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## Richardson's thrilling tale of television

By Chris Pedler  
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Former BBC journalist turned author Ian Richardson has called on experiences from his career for his new book.

The book, titled *The Mortal Maze*, follows an ambitious television foreign correspondent who is exploited by intelligence services.

Richardson said lead character Jackson Dunbar was based on no-one in particular but displayed habits that some journalists tended to exhibit.

"Jackson is just a troubled character from my imagination but his behaviour is not uncommon for a few journalists in the field," Richardson said.

"It's a pattern of behaviour that does exist. When I was working in the field, I always felt there were certain characters I wasn't sure about."

Richardson hopes his knowledge and experience as a foreign correspondent makes for an authentic story.

"I spent a lot of time out in the field as a producer and editor for the Gorbachev summits and the Tienanmen Square protests," Richardson said.

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“There's a lot of information and experiences I gathered for what I hope is a good work of fiction.”

Richardson grew up in St Arnaud and Charlton as part of a newspaper family.

His father edited the St Arnaud and Charlton papers, combined many years later to create the North Central News.

“My mother sold the newspapers after my father had died and she remarried and I moved to Bendigo to work for 3BO News. That led me to 3AW in Melbourne,” Richardson said.

Richardson later worked for the BBC World Service as a field co-ordinator then became the BBC's news development editor.

Despite his vast experience, he admitted that his professional career has been “one accident after another”.

“I've done a lot of things that I never set out to do. I've always grabbed opportunities that came up,” he said.

“I used to listen to the BBC when I worked in Charlton and Quambatook but I never thought for one moment I would end up working for the BBC.”

*The Mortal Maze* began as a screenplay before Richardson decided to adapt it to a book.

Richardson's first book, *God's Triangle*, also began as a screenplay.

“I switched to writing screenplays when I discovered something that looked like a scandal in my own family,” he said.

“That's the story of *God's Triangle*, which was first written as a film script.

“My wife warned that if I didn't put that information down in a form other than a script, I might lose it all. So it also ended up as a book.

“When I wrote *The Mortal Maze* I loved it as a film script but I thought ‘gosh I'd love to write it as a fictional story’.”

After spending so many years in the field and in charge of dozens of journalists, Richardson said he is amazed at the speed news is produced these days.

He said it was one of the problems he had writing *The Mortal Maze*.

“My knowledge of technology was out of date. I had to check with some of my former correspondents on how they do things now,” he said.

“When I first started in television in 1980, setting up a satellite report was an expensive and time consuming thing.

“Now journalists travel with what looks like a laptop and they open it, line it up with a satellite and can be immediately on air.

“I was recently watching a correspondent who once worked for me and he was doing a live TV report using an iPhone on a selfie stick. It was absolutely amazing.”

Richardson is also working on another story which he has called *Seeds of Revenge*.

“It's another thriller. I enjoy writing thrillers because it's a wonderful mental exercise to come up with a plot that draws people in and they can't work out the end of it,” he said.

“Although *The Mortal Maze* has only been out for a few weeks, I'm thrilled people have got in touch and admitted they didn't guess the ending.”

For more information on the book visit <http://www.themortalmaze.com/>