Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

SUSPINSE MAGNINE

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2016

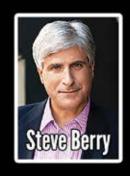
THE "BEST OF"

Embracing the Panic Anthony Franze Talks Writing with

HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN

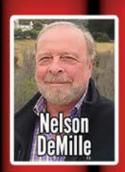
CHRISTIE GOLDEN
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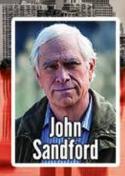




Andrew Gross











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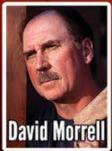
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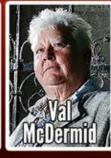




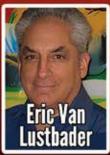
















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FROM THE EDITOR



Can you believe that we are rapidly approaching the end of 2016? And what a year it has been! Now that certain things are finally over, we can sit back and breathe and read. But first we need to search for something that is lost. I can't tell you when we lost it, but I certainly hope we can all find it again. What I'm talking about is the holiday we call Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a holiday that has been

caught up and mired down in the manic extravaganza called Christmas shopping. For years now, several companies open their doors on Thanksgiving night around 6:00 pm, forcing workers to leave their families and go to work so people can act like idiots while searching for the next Tickle Me Elmo (which will end up thrown in the corner of the room before New Year's Day.)

Thanksgiving is a holiday where we used to sit down and give thanks for *all* the joy we are experiencing in our lives. It was always the ultimate family holiday because there was no pressure worrying about if Uncle Fred would like the shirt you bought him. Thanksgiving *should* be a calm day—a day to celebrate the coming together of people, making peace, enjoying a meal and sharing some true fellowship. Instead...Thanksgiving is simply a day to shop. The special part of Thanksgiving has been turned into a few profitmaking hours, and nothing more.

It's sad when I see more stories focusing on "Black Friday" (a day most people don't even understand the meaning of) instead of the history of Thanksgiving and why it's so important to us. I have to wonder, if Christmas fell on July 30th, would July 4th suffer the same fate? Have we become such a society of consumers that we've let far more important things fall by the wayside? I don't know...and I hope I'm wrong.

I think that Thanksgiving is hiding in the corner with old Elmo, waiting to come out and surprise us. I think that if we give it a chance, we could remember the special feeling

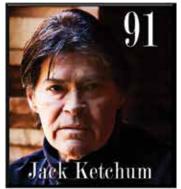
we had years ago when we smelled the turkey an hour before it was placed in the center of the table; or, enjoying that piece of pumpkin pie while watching the football game. I hear people all the time saying that they wish they could just "unplug" for a day and relax. Well...guess what? That day is still here. I hope this time around you all spent some quality time with the people you love. Perhaps even donated some food to a shelter in order to feed people you don't know, but who truly need your kindness.

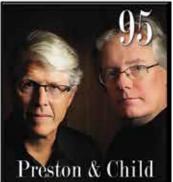
I believe that if we *all* look hard enough we will find Thanksgiving again. And remember: There are still 363 days left to shop after the bird has been consumed, so there's still plenty of time to spend your money.

, John Raab CEO/Publisher Suspense Magazine •

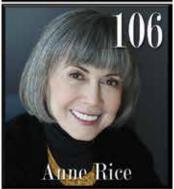


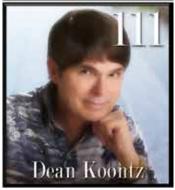
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CONTENT

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

November/ December 2016 / Vol. 073

Writing With a Partner: The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly By Dennis Palumbo	3
Christie Golden Expands the Assassin's Creed Universe	5
Excerpt: "Love You Dead" By Peter James	8
Marcia Clark on "Moral Defense" and Having Hope in Hollywood	11
Forensic Files By D.P. Lyle, MD.	14
Inside the Pages: Suspense Magazine Book Reviews	16
Suspense Magazine Movie Reviews By Jeff Ayers	38
Hank Phillippi Ryan's Rules of Fiction By Anthony Franze	40
Featured Artist: Evelyne Paniez	43
2016 "Best of" Introduction	49
Always Evolving: Sit Down with Andrew Peterson	80
Writing a PI Novel Wasn't Always Easy With Dana King	82
The Hourglass By Jeff Ayers	85
Reed Farrel Coleman: Thinks Everyone Should Have a "Debt to Pay"	89
How to Engage With Influencers on Twitter By Lynne Constantine	94
Excerpt: "Crimson Death" By Laurell K. Hamilton	99
Prodigal Son By Mark Mellon	102
The American Dream By Laura Stewart Schmidt	116

WRITING WITH A PARTNER: THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY

By Dennis Palumbo Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Now and again a screen- or TV writer patient of mine wrestles with the idea of taking on a writing partner. Having done dozens of therapy sessions with writing teams over the years—plus having begun my former career in Hollywood as half of a sitcom-writing partnership—I have more than a few thoughts about the potential benefits, liabilities and turmoil of doing so. Let's call these (with apologies to Sergio Leone) the Good, the Bad and the Ugly.

The Good: The obvious benefits of a writing partner can be reduced down to the familiar adage: "Two heads are better than one." With a partner you have the advantage of a sounding board for your ideas, a straight man (or woman) for your jokes, and a life-raft when your inspiration is sinking.

A partner brings less obvious benefits, as well. If you're prone to procrastination, just knowing that your partner is waiting impatiently for you to join in will help motivate you. A writing partner can pull

the two of you up when you're feeling down. Moreover, when pitching a story to a producer or studio exec, your memory might suddenly flag, or you'll get the narrative elements out of order and panic sets in. In which case, a good writing partner can step up and pinch-hit for you. (It helps, too, when a pitch goes badly to have someone with whom to commiserate over beers at the inevitable post-mortem.)

Finally, a writing partner can be the obvious solution to a well-known downside to the profession: it can be lonely. For many TV and film writers I know, taking on a partner rescued them from an experience of loneliness that, after a number of years, had grown literally intolerable.

Next up, the Bad: For just as many writers I know, the thought of having to compromise their vision, negotiate scenes and dialogue, and split credit (and fees) is equally intolerable. The inverse of the loneliness to which writers often succumb is the sublime privacy and freedom from interference that a solo writer enjoys. "It's bad enough," one of my patients told me, "to have to take notes from agents, producers, directors and actors. But having to take them from a writing partner is maddening." This patient, as you may have guessed, had worked with a partner for years before going her own way.

Which brings up another dilemma that plagues writing partnerships: how you're each perceived in the marketplace. Is one of you considered the more talented, funnier, easier to get along with? Within the partnership itself, is the division of labor fair, effective, logical? And who decides these concerns? Which of the two of you assumes the role of team spokesperson, agent liaison, the one who has the star's ear on set?

And, lastly, what happens when the two writers grow in different directions? When, for example, one has ambitions to write dramatic film or TV scripts, while the other prefers to stay in comedy? When one writer wants to try his or her hand at a novel or play? Or decides to go on a three-month spiritual retreat? What does the partner do, sit around and wait? Or start looking for a new partner?

Which brings me, regrettably, to the aspect of writing partnerships that I've dubbed, the Ugly: As I mentioned up

front, I do see writing teams in my therapy practice, and usually for the same reason I see romantic couples—issues involving money, communication, power, jealousy and fear of abandonment.

As in any long-term relationship, a writing partnership creates an environment in which old interpersonal and intimacy issues emerge. Issues that existed long before you joined up as a team. Think about it. If the tools of communication are poor in other areas of your life, what makes you think you'll deal with a writing partner in more effective ways? If you're prone to envy, let's say, this will prove to be true in the partnership as well. If, to avoid conflict, you surrender your own needs and beliefs in your other relationships, you're likely to do the same in your writing partnership.

As I've seen in my office, these problems can become especially painful if the writing team is successful. Like the unhappy couple that stays together "for the sake of the children," there are writing partners that stay together to maintain their level of professional success. "I can't afford to get a divorce," I've heard many a husband or wife say privately to me. I've heard many a member of a writing team tell me the same thing.

