since ABBA.

The Mesopotamian Trilogy is the first antiquities thrillers to feature Mesopotamian mythology. Book Two of the Trilogy focuses on the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Book Three focuses on the Sumerians and the origin of angels.

D.J. (Dorothy) McIntosh is the former co-editor of the Crime Writers of Canada's newsletter, Fingerprints, and a Toronto-based writer of novels and short mystery fiction. Her short story "The Hounds of Winter," published in Blood on the Holly by Baskerville Books (Toronto, 2007), was nominated for the 2008 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Short Story. "A View to Die For" appeared in Bloody Words: The Anthology also published by Baskerville Books (Toronto, 2003). McIntosh graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Toronto.

For further information, please contact:

Yvonne Hunter, Vice-President

Publicity and Marketing

416-928-2409 Direct /416-471-4973 Mobile