

Author Q&A

with
**Delphine
Pontvieux**



Thrilleresque caught up with award-winning French-American thriller author Delphine Pontvieux to find out more about what makes her so passionate about her fiction writing.

Delphine is a tall, blonde, multilingual diver, rock climber, runner, music industry expert and globetrotter, with enough energy to light up any conversation, on any topic. There's no guessing why we wanted to interview her!

Tell us about yourself.

I was born in Versailles and grew up in France. I have lived in Australia, the United States, Spain, and the Netherlands and traveled to several more

countries before moving to Chicago in 1998, where I live today. I worked for ten years in the music industry until a few years ago, when I transitioned to writing full-time and also founded my company, Miss Nyet Publishing.

What is your latest novel?

ETA-ESTIMATED TIME OF ARREST is my first published novel and came out in hardback in December 2009 and in digital form in late 2010. The novel has exceeded expectations and led to

me being given this year's *Indie Book Excellence Book Award* in the Thriller category, and the *French in Chicago community award* in the arts and culture category. *ETA* is set in the French Pyrenees and the Basque country. The story is a fast-paced, action packed thriller combining politics, romance, suspense and police drama. After participating in a pro-separatist march that turned violent in January of 1992, 21-year-old Lorenzo Lartaun Izcoa is wrongly charged with the fatal bombing of a police station in Irun and finds himself on the Spanish Secret Service's "most wanted" list, branded an active member of the Basque terrorist group ETA. He has no choice but to flee his country until two years later, Lartaun's childhood friend, Patxi, offers him the chance to return to Europe under a new identity in exchange for a "small favor." Lartaun seizes the opportunity, yet soon realizes that the favor he owes his friend is not so small after all, as Patxi is secretly planning a violent confrontation that will send shockwaves through Spain's political establishment.

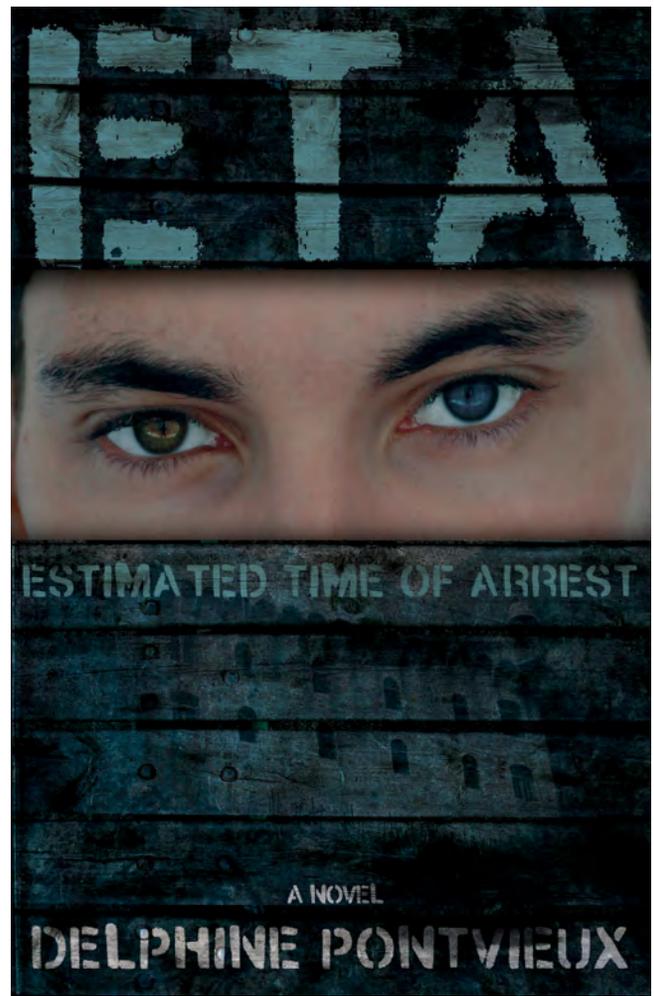
How did you come up with the book's title?

It's a play on words. It's not only a variation of the abbreviation for "Estimated Time of Arrival"—I used "Arrest" instead—but ETA is also the name of the Basque terrorist group that's been active for over fifty years throughout Spain. ETA stands for *Euskadi Ta Aska-tasuna*, meaning "Basque country and freedom" in Euskara, the language spoken in this region of Spain. While I have no Basque roots or family origin, I've always been fascinated by the region's language, culture and social and political history, as well as its beautiful landscapes, with spectacular mountains, green pastures and rugged coastline. When I was a teenager in the mid-1980s, the Basque struggle for independence was in full swing. The terrorist group ETA often made the news with bombings, shootings and kidnappings. Looking back today, I guess those incidents marked me more than I expected—they inspired me to write this book.

What were your inspirations for the characters in your story, and do you identify with the protagonist?