Now here's the good news: as with most couples, the issues disrupting a writing partnership can usually be addressed and worked through if each of the writers is willing. However, as any therapist who does couples counseling will attest, there's no one blueprint for achieving effective communication and fostering intimacy; each relationship, ultimately, is a mystery. The same is true for writing partnerships. Even productive, successful ones. Some days are good, some are bad, and some are just plain ugly.

Like with most things in life, the pleasures and pains of writing with a partner are particular to each writer and a function of that writer's temperament. In other words, the more you know yourself, the better you'll be able to decide if writing with a partner is right for you.

Good luck. •

Formerly a Hollywood screenwriter (My Favorite Year; Welcome Back, Kotter, etc.), Dennis Palumbo is now a licensed psychotherapist and author. His mystery fiction has appeared in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The Strand and elsewhere, and is collected in "From Crime to Crime" (Tallfellow Press). His acclaimed series of crime novels ("Mirror Image," "Fever Dream," "Night Terrors" and the latest, "Phantom Limb") feature psychologist Daniel Rinaldi, a trauma expert who consults with the Pittsburgh Police. All are from Poisoned Pen Press. Dennis Palumbo's articles have previously appeared on the PSYCHOLOGY TODAY website.

For more info, please visit www.dennispalumbo.com.

"BETTER THAN ANYTHING CUSSLER HAS
PRODUCED SINCE HE AND KEMPRECOS WENT
THEIR SEPARATE WAYS. THIS IS HIGH-ACTION
ADVENTURE WRITING AT ITS BEST, A SUPERB
HISTORICAL MYSTERY LAYERED WITH
TWISTS, TURNS AND TRICKERY."
—Jon Land, USA Today Bestselling Author

When robotics engineer and ex-Navy SEAL Matinicus "Matt" Hawkins gets a call asking him to survey a shipwreck off the coast of Spain, he jumps at the chance to dive on what may be an intact Minoan vessel, a discovery long considered the Holy Grail of underwater archeology. The find could rip the covers off the mysterious civilization that flourished thousands of years ago on the island of Crete.

But as he descends in his submersible to the ocean bottom with Greek archeologist Kalliste Kalchis, Hawkins soon learns that an invisible No Trespassing sign has been posted on the wreck and violators will be killed. Sinister forces quickly make it clear they will do anything to retrieve the ancient translating device he brings up from the deep.

Hawkins will have to use every mental and physical resource at his command to escape from the clone-like men in black with the blue-painted scalps, figure out how to get into a castle to rescue Kalliste from her long-fated death in the labyrinth, and outwit the monster guardian of the maze known as the Minotaur.

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CHRISTIE GOLDEN

Expands the Assassin's Creed Universe

Interview by *Suspense Magazine* Press Photo Credit: Elizabeth Golden

Suspense/thriller books are not limited to serial killers, FBI and cops or crime investigations. Suspense can be found in other things like...video games. Yep, that's right, video games. Christie Golden is one of the foremost writers who has written for the Star Trek, Star Wars, World of Warcraft and StarCraft worlds—the last two being video games. Now, with the Assassin's Creed movie slated for release (Dec. 21), Golden has written the newest book in that world called "Heresy." This is not a movie adaptation but a story that expands upon that universe.

Award-winning and eight-time New York Times bestselling author Christie

Award-winning and eight-time *New York Times* bestselling author Christie Golden has written fifty novels and several short stories in the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Among her many projects are over a dozen *Star Trek* novels, a similar number for gaming giant Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* and *StarCraft* novels, three books in the nine-book *Star Wars* series, "Fate of the Jedi," which she co-wrote

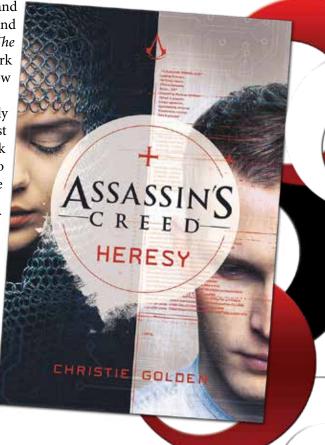
with Troy Denning and the late and greatly missed Aaron Allston, and the novelization of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* unaired episodes, "Dark

Disciple," which many reviews and lists have cited as the best of the new canon novels.

2014 saw the publication of no fewer than four novels: the highly successful *World of Warcraft* novel, "War Crimes; Blackbeard: The Lost Journal;" a companion book to the video game "Assassin's Creed: Black Flag"; a second *Assassin's Creed* book, "Assassin's Creed: Unity—Abstergo Employee Handbook" and "The Accidental Knight," a novel set in the world of Cryptozoic's online card game, HEX.

She is looking forward to 2017 and WordFire Press's rerelease of one of her favorite original novels, "A.D 999," which features the fallen archangel Lucifer, the Norse god Loki, and the two mortals who dare stand against them and the approaching end of the world.

Golden appeared on the scene a quarter century ago, launching the TSR *Ravenloft* line in 1991 with her first novel, the very successful "Vampire of the Mists," which introduced elven vampire Jander Sunstar. To the best of her knowledge, she is the creator of the elven vampire archetype in fantasy fiction. Several original fantasy novels include "On Fire's Wings," "In Stone's Clasp" and "Under Sea's Shadow," the first three in her multi-book fantasy series *The Final Dance*. She is delighted to see her first original novels, "Instrument of



Fate" and "In Stone's Clasp," available in an entirely new format as online books nearly fifteen years after their original publication.

Here's a brief look inside "Heresy" and then you can check out her interview below.

From New York Times bestselling author Christie Golden comes an original story set in the universe of Assassin's Creed. Reliving the memories of his ancestor who fought beside Joan of Arc, high-ranking Templar Simon Hathaway slowly uncovers secrets of the past that could dangerously impact his present...and that of the entire Templar order.

An endless conflict. An old wrong. A new revelation.

Simon Hathaway, member of the Templar Inner Sanctum, brings a cool head and detached manner to his new role as Head of Abstergo Industry's Historical Research Division.

But Simon also has an insatiable curiosity, and is fascinated by the thought of experiencing history first-hand through his ancestor—Gabriel Laxart, who fought alongside the legendary Joan of Arc.

When he enters the newly-designed Animus for its initial project, Simon finds himself unprepared for what he discovers: How deep the conflict between the Templars and the Assassins goes. What Gabriel will do for the woman he both loves and reveres.

And the most dangerous truth of all: Who is the heretic...and who is the true believer.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): "Heresy" an Assassin's Creed book, is your latest; can you tell us about it?

Christie Golden (C.G.): For those not familiar with the games, the world of Assassin's Creed operates on the concept that there are two groups trying to control humanity's destiny—the Assassins, who believe in free will, and the Templars, who believe that humanity doesn't know what is best for it and should be controlled.

"Heresy" is going to surprise some readers, I think, because most of those who are familiar with the universe are used to the Assassins being the good guys. In this book, we get to see some (I think!) very likable Templars, and find out that they're not always the villains. For one of the first times, I think, we get to see that both Templars and Assassins really do care about humanity.

S. MAG.: How is the world of Assassin's Creed much different than the worlds you have written in?

C.G.: Most of what I write is set not only in the worlds of other IPs, but in another "world" altogether—either a far-flung future, or else universes like those we see in Star Wars or World of Warcraft.

Assassin's Creed sets its games squarely in our world—our history, and our present. Granted, while history is unchanged, it's certainly interpreted differently in Assassin's Creed, and there is no conspiracy group like the Templars hunting Assassins... well, that we know of anyway!;)

S. MAG.: How much research goes into these books to make sure you "get it right"?

C.G.: A LOT. Seriously. I always do my research on whatever universe/franchise I happen to be writing in, but this is our own, real history—and that means a lot of people know what happened. There's extra pressure to get it right because you're describing what actually happened. I spent most of my time doing research. Ubisoft has a historian on staff, Maxime Durand, who was extremely helpful to me as well.

