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Manda Scott is one of Shropshire's best kept literary secrets. Before becoming a published author about 10 years ago, Manda was a veterinary surgeon, specialising in anaesthesia, a rock climber and amateur photographer. Born and educated in Scotland, she trained at the Glasgow Vet School and now lives and works from her rural home near Clun, sharing her life with her partner Faith, her lurcher, her Welsh section C pony, and an elderly cat

DIMINUTIVE in stature, Manda has a fierce intellect, sharp wit and is very self-effacing. This becomes quickly apparent when she starts to talk about her emergence as a best-selling author – where many lesser-known authors are talking their books ‘up’, Manda merely whets the appetite of her audience encouraging them to look deeper into the meaning of her novels and become immersed in the gripping storylines and believable characters.

When she turned to writing, she started with crime. Her first thriller, *Hen's Teeth*, described by Fay Weldon as ‘a new voice for a new world’ was shortlisted for the 1997 Orange Prize, and was part of a trilogy, for which she was hailed as ‘one of Britain’s most important crime writers’ by *The Times*.

Her fourth novel, *No Good Deed* was a hard, sharp edged stand alone contemporary thriller that was nominated for an Edgar Award for best crime novel in the United States, a rare accolade for a British writer.

What happened next was a life-changing moment for Manda, as she explained: “I was out walking my lurcher, thinking about my next book, the sequel to *No Good Deed*, when I suddenly noticed that my dog had caught and killed a lactating hare. She clearly had young kits somewhere close by and I felt it was my responsibility to find and care for them to make up for the loss that my carelessness had caused. This would have been the case whatever the animal was, but it was especially vital as she was a hare and they are sacred in the old religions of this land, which are my spiritual path. Unfortunately, despite searching all day, I couldn’t find them and returned home with some hard thinking ahead of me.

“I did a vision quest later, asking of the gods the question: ‘What do you want of me?’ and the answer came back to write *Boudica*.”

Boudica: Dreaming the Eagle was her fifth book and the first part of the imagined four-part epic of the life ▶

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of Boudica – depicted as the last defender of the Celtic culture in Britain, its dreams, its astonishingly accomplished art, its egalitarian society, where a woman could, and did, lead her people to war.

But it's the dreaming that is the core of the book: her depiction of the shamanic spirituality of the time is based on her own shamanic dreaming path. As she says: 'I made it a rule that all of the dreaming depicted in 'Eagle' would be based on either something I had done, or had seen done. I had to stretch it for the next three books, but I kept to it as much as possible. This is who we were – but it isn't lost. This is who we could be – that's the real message of the books.'

Her most recent novel, *The Crystal Skull* is a contemporary thriller with an historical narrative set in Tudor times. Inspired by a real crystal skull in the British Museum the novel is based around a Mayan prophecy that mankind is doomed and the lights will go out on 21/12/2012. Saving the world is the focus of the plot and the fast pace keeps readers on the edge of their seats.

Manda's versatility as a writer was put to the test in producing *The Crystal Skull* which many reviewers have put in the same class as the top-selling *Da Vinci Code*.

Manda underlines that the novel is a work of fiction and although there are some people who genuinely believe the prophecy, she is not one of them: "I don't believe 21/12/2012 is an end point. I do think that we're moving towards an ending and that it is man-made. The message of the skulls is that we can change, but we have to listen to the warnings and change what we're doing.

"On good days I think that can happen. On bad days, I look around and realise nobody's ever going to change enough in time – including me."

The publication of *The Crystal Skull* in paper back, is likely to make Manda a household name. The paperback edition is available from the supermarkets from April as well as the usual book stores.

The subject of *The Crystal Skull* has also caught the imagination of Hollywood film writers who are planning to make it the focus of a new Indiana Jones film intended for release in the early summer. ■

