

culture

Culture is the arts magazine which, every two months, takes an in-depth look at what's happening in and around Leicester. It's free and the fifth issue is available from April 2. It is produced by the Leicester Mercury and supported by the Arts Council, Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council. Every Thursday in the Mercury there will be a taste of what you can expect to see in each 36-page issue of Culture

ARTS CULTURE HERITAGE DANCE MUSIC DRAMA PERFORMANCE LITERATURE DAYS OUT FILM THEATRE VISUAL ARTS HERITAGE DANCE MUSIC DRAMA PERFORMANCE LITERATURE

How you can follow in writer's footsteps

Culture shorts

Extra date is added to festival

WHILE working as a financial controller in Leicester, Philip Neale dreamed of becoming a published crime author. But he knew that thousands of would-be writers shared that ambition and that most would be rejected, their precious work left to gather dust on the shelf at home.

But the accountant's persistence paid off and, in 2008, his novel *A Ticket to Tewkesbury* provided the breakthrough.

He's gone on to publish four more books with the latest addition to his bibliography, *Full Marks*, released earlier this month.



Leicester, like the rest of the East Midlands where he has always lived and worked, remains an inspiration – his serial killer novel *Two Little Dicky Birds* opens with the murder of a prostitute on the streets of Leicester.

"It's the book I'm most pleased with," says Philip.

He's also planning to expand his fanbase by branching out into science fiction. He has written 80,000 words so far of his debut in the genre, *The Rings of Darelus*.

Getting a book into print is a cherished dream for many would-be authors. Philip Neale has cracked it and tells Nigel Powlson how you can too



'THIRTY DAYS TO CLEAR HIS NAME': Cover art for the new book and, left, Philip Neale, who uses the pen name Neal James

But he admits that he has been lucky and knows that many writers would love to get as far:

He says: "You just don't know. Pneuma Springs just looked at my work and said 'here's a contract'. I thought it was too good to be true – but it wasn't. They have done an enormous amount for me."

Philip has worked as an accountant for more than 30 years and came into writing late, as a result of an entry in an international short story competition in 2007.

He didn't win, but being listed in the top ten entries spurred

him on to attempt further writing.

In July, 2008, *A Ticket to Tewkesbury* gained him a foothold in the business and within three months it was on the market and available through Waterstones stores, and on line at Amazon.

To date, the book has found its way to Texas, Baltimore, Michigan, Indiana, The Gambia, France, Australia and New Zealand.

The publisher was quickly keen on a follow-up title.

Two Little Dicky Bird was released at the end of July 2010.

Now, *Full Marks* is the latest

work to see the light of day. Philip says: "I had already written a series of short stories about policeman Dennis Marks and his progression from a PC to a DCI. In this story, he has 30 days to clear his name. Charges have been laid at his door and he has only a short time to prove his innocence."

The book, like all of Philip's work, is written under the pen name of Neal James.

He explains: "Philip Neale's an accountant and he doesn't write books! It just didn't feel right. When I'm writing I become Neal James. James Neale

is my son and I just turned the two names around."

Philip admits that James Paterson is his biggest influence.

"You want to have your own voice but you can look at his style and do something similar."

"He writes very short chapters that force you to turn the page and stay up all night to finish the book. He's a page turner and what's pleased me has been when people say they couldn't put my books down."

"He's one of the most successful writers in the world. And, did you know, 31 publishing houses turned down his first book?"

10 top tips on how to get your work published and noticed

PHILIP NEALE'S WRITING TIPS:

1. Write what you know about, or can be reasonably sure of. The knack of keeping it simple will steer you away from experts who will pull your work to pieces.

2. Be prepared for rejections, because they will come thick and fast. Just because you think that the book you've written is good, does not mean that everyone will share your enthusiasm.

3. Accept the fact that Liter-

ary Fiction is a minefield of opinions – they are not all correct but that will not help you. Agents and publishers employ teams of reviewers who plough through the 'slush pile' of submissions – if you don't catch their eye within moments your script will simply end up in the bin.

4. Never expect agents and publishers to reply to you. The good ones will but others will simply let you assume that your submission has failed to

make the grade.

5. Be prepared to read widely in the genre for which you are aiming to write. Look at the top authors in that field and see how they structure their work. Don't forget, though, that they were once in your position.

6. Never rush the writing. Let the story tell itself to you and be prepared to change tack if it looks as though you're heading up a blind alley. Writers' block is a real concept.

7. Self-publishing has become

very popular in the last few years and there are some excellent sites (Lulu, Smashwords, Createspace). There are a number of print-on-demand publishers who are always open to submissions.

8. Never, never, never try to edit your own work – you will simply see what you expect to see. Find someone with a firm grasp of English and its structure and always be ready to accept criticism.

9. Once you've found yourself

a publisher, be patient. The last thing they will want is you hassling them on a regular basis.

10. Network yourself – there are a host of sites where you can promote your work. Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest. Tell friends what you are doing – over 50% of book sales come via word of mouth recommendation.

● For more information about the author and his books go to www.nealjames.webs.com.

Next issue



CULTURE ISSUE 5: APRIL/MAY

The next 36-page issue of Culture magazine will be free with the Leicester Mercury on April 2. There will be features on the Let's Dance and Spark children's festivals, a preview of De Montfort Hall's centenary celebrations, a guide to the best new movies, what's on listings for April and May and a chance to win family tickets to visit Alton Towers.

Follow Culture on Twitter: @LeicsCulture
You can e-mail us at: npowlson@leicestermercury.co.uk