Since our main historical figure is the very well-known Joan of Arc, I tried to make extra-sure I got everything right, as well as doing a good job of weaving her story into one involving the conflict between Templars and Assassins.

Even for the part of the stories that are set in present day, you need to make sure your geography is correct, for example. That's all on top of understanding the nature of the Assassin/Templar conflict!

S. MAG.: Can you let us know how you got into this crazy profession?

C.G.: I got into writing to tell my own stories, but when a book I'd written and shopped around for seven years didn't sell, I answered an audition for TSR's fiction line—specifically for the first book in the "Raveloft" game setting. TSR is the people who gave the world Dungeons and Dragons, for those who don't know. They liked my submission—an outline and a single chapter—and hired me to launch the line. That was 25 years ago in September of this year, and I've just started on my 52nd book.

"WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I WAS SO UPSET THAT THERE WOULD BE NO MORE *NARNIA* BOOKS THAT I SET OUT TO WRITE MY OWN."

S. MAG.: With Star Wars, Star Trek, Warcraft and more, do you have a series you would like to write in that you haven't yet?

C.G.: I love the world of "Bioshock." The game absolutely blew me away. The feel, the storyline, the glimpses of this Utopia that was ill-conceived in the first place gone horribly wrong—I just love the mood it captures. The first game absolutely gutted me in the way that a really good book can do. And "Infinite" is also fascinating to me. I'd be delighted to write something in that universe.

I'm also a big fan of Supernatural and Doctor Who, but I'm not sure I wouldn't be happier keeping those as something that I just get to enjoy as a fan.

S. MAG.: In "Heresy" will fans of the game see something different? And what will they love to see?

C.G.: As I said earlier, this book is going to focus almost entirely on the Templar side of things, with a pretty decent human being as the main character. Not something fans have seen much of! Readers will have a chance to shift from present to past—the past of Joan of Arc in particular—and they are going to see exactly why the book is entitled "Heresy." It may not be for the reason you think.

S. MAG.: What is on your DVR right now?

C.G.: Poldark, Supernatural, The Flash, Arrow, Timeless, Westworld, Doctor Who, and Crimson Peak.

S. MAG.: If you could write a sequel to any book, which one would it be?

C.G.: When I was a little girl, I was so upset that there would be no more Narnia books that I set out to write my own. My first foray into fanfic, I guess! I know C.S. Lewis wrapped it up pretty well...but I'd still jump at the chance to write a Narnia book. One of the works that really shaped and cemented my love for fantasy.

S. MAG.: Do you have any superstitions when you write?

C.G.: No real "superstitions," but I have developed routines that keep me productive. Unless I'm in a coffee shop, I like to have silence when I work. For some reason, the bustle of a coffee shop doesn't distract me—maybe because I usually have some good coffee beside me. I also have a diffuser and I use scented oils that have been proven to increase alertness, like peppermint and rosemary. I try to make sure I take breaks, and I like to start pretty early in the day. I fade if I have to keep working into the evening.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in the future?

C.G.: The downside of all exciting things I get to do is that I'm pretty constantly under NDA. Suffice to say folks will be seeing another novelization of a movie, this one will be out next year, and I'm also working on something in a different type of media than prose.

Things I can discuss are the rerelease of my historical fantasy, "A.D. 999," under the WordFire Press imprint next year, and I hope to be releasing other original titles that have gone out of print.

We would like to thank Christie for taking some time out of her busy writing schedule to talk with us for the first time. For more information on Christie and everything involved in her world, visit her website at www.christiegolden.com.

SPECIAL PREVIEW FROM PETER JAMES

LOVE YOU DEAD



By Peter James Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

CHAPTER 1

Tuesday 10 February

The two lovers peered out of the hotel bedroom window, smiling with glee, but each for a very different reason.

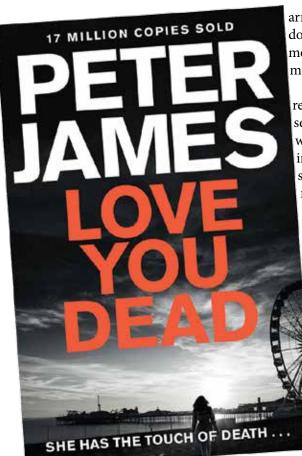
The heavy snowfall that had been forecast for almost a week had finally arrived overnight, and fat, thick flakes of the white stuff were still tumbling down this morning. A few cars, chains clanking, slithered up the narrow mountain road, and others, parked outside the hotels, were now large white mounds.

Everyone in the smart French ski resort of Courchevel 1850 was relieved—the resort managers, the hoteliers, the restaurateurs, the seasonnaires, the ski-rental shops, the lift companies, and all of the others who relied on the ski season for much of their livelihood. And, most importantly of all, the winter-sporters themselves. After days of blue skies, searing sunshine and melting snow, which meant treacherous ice in the mornings and slush and exposed rocks in the afternoons, finally the skiers and snowboarders, who had paid top money for their precious annual few days on the slopes, now had great conditions to look forward to.

As Jodie Bentley and her elderly American fiancé, Walt, put on their skis outside the boot-room entrance of the Chabichou Hotel, the falling snow tickled exposed parts of their faces beneath their helmets and visors.

Although a seasoned skier and powder hound, this was the financier's first time skiing in Europe and he had been relying all week on his much younger fiancée, who seemed to know the resort like the back of her hand, to guide him.

They skied down carefully in the poor visibility to the Biollay lift, just a couple of minutes below the hotel, went through the electronic turnstiles, and joined the short queue to the chairlift. A couple of minutes later, clutching their ski poles, the wide chairs scooped them



up and forward.

Walt pulled down the safety bar, then they settled back, snug in their cosy outfits, for the seven minutes it took for the lift to carry them to the top. As they alighted, the wind was blowing fiercely, and without hanging around, Jodie led the way down an easy red then blue run to the Croisette, the central lift station for the resort.

They removed their skis, and Walt, despite suffering from a prolapsed disc, insisted on carrying Jodie's skis as well as his own up the ramp to the lift. As a red eight-seater gondola came slowly round, he jammed their skis into two of the outside holders, then followed Jodie in. They sat down and pushed up their visors. They were followed by another couple and, moments later, just before the doors closed, a short man in his fifties clambered in after them, wearing a smart Spyder ski outfit and a flashy leather helmet with a mirrored visor.

'Bonjour!' he said in a bad French accent. Then added, 'Hope you don't mind my joining you?' He settled down opposite them as the gondola lurched forward.

'Not at all,' Walt said.

Jodie smiled politely. The other two strangers, both busy texting on their phones, said nothing.

'Ah bien, vous parlez Anglais!' The stranger unclipped his helmet and removed it for an instant to scratch the top of his bald head. 'American?' he said, pulling off his gloves, then removing a tissue from his pocket and starting to wipe his glasses.

'I'm from California, but my fiancée's a Brit,' Walt said, amicably.

'Jolly good! Beastly weather but the powder at the top should be to die for,' the man said.

Jodie smiled politely again. 'Where are you from?' she asked.

'The south—Brighton,' the stranger replied.

'Good lord, what a coincidence! So am I!' Jodie said.

'Small world,' he muttered, and suddenly looked uncomfortable.

'So what line of business are you in?' Walt asked him.

'Oh, in the medical world. Just recently retired and moved to France. And yourselves?'

'I have a group of investment trusts,' the American replied.

'I was a legal secretary,' Jodie said.

As the small gondola climbed, rocked by the wind, the snow was turning into a blizzard and the visibility deteriorating by the minute. Walt put his arm round Jodie and hugged her. 'Maybe we shouldn't go too high this morning, hon, it's going to be very windy at the top,' he said.

'The powder's going to be awesome up there,' she replied, 'and there won't be too many people this early. There are some really fabulous runs, trust me!'

'Well, OK,' he said, peering dubiously through the

misted-up windows.