Though a work of fiction, *ETA*'s plot is set within the current political situation in Euskal Herria. I focused on tightly weaving the story within the actual historical context to give the novel the needed credibility. What the characters go through could indeed have happened in the real world, and perhaps did happen in some way. None of the characters were based solely on any familiar person, whether well known or not. Rather, they're the result of a patchwork of bits and pieces of individuals I pulled

together to these complex characters. I find there also is a piece of me in all of them, even if their personalities are wide-ranging. I avoid pushing my own opinions or biases onto the reader, but instead I let the characters expose and represent the cross-section of views on the complicated Basque separatist conflict. In other words, each character plays a role in swaying the reader toward a particular side without much influence from the author. I tried to put myself in their shoes, and to talk their talk, and walk their walk the way they would based upon their respective beliefs and the events that challenge them, whether they are police officers, secret agents, fascists, peaceful activists, disabused militants or even terrorists. And yes, I feel particularly close to Lartaun, the protagonist, because I can relate to his complex personality which often causes him to be misunderstood, sometimes to his detriment.



(above) French-American author Delphine Pontvieux's debut thriller *ETA—ESTIMATED TIME OF ARREST* (Miss Nyet Publishing).



What is your typical writing day?

A normal writing day for me really starts at night. I'll sometimes write during the day, but I seldom get anything accomplished—far too many distractions. I prefer writing when I'm alone at home, especially if I know I can pull an all-nighter if I feel like it without worrying about bothering anyone else. Otherwise, I write in my office, where it's quiet and out of the way. Sometimes, however, if I feel like being social while writing, I'll find a spot at the kitchen counter. Whichever location I choose, I often find myself struggling to muster the discipline to write longer hours. Thank goodness I'm the only one who imposes deadlines on my writing.

What techniques do you use to develop your story?

I call it my "dream technique." I never follow an outline. When I started writing *ETA*, I didn't even know the fate of my protagonist, Lartaun, until much later on. I simply dreamed about the story at night (yes, I can dream in episodes, and pick up from where I left off) and wrote down what happened the next day. I trust my characters to figure out what they'll do, and I trust their judgment when they face a new situation. By the time I'm done writing the manuscript, I know each character completely, down to the smallest detail—as if I'd known them a lifetime. I never thought I'd end up with my own novel. It just sort of happened. I started writing one day, and by the time I realized it, I'd already finished five chapters. It was too late to back out.

Which are your favorite French or European authors, and why?

I've always loved the French classics: Emile Zola, in particular, for his talent in describing the Paris of his era. When I read *L'ASSOMMOIR* or *NANA*, I'm transported back to the France's Second Empire, with amazing vividness. I also love Marcel Pagnol for his stories that literally



Thriller author Delphine Pontvieux explores a sunken vessel in Lake Michigan.

transport you to Provence. I also admire the works of Colette, Boris Vian, Ionesco, Albert Camus, Antoine de St Exupery, Victor Hugo, and the poets Beaudelaire and Apollinaire.

Tell us about your passion for scuba diving and how this will play a part in your new books.

I went diving with my dad when I was a kid. Back then it was a lot tougher than what today's recreational diving. There were no fancy bouyancy control devices, backup regulators or dive computers, but just a basic harness and a tank. Later on, as a teenager, I became more interested in rock climbing (which found its way into my novel, *ETA*) and soon forgot all about diving. That is, until I moved to Chicago, where I soon rekindled my love of the water, so much so that I became a scuba instructor in 2004 and am training students today. I am also active in technical diving, as well as wreck and cave diving. In fact, I am in the middle of writing a story that takes place in Quintana Roo, Mexico, in which the heroine is an expert cave diver.

How does having lived in France and the U.S. influence your writing?

ETA takes place in France for the most part and the majority of the characters are French. Since I grew up in France, it obviously gave me an edge to capture their backgrounds and personalities. The same applies to how I

describe the settings. I believe it gives more authenticity to the story, because the reader knows this is where I come from. As for living in the U.S., I have spent enough time here now to relate to the culture, to what affects Americans. I also read American authors. Even though I maintain a writing style different from typical U.S. thriller authors, I have learned to adapt my style to the local market (more action; heightened emphasis on credibility; and getting straight to the point!).

Where can readers find your book?

ETA is available everywhere in both hardcover and digital version, and also on Amazon.com. You can subscribe to my blog at www.missnyet.com (which is also on goodreads.com, imdb.com and Facebook, among other sites). I am still focusing my efforts on the sale and promotion of *ETA*, particularly since it continues to get great reviews and awards. I always welcome new readers and reader feedback!

What projects are you working on?

I'm writing my second novel, and I've finished some short stories due out this year in several anthologies. I'm also focused on my budding acting career, with a role in the upcoming motion picture *LOL*, featuring Demi Moore, Ashley Greene and Miley Cyrus (for details, visit the site: www.imdb.com/name/nm4041746 or check out her Facebook page).