'Oh, absolutely,' the Englishman said. 'Trust your beautiful young lady—and the forecast is improving!' As the gondola reached the first stage, he waited politely for them to alight first. 'Nice meeting you,' he said. 'Bye for now.'

The other couple, still texting, remained on the gondola.

With Walt again insisting on carrying Jodie's skis, they trudged the short distance to the cable car. Normally jampacked with skiers squashed together like sardines, this morning the huge cabin was three-quarters empty. Along with themselves there were just a few die-hards. Several boarders in their baggy outfits, two rugged-looking, bearded men in bobble hats, wearing rucksacks, who were sharing swigs from a hip flask, and a small assortment of other skiers, one wearing a GoPro camera on his helmet. Walt raised his visor and smiled at Jodie. She raised hers and smiled back.

He removed a glove, jamming it between his skis, produced a chocolate bar from his breast pocket and offered it to Jodie.

'I'm fine, thanks, still stuffed from breakfast!'

'You hardly ate anything!' He broke a piece off, put the bar back in his pocket and zipped it shut, then chewed, peering out anxiously. The cable car rocked in the wind, then swayed alarmingly, causing everyone to shriek, some out of fear, others for fun. He put an arm around Jodie again and she snuggled up against him. 'Maybe we should get a coffee at the top and wait to see if the visibility improves?' he said.

'Let's do a couple of runs first, my love,' she replied. 'We'll find some fresh powder before it gets ruined by other skiers.'

He shrugged. 'OK.' But he didn't sound particularly enthusiastic. He stared at her for some moments. 'You know,' he said, 'you're incredible. Not many people can look beautiful in a helmet and visor, but you do.'

'And you look every inch my handsome prince!' she replied.

He tried to kiss her but the top of his helmet bashed against her visor. She giggled, then leaned closer to him and whispered, 'Too bad there's other people on here,' running her gloved hand down his crotch.

He squirmed. 'Jeez, you're making me horny!'

'You make me horny all the time.'

He grinned. Then he looked serious again, and a tad nervous. He peered through a window into the blizzard, and the car yawned in the wind, then swung, almost throwing him off balance. 'You have your cell with you, hon?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'You know—just in case we lose each other in this white-out.'

'We won't,' she said, confidently.

He patted his chest and frowned. Patted it again, then tugged open a zipper. 'Jeez,' he said, and began to pat all over the front of his stylish black Bogner ski jacket. 'I can't believe it, how stupid. I must have left mine back in the room.'

'I'm sure I saw you put it in—your top right-hand pocket—before we left,' she said.

He checked all over again, and his trouser pockets. 'Goddammit, must have fallen out somewhere—maybe when we were putting our skis on.'

'We're going to stay close. Just in case we do get separated, then plan B is we both ski back down to Croisette and meet there. Just follow the signs for Courchevel 1850—it's well posted all the way.'

'Maybe we should ski straight back down and go and check it's not lying in the snow outside the hotel.'

'Someone'll find it if it is, darling. No one's going to steal it, not at that lovely hotel.'

We'd better go back down, I need it. I have a couple of important calls to make this afternoon.'

'OK,' she said. 'Sure, fine, we'll ski fast!'

Five minutes later, the cable car slowed right down, and a shadow loomed ahead. The car rocked from side to side, bumping against the buffered sides of the station, slowly sliding in, before stopping. Then the doors opened and they stepped out in their heavy ski books, onto the gridded metal walkway.

They shuffled along it, then carefully down the steps and out into the ferocious blizzard, their faces stinging from the snow as hard as hailstones. They could barely see a few feet in front on them, and the group ahead, ducking down and clipping into their boards, were little more than shadowy silhouettes.

As they stood beside a sign mostly obscured with snow, Walt laid their skis down on the ground, kicked the ice away from the bottom of his boots, tapping them with his ski poles to make extra sure there were no lumps of snow stuck there, then stepped into his bindings and snapped them shut.

As the silhouettes began to move away, Jodie said, 'Hang on a sec, darling, I need to clean my visor.'

Walt waited, turning his face away from the wind as best he could, while Jodie tugged down one of her zippers, produced a tissue and wiped the inside of her visor, then the outside.

'This is horrible!' He had to shout to make his voice heard

'We're almost at the highest point in the whole resort,' she said. 'As soon as we get off this ridge we'll be out of the wind!'

'I hope you're right! Maybe we should start with something easy—is there a blue run back down? I don't fancy anything too challenging in this goddam visibility!'

'There is and it's lovely. There's one tiny steep bit to get to it, then it'll be a glorious cruise. It's my favorite run!'

He watched the last of the silhouettes disappearing as Jodie pulled her gloves back on, then stepped into her skis.

'Ready?' she asked.

'Uh-huh.'

She pointed to the right. 'We go down here.'

'Are you sure? Everyone else has gone that way.' He pointed in the direction that the others who had been in the cable car with them had taken.

'You want the hardcore black run down or a gentle blue?' 'Blue!' he said emphatically.

'That crazy lot have all taken the black.' She glanced over her shoulder and could just make out the cable car leaving the station for its return journey. It would be around fifteen minutes before the next load of skiers arrived. Right now, they were alone. 'Blue?' she said. 'Are you sure? I'm sure you could cope with black.'

'Not in this visibility.'

'Then we go this way,' she said.

'I can't see any sign pointing this way, hon. There must be a sign-post up here, surely?'

With one ski pole, she began to brush away the fresh powder snow from the ground beside her. After a moment, tracks were revealed beneath it, frozen into the cruddy, icy surface beneath. 'See?' she said.

He peered at them. They led straight ahead for a couple of yards before disappearing into the swirling white blizzard. Looking relieved, he smiled. 'Clever girl! I'll follow you.'

'No, you go first in case you fall over—I can help you up. Just follow the tracks. Bend you knees and brace yourself because the first fifty yards or so are a bit steep, then it levels out. Just let yourself go!' She shot an anxious glance around her to make absolutely sure no one was watching.

'OK!' he said with a sudden burst of enthusiasm. 'Here goes! Yeee-ha!'

He launched himself forward on his poles, like a racer out of the gate, and whooped again. 'Yeee-ha!'

Then his voice turned into a terrible scream. Just for one fleeting second before it was swallowed by the wind.

Then silence.

Jodie turned round, then pushing with her poles, headed off in the direction all the other skiers had taken, oblivious to the wind and the stinging snow on her cheeks.

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Peter James is an international bestselling thriller writer. He is a New York Times bestseller, as well as having 11 consecutive Sunday Times No 1s, and he is published in 37 languages. His DS Roy Grace crime novels have sold 18 million copies worldwide. Prior to becoming a full-time author, he was responsible for 25 movies. In 1994 Penguin published his novel, "Host," on two floppy discs as the world's first electronic novel. He is Overseas Vice-President of International Thriller Writers in the U.S. His novels have won numerous awards, most recently the coveted 2016 CWA Diamond Dagger for sustained excellence, and he was publicly voted by WH Smith—Britain's biggest book selling chain—The Best Crime Author of All Time. Visit him on YouTube: www.peterjames.com/youtube.

CASE STUDIES:

Marcia Clark on "Moral Defense" & Having Hope in Hollywood

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Marcia Clark is having a moment. More than two decades after prosecuting the so-called "Trial of the Century," she enjoyed a rare night away from her writing desk to witness actress Sarah Paulson win an Emmy for portraying her in FX's critically acclaimed mini-series, American Crime Story: The People vs. O.J. Simpson. Though seemingly resurrected to the public at large, thriller readers have been keeping a collective eye on Clark since her emergence as a crime fiction novelist with "Guilt by Association" (2011)—the first in a four-book series featuring L.A. prosecutor Rachel Knight. Last May, Clark—who began her career as a defense attorney and currently represents the indigent in appellate law-switched sides of the counsel table to explore a more ambiguous protagonist, Samantha Brinkman, in "Blood Defense" (Thomas & Mercer). That book was a #1 Kindle Bestseller and has since been optioned by NBC as a potential legal drama.

"Moral Defense," the second entry in the Samantha Brinkman series, was published last month and debuted at #9 on The Wall Street Journal (in the category of Fiction E-Books)—on the same day that "Blood Defense" surpassed 100,000 copies sold. In the book, Samantha is hired to represent Cassie Sonnenberg, a teenager whose family was brutally murdered in their suburban home. The title was selected as an Amazon Best Book of the Month (Mystery, Thriller & Suspense) and received a starred review from Publishers Weekly. Further, The Associated Press praised: "'Moral Defense'...has it all: a hard-charging lawyer heroine, tough-as-nails cops, realistic, yet somehow lovable 'bad guys,' as well as fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants pacing and page-turning twists."



SuspenseMagazine.com

Join the author as she reflects on literary legalities...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): I'm wondering if you can tell us about the significance of the book's title, "Moral Defense"?

Marcia Clark (M.C.): Well...no. (Laughs.) Honestly? I find titles really difficult and so I have to think about it, work at it, and knock around a million ideas with it. I try to go with the essence of the story. But I don't want to give anything away. In "Blood Defense," the blood I refer to is not crime scene blood. It has to do with relationships and your blood relatives. In "Moral Defense," it has to do with...a morality above and beyond the guilt or innocence of a client.

J.B.V.: What is the difference in writing a follow-up book such as this versus a book that's meant to launch a series?

M.C.: Ordinarily, you just go for the next story...but in this case with Samantha, there were so many threads left that had begun in "Blood Defense" that I thought: 'You know, I should pull those through and show what happens next. I shouldn't let those stories just die... How did her relationships with the various characters develop and what happens as a result of that?' And so in this case, with "Moral

Defense," unlike in my other series, I really made it a sequel. You really are better off having read "Blood Defense." I do catch the audience up so if you don't want to read "Blood Defense" you'll still understand what's going on. But you will miss some of the nuances. You'll miss the fullness of the stories I'm talking to you about. So this one was really different because of that. There are new stories, of course—the central case that she picks up is new—but there are side stories that are a continuation from "Blood Defense."

J.B.V.: Given her ambiguities, do you view Samantha Brinkman as a traditional protagonist or do you see her more as an anti-hero?

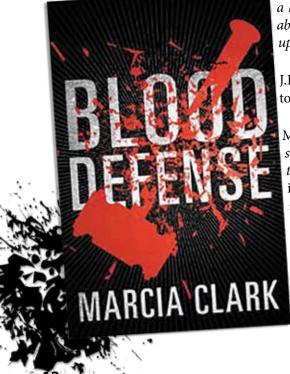
M.C.: You know, there are so many wrinkles to her. She is an anti-hero in some respects. She's a dark hero, let's say that. She does speak up for the right thing, essentially. The way in which she does it is not exactly legal. She's not worried about how the justice is delivered so much because she doesn't really believe the system works. She doesn't think cops are worth anything. She has a

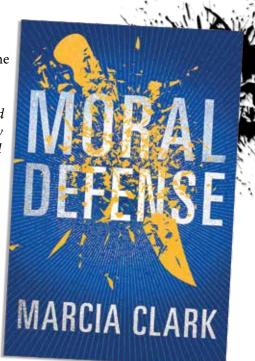
definite bent against the rules of law, which puts her in a strange position since she's a lawyer. But she does have her own morality. She does have her own belief system about who should be convicted and who shouldn't be, which doesn't necessarily square up with what the rule of law would say. So...anti-hero and hero.

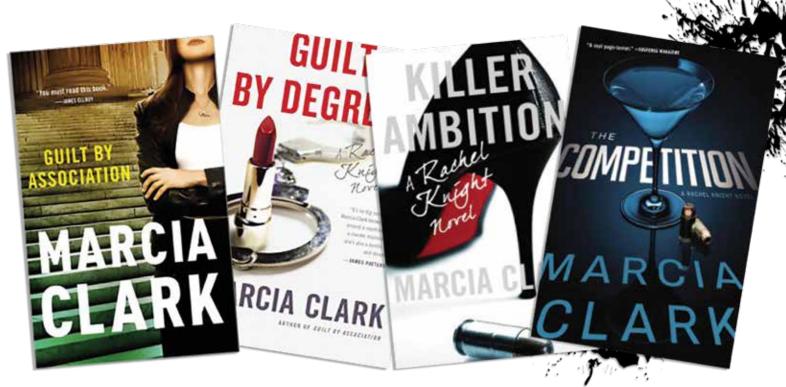
J.B.V.: Tell us about Cassie Sonnenberg and how you wanted to use her character to show the treatment and portrayal of victims.

M.C.: I used her to look at all sides of a case involving abuse of children. From one side to the other and all the people around them...the potential abusers. I wanted to go at it sideways...and so Cassie is a little bit different in terms of victims. She is one in some respects; in other respects she isn't. I also wanted to talk about the unique issues that adopted children have. I had fallen into a website where adopted kids were writing in to one of these internet forums and what was really nice was, because it was largely anonymous, they were able to be very honest about their feelings. The answers, and the issues, and the feelings that they had were really eye-opening and very informative and so I wanted to also use a character who has been through the pain of some of the things that adopted children go through.

J.B.V.: Exploring Cassie's character and circumstances allows us to get to know







Samantha on a different level. How did you use Cassie to be a reflection of Sam, or to develop her character further?

M.C.: Sam, in some respects, really identifies with her. And because she identifies with her, she has a different feeling about this case and about Cassie. In every case, I believe, this is going to happen with Samantha because she's on the defense side and so she's going to have a reaction to the defendant sitting next to her and she's either going to be able to relate to them or not. She'll sympathize with them or not. Either way, she's going to defend them, of course. She doesn't have to love them. You never do. But I did want to explore, and will always want to explore, Sam's reaction and interaction with her clients. In this case, she has very specific things in common with Cassie and so that gives her a unique insight into Cassie in some respects. It also blinds her to the truth of Cassie in some respects.

J.B.V.: What do you want to say about the true nature of crime, and how can you use these books as a vehicle to do that?

M.C.: You know, what's great about being able to do it [write] from the defense side is that you can explore people's biases and the ways in which people do rush to judgment...and the way in which people view defendants in general. Not seeing them as people. Not seeing where they came from, why they got embroiled in what they did. There are reasons for these things and so I get to explore in these cases where the defendants come from. For instance, gang bangers very often become gang bangers because they have no choice; they have to survive in a neighborhood that is being run by them. So it's the ability to explore these types of social issues that get into the reasons why defendants are what they are and did what they did, and how Sam has to work to overcome biases on behalf of her clients.

J.B.V.: What can you tell us about the development of the "Blood Defense" television project?

M.C.: At this point, it's just a pilot script. We will not know what's going to happen with it, whether or not it's going to be a series, until next year...probably around April or May. The process of getting a show on the air is such a long, arduous one. It's no easy thing. So all I can say is...hopefully. Cross my fingers, you know? And throw salt over my shoulder, and all that stuff. That's kind of the hard thing about working in Hollywood. You do a lot of work in the hopes that you'll basically roll a bunch of sevens. Getting on the air is like that. It's like lightning striking. It doesn't happen very often, and you have to be in just the right spot at just the right time.

We'd like to thank Marcia for updating us on her new and upcoming projects. To learn more, go to: http://marciaclarkbooks.com. ■

Forensic Files

Q&A: IF A CORPSE LIAS UNDERGONE ADIPOCERE FORMATION, CAN MY M.E. ACCURATELY DETERMINE THE TIME OF DEATH?

By D.P. Lyle, MD Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Q: In your blog you have talked about the formation of adipocere and explained the process. But what about how to estimate the time of death after a corpse has gone through the process of saponification? In my current project I have a body covered in adipocere. The victim is found fifteen years after she was killed. Will it be possible for the detectives to determine exactly when she had been killed?

~EE Giorgi. Los Alamos, NM

The short answer is: no, they would not be able to. At least not from the adipocere alone.

Adipocere formation is not common but it does indeed occur. This process is not one where the body is covered with adipocere but rather the body turns into this soap-like material. This can happen in a few weeks under the proper circumstances, which is usually a body buried in very acidic or alkaline environments. But it can happen under many circumstances.

Once it is formed the body remains fairly stable and can easily remain intact for 15 years or longer. But there is nothing about the adipocere itself that would give a timeline for when death occurred. Based only on that it could've been a few months ago or a few decades ago and the medical examiner has no tools for really distinguishing one from the other.

He would instead rely on other information, such as when the person went missing. Let's say the victim was 20 years old at the time of death. That would mean she would be 35 at the time the body was found. When the medical examiner, and perhaps a forensic anthropologist, examined the body, they would know that the corpse was more consistent with someone in the 15 to 20 year old range than someone in the 35 to 40 year range, and therefore could say that she had been dead for 15 years or so.

There might also be scene markers, such as the clothing she was wearing or items found in her pockets, purse, or anything else discovered at the burial site. Some of these might suggest that she died shortly after she disappeared. Maybe a friend had just given her a check or a letter to mail and it had somehow survived in her purse. Most people deposit checks and post letters fairly soon rather than keeping them in their possession for weeks or months. So if these were found it would suggest she had died fairly soon after receiving them.

Maybe she was known to be wearing a certain shirt or jacket or other item of clothing at the time she disappeared and the same clothing was found on or around the corpse. This would be strong evidence that she died around the time she had disappeared, simply because had she lived for a period of time after disappearance she would likely have changed clothes.

The ME could see all of this and make his best estimate that she probably died around the time she disappeared. •

D.P. Lyle is the Macavity and Benjamin Franklin Silver Award winning and Edgar, Agatha, Anthony, Scribe, and USA Best Book Award nominated author of many non-fiction books as well as numerous works of fiction, including the Samantha Cody thriller series, the Dub Walker thriller series, and the Royal Pains media tie-in novels. To learn more about D.P., check out his websites at http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com, or Crime and Science Radio at http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com, or http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com, or http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com, or http://writersforensicsblog.wordpres

WHO'S TELLING THE TRUTH?

Award-winning author Suzanne Chazin's powerful new novel

follows a deadly stand-off between a Hispanic police officer and an undocumented immigrant...and the shocking connection between them.

"Exceptionally well-written...should be required reading."

—Publishers Weekly, STARRED REVIEW

An excerpt from No Witness But the Moon:

"One. Two. Two seconds. That's all the time a police officer has to make a decision.

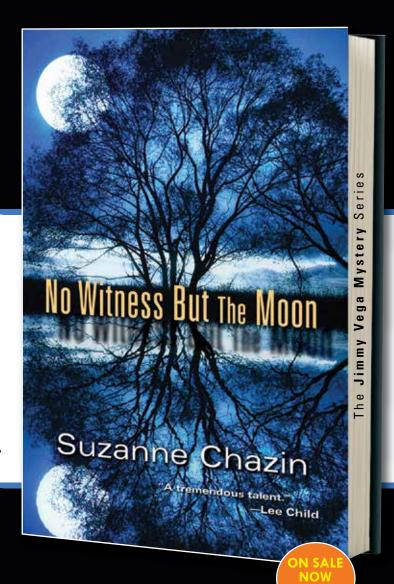
One. Two. A lot can happen in two seconds.

An object can fall sixty-four feet.

A bullet can travel a mile.

And an indecisive cop can become a dead one."

A Publishers Marketplace Buzz Books 2016 Selection



INSIDE THE PAGES

DAMAGED

By Lisa Scottoline

A retired accountant, Edward O'Brien, has asked attorney Mary DiNunzio to help defend his tenyear-old grandson, Patrick. The boy has been accused of attacking Steven Robertson, a teacher's aide at Grayson Elementary. Patrick is dyslexic and Robertson has stated that Patrick attacked him with a pair of scissors.

Edward maintains that this is a lot of hot air, saying that his grandson couldn't harm a fly. Yes, he's shamed by his primitive reading skills, and has a habit of becoming sick when he is stressed from the constant bullying he has to put up with, but Patrick is really a sweet kid. To top this all off, Robertson's lawsuit is simply to sidetrack attention away from the fact that the last time the aide saw Patrick getting sick, he hit the child hard enough to bruise his face.

When Mary investigates she finds that the situation is a whole lot worse than she originally thought. Robertson has a history of abusing Patrick, and when she tries to get answers it's almost impossible.

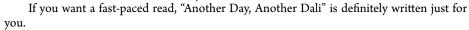
Out of the blue, Edward dies and Mary asks for an emergency appeal to act as Patrick's temporary guardian. However, evidence comes to light making Edward's death look like murder, with Patrick being the obvious suspect.

The plot is ripe with characters and stories, yet the book seemed to get longer and longer during the custody meetings. Important to the tale, yes, but some went on a tad too long causing my attention to dim. After each meeting the story picked up once again and went along gaining energy. Towards the end, the twists came one right after the other as family secrets continued to fill the pages. Scottoline is always a fantastic writer, and if you're into court scenes you will have no trouble with this title. If you do, keep reading, because the end will give you every ounce of suspense you crave.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER DALI

By Sandra Orchard



A painting done by the famous master, Salvador Dali, has been stolen. The person in charge of the case is Serena Jones, FBI Special Agent. Serena is also approached by her own grandmother to look into a neighbor's missing Degas. She takes the case on as a favor to her grandmother, thinking that this will be an ordinary theft investigation. She also has a personal

motive, however; Serena believes that when she catches the thief her grandmother will finally admire Serena's work. Unfortunately, as she begins to investigate the cases, the less ordinary it all becomes.

The Dali is not the only painting that has been forged by the thief, and with the Degas missing, the prospect that she has a classy theft ring on her hands comes to pass. This could be one ring that also has links to police officers as well as an aspiring young artist. In addition, there is the unsolved murder of Serena's grandfather she'll have to contend with.

Hunting down this art forgery ring, Serena must dodge bullets as she finally finds the missing Degas with the help of Nate Butler, her neighbor. Although she's grateful, Serena finds it a bit odd that Nate gives her a lead to the criminal underworld, making her wonder what side of the law he's really on.

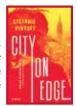
This book was very amusing, as the writer brings together mystery, comedy, love, and family issues to make the perfect story. Tanner, who is one of Serena's mentors in the FBI, is a great character, and Serena's neighbor Nate is also worth an honorable mention. But the real love has to go to Grandma. Yes, she can be difficult, but a whole lot of fun at the same time. Readers will be looking forward to the next Serena Jones Mystery.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

CITY ON EDGE

By Stefanie Pintoff

Tensions run high the day before the Macy's Day Parade in New York City. With the constant threat of terrorism and the heightened discord between the police and the city's minorities, everyone is walking on eggshells. The pressure runs highest for Police Commissioner Logan Donovan. His hardline stance on crime, and backing up his men in blue when altercations with citizens have occurred, have placed a target on his back.



When Police Commissioner Donovan is shot during a news conference, a riot ensues. With the combustion of the moment, those witnessing the event don't know if he is dead or alive, and one of the witnesses is his teenage daughter, Allie. During the ensuing riot, Allie is kidnapped.

Logan Donovan, not knowing who to trust, turns to FBI Agent Eve Rossi and her team of convicts-turned-agents for help.

In this high adrenaline cat-and-mouse crime thriller, you will constantly wonder who the good guys actually are. It seems everyone has skeletons in their closet, and someone is rattling them for his or her own personal agenda. Stefanie Pintoff has written a blistering-paced thriller that will have you reading late into the night and leave you guessing until the very end.

Reviewed by J.M. LeDuc, author of "Painted Beauty," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

Cheddar off Dead

CHEDDAR OFF DEAD

By Julia Buckley

Main character, Lilah Drake, is back and waiting in a school parking lot to deliver Mac and Cheese to Jenny, a friend from her college days. The food is for a Christmas Party that is being held where Jenny teaches. As Lilah is driving out of the parking lot, someone drives in and shoots Brad Whitefield, a man who is dressed as Santa and on his way to entertain the kids. Much to her dismay, the detective who arrives on the scene to take her statement is none other than Jay Parker, someone Lilah has been trying to avoid after their very unsuccessful date.

It turns out that the dead Santa was a complicated mess of both "naughty and nice," with a long list of people who wanted to take a shot at him. Now that he's gone, the person or persons want to make sure that Lilah, the only witness, keeps quiet. Lilah will have to team up, like it or not, with Detective Jay Parker to unwrap the mysteries of this Christmas killer, while attempting to stay alive long enough to see the New Year begin.

Lilah proves to be a fun and very intelligent main character that readers will instantly connect with and enjoy spending time with. This is one cozy mystery that's very well-written and readers will be looking forward to seeing more of Julia Buckley's books in, hopefully, the very near future. Add in awesome recipes given in the back of the book that include savory French Toast and incredible Chocolate Chip Cookies, and you have the perfect holiday mystery.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

DEATH AMONG THE DOILIES

By Mollie Cox Bryan

This is the very first book in a new series called the *Cora Crafts Mysteries* and is a whole lot of fun!

The setting is Indigo Gap, North Carolina, where Cora is renewing her life after having dealt with a situation causing her to suffer PTSD. Cora is a craft blogger, hosting a crafting retreat in her new residence, an old Victorian home referred to as the Kildare House.

Jane Starr and her daughter, London, live in the carriage house on Cora's "estate." Jane is a very talented potter who, in the past, tried to kill her abusive ex-husband, Neil. A candle maker, Ruby O'Malley also came with the house and lives in the gardener's cottage. Ruby's son, Cashel, is a lawyer who spends a great deal of time assisting friends of his mother.

Poor Sarah Waters, the school librarian, is murdered, and Jane becomes a person of interest; not only because of her background but also because of a distinctive problem with her fingerprints. As they are attempting to clear Jane of the murder, Cora and Cashel want to interview Josh Waters, Sarah's ex-husband. But when they get to Sarah's home, they find out Josh, too, has met his maker.

Author Mollie Cox Bryan is highly skilled at offering wonderful characters and a whole lot of humor, but at the same time mixing it all with truly serious issues such as, domestic violence and the after-effects that it has on victims.

Fast-paced, mystery lovers will be thrilled with the suspense, romance and the author's ability to keep readers guessing. And in the back of the book there are directions for some pretty cool craft projects, including; making candles, soaps, and bird feeders. This new series is sure to have a long life.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

ABSTRACT ALIASES

By Ritter Ames

It is New Year's Eve in London and Jack and Laurel are among the celebratory crowd ushering in the brand new year, when an old acquaintance of theirs finds them in the middle of all the merriment. And just like that ... this third tale in the author's *Bodies of Art Mystery* series takes off as fast as a speeding locomotive.



Old opponents are beginning to resurface and art recovery specialist, Laurel Beacham, is trying to keep her busy business from driving her bonkers while also keeping up with her partner in crime, Jack Hawkes.

Laurel is in her office one day when it's suddenly invaded by several strange men. She and Cassie, Laurel's assistant, escape out the emergency exit and, from then on, the games begin. Jack and Laurel must track art thieves from London to Italy, France to Germany and then back again, following a series of clues that sometimes lead to nothing more than dead ends. The good guys don't stand out from the bad, and as Jack and Laurel become stumped as to who can be trusted, bodies begin to pile up all around them.

This author is sheer perfection when it comes to using descriptions and locations that are richly done and offer sharp details throughout the entirety of the story. Some of the mysteries are solved, some not, which lets readers know that they will have many terrific installments of this series to come. The twists in this story will keep you reading until the amazing end and, for those who fall in love with these as much as this reviewer has, I would recommend reading the entire series in order: "Counterfeit Conspiracies," "Marked Masters," and now this incredible, "Abstract Aliases." Have a great deal of fun while delving into the art trade filled with betrayal, old secrets, greed, and some extremely strange gifts. This author continues to produce 5-Star reads!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*.

SOMETHING BURIED, SOMETHING BLUE

By Wendy Corsi Staub

Bella Jordan is a young widow getting used to running the Valley View Guesthouse in the town of Lily Dale. Mostly filled with felines, Bella is looking forward to peace and quiet considering its wintertime and off-season. She likes the town, even if it is a bit odd. After all, many of the residents believe that Lily Dale has some type of connection to the psychic world.

Her very good friend and neighbor, Odelia Lauder, believes that the two of them should go into the wedding-planning business. It seems that Odelia's granddaughter is friendly with a girl who is hunting for an "out-of-the-way" place to hold her ceremony, and the town of Lily Dale is just what she's

been looking for.

Bella soon finds that the bride-to-be, Johneen Maynard, is very single-minded. Whereas the groom, Parker Langley, is much easier to get along with. When they descend on the town, he is the calm fellow who helps Bella and her son Max put together a wedding that will go off without a hitch. Unfortunately, the hitches keep happening.

Odelia, meanwhile, also wants to be of help to Bella. But the only thing she's done so far is anger the bride by delivering messages from the "spirit world" that Johneen might be in horrific danger. To make matters worse, a blizzard is bearing down on their location. When it finally hits, the spirits words come true, leaving Bella with a dead bride and a guesthouse full of suspects.

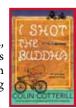
Staub is a writer who always has a surprise waiting around every corner, and this title is no different. The writing is so vivid that the reader feels as if they're a part of the frenzy happening inside this Upstate New York bed-and-breakfast, and using the spirit world to bring about a murder turns out to be the perfect recipe for a great read!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by Suspense Publishing •

I SHOT THE BUDDHA

By Colin Cotterill

It is amazing to say, but this is the *eleventh* book in this author's tales featuring Dr. Siri Paiboun, a retired coroner living in the country of Laos. This time around, however, most of the novel occurs in Thailand, where Siri and his wife, Madame Daeng, are searching for a missing person. The man who has disappeared just happens to be a Buddhist monk by the name of Noo; he'd been staying with the Paibouns when, one day, he simply took off on his bike... and never came back.



The doctor and Madame have had lots of experience with the supernatural. They have recently attended (and disrupted) a Communist Party seminar that condemned "spirit worship" as part of the Communist regime's effort to help resolve differences between their faith, Buddhism, and beliefs in the reality of spirits. In the meantime, Noo, who the doctor had given refuge to from the military, vanishes. He does leave behind a note, however, asking the doctor to smuggle another monk back to Thailand—a favor that turns out to be somehow connected to the killings of three women.

Of course, Dr. Paiboun is not willing or able to turn down a new adventure. So he, along with his friends, find themselves going up against Laos secret service officers which is not what he was bargaining for. Murders must be solved and the monk's mission must be understood before others end up as victims.

Action-packed with a storyline that never stops, this one is all about the supernatural elements that can be found in this world. A mystery that is anything but "grounded," fans of Cotterill will absolutely fall head over heels for this one.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

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THE READAHOLICS AND THE GOTHIC GALA

By Laura DiSilverio

If the title of this one doesn't grab your interest, then I don't know what will!

Get ready to meet a really fun crowd of folks (if you haven't met them previously) calling themselves The Readaholics. They are a book club that reads mostly mysteries, although it's true that they read a wide variety of books. The reason they're really big on mysteries is that they have found themselves caught up in many real ones, and the featured player this time around is Amy-Faye Johnson; a woman who is, at the moment, planning an event in her hometown of Heaven, Colorado.

When this story begins, Amy-Faye is putting together the "Celebration of Gothic Novels" that will be held at her bookstore. This party is in honor of the 100th birthday of author Mary Stewart, one of the most popular writers in the mystery genre. There are three authors taking part in the celebration and the day will include talks, a book signing, an auction, and a costume ball to take place in the evening. The Readaholics are getting into character by enjoying the classic "Rebecca" by Daphne du Maurier.

As the festivities begin everything is fairly pleasant. As the weekend progresses, however, the celebration begins to show its true colors. The event is chock full of large egos, resentments and guests who were not invited to the party. And, of course, a dead body turns up at the ball as the dance is drawing to a close.

No one knows the victim, but Amy-Faye witnessed the stranger hanging around the entire day. Right off the bat skeletons crop up out of various suspects' closets, and Amy-Faye and the Readaholics find themselves looking into backgrounds, odd experiences, and turning to their knowledge of Gothic literature to uncover a killer that's a stranger to one and all.

The Readaholics series has been a fantastic one up until now, and continues to get better and better with each title!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

A GAME FOR ALL THE FAMILY

By Sophie Hannah

This tale begins with the story of a London TV producer by the name of Justine Merrison. Merrison has retired to Devon to get away from it all.

The day she begins her excursion into serenity, she sits in the car of her husband and opera singer Alex Colley. As they inch into traffic, she announces: "My name is Justine Merrison and I DO nothing." She's excited about living a life with no more early morning meetings, or having to provide unnecessary flattery to strangers, and no more guessing which



TV series will be good or bad. There's not even the passing sense of anxiety when Alex tells Ellen, their fourteen-year-old daughter, that they have changed their plans and have decided to move into a house that he points out to her on the highway.

Four months later, the house that was supposed to bring Justine peace causes her to be disturbed by telephone calls received from a woman who will only identify herself as Sandie. And all the woman states is that she knows why Justine really moved, and insists that she go back to London.

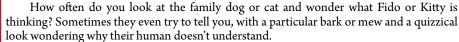
In the meantime, Ellen seems to have settled nicely into the new Beaconwood School by writing the story of a family whose youngest child, a daughter, is a murderer and a murder victim. Ellen's good feelings for Beaconwood end, however, when her best friend George Donbavand is expelled for stealing. Things further heat up when Justine goes to the school to save the day and is told by the head teacher that there never was a student named George in the first place. This announcement is just another disturbing story that makes Justine have to face up to the real reason she left her old job and her old life far behind.

This is an odd, surprising, psychological tale where Hannah made sure readers will never be able to forget this extremely unique nightmare.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

ELIJAH

By Frank Redman



Of course, in fiction we have had exceptional canines, such as, Rin Tin Tin and Lassie, but even they couldn't speak to their humans the way we talk to each other, until Elijah came along. Now, he's no Dr. Doolittle but he does have an inane ability to hear the thoughts of the

neighborhood pets; and folks, it's not good news.

These dogs and cats lay out all the problems in town. Who is drinking too much, the child whose parents are abusive and, of course, who is plotting to kill who. Unable to hold back he gets involved in helping break up a child prostitution ring. Putting his own life in mortal danger, Elijah helps bring down the bad guys with both human and canine assistance. Having suffered abusive parents as a child, Elijah is in tune with children and knows how to deal with the suppressors.

"Elijah" is Redman's debut novel and he has written a page-turner that, once you understand the gravity of the adventure, will have you on the edge of your seat.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of "Kettle of Vultures"

BETRAYALS

By Kelley Armstrong

"Betrayals" is the fourth book in Kelley Armstrong's action-packed *Cainsville* series, which is truly a series that has gotten better with age. As the story moves ahead, it seems that the previous books can stand on their own; however, it is the small details presented in the previous titles that make this new one come alive.



For those who haven't read the first three, Olivia Taylor-Jones (also known as Eden Larsen) is a twenty-four-year-old woman whose biological parents, Todd and Pamela Larsen, were accused of murder and are currently sitting in prison awaiting a new trial. When Olivia learned of this, she moved to Cainsville, Illinois, where she began to work with a lawyer, Gabriel Walsh, to discover why her birth parents were locked up. Olivia, Gabriel, and Olivia's biker boyfriend Ricky, have faced a lot of oddities over time; from solving murders to unveiling myths to dealing with humans who make mistakes galore.

Our heroine, Olivia, as usual, is holding her own as her relationships with Ricky and Gabriel are progressing. This time around, however, it is Ricky who's being framed for the killings of some lamiae (which is a new kind of 'paranormal'). But regardless of what skills the victims possessed, it is a fact that Ricky is being framed.

Liv and Gabriel are on the case. Apparently there is some tension between Liv and Gabriel left over from the last installment, when he failed to come when she called which led to her being hurt. It seems almost impossible for them to work together again, but they're managing. As they fight to clear Ricky's name, Liv finds herself once again in the path of pain, and whether or not this trio can stick together through yet another moment of darkness is anyone's guess.

Armstrong's name is synonymous with great storytelling, and this *Cainsville* series is definitely being set up to deliver a heck of a surprise when it all comes to an end.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

A MOST EXTRAORDINARY PURSUIT



By Juliana Gray

This story starts with the Duke of Olympia's personal secretary, Miss Emmeline Rose Truelove, supervising his funeral. She is then pulled aside to hear about a mission from the current Dowager Duchess. It seems that the Duke's only heir, archaeologist Maximilian Haywood, was last seen at a dig on the island of Crete and has since disappeared. Being that he needs to be informed of his new status, the man must be found.

Miss Truelove is a little uncertain as to what she should do until she gets a load of her new partner, Lord Silverton, who doesn't make much of an impression for being a capable helper. But the mission is the mission and Emmeline has no choice. She and Silverton hop from port to port, following Haywood's trail, discovering that he might have encountered people who would do him bodily harm. Emmeline is somewhat out of her depth but tries to soldier on, and with each new day, she begins to notice there is far more to her partner than she first thought.

Each chapter starts with a selection from a diary that was found in the present day. This, combined with Truelove's history, brings the reader all the tension a good mystery should provide and unveils questions not yet asked. From Crete to Greece, the locations are stunning. From a shootout in a hotel room to dubious questioning and plowing through a storm, each scene is entertaining. Add in humor, a charming plot that offers lines of historical fiction, and just a dash of the supernatural, and this book becomes one that you hope with all your heart will be the perfect beginning to a fantastic, long-running series.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

BRIGHT MIDNIGHT

By Chris Formant

"Bright Midnight" is definitely a work of fiction, yet the fiction certainly matches the factual and incredibly "strange" stats we have concerning stars we've lost. For example, the unfortunate loss of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and others, who all died at the age of 27. Then, in 1994, with Kurt Cobain committing suicide at the same age. It was only after Cobain's demise that the "27 Club" theory crept up, making people wonder how it could be that such a talented group of icons could eerily die at the same age. Evidence, of course, makes the deaths completely unrelated. But Formant puts out the theory... what if they weren't?

In this story, readers meet Gantry Elliot, a genuine rock-and-roller who's been around the block for a long time and doesn't exactly deal well with the modern music era of rap, etc. His job is writing for *Rolling Stone* magazine. Gantry has gotten older, of course, and misses his once "cool" seat among the true rockers. The gift Gantry has, however, is his extensive, encyclopedic knowledge of the rock-and-roll world. Knowledge that could actually bring to light the real reason behind the mystery of the "27 Club."

Packages begin to arrive at Gantry's home and office, which he ignores. But another "27" plot is in the works and the little "gifts" sent to Gantry soon become personal. Realization dawns that he's not part of a game and no innocent idiot with a bad sense of humor is pulling the strings behind these deliveries. In other words, Gantry's life is either in danger, or someone wants him because in his encyclopedic brain, he harbors secrets everyone would like erased

Saying anything more would be downright wrong here, because this is a fantastic debut that everyone should read. And I wouldn't want to give one single hint away. Extremely creative, using fact to parallel fiction, readers will find themselves completely enthralled with this hunt to unveil the truth about rock-and-roll's earliest departures.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by Suspense Publishing •



IQ By Joe Ide

There are debuts that are talked about for a good, long time after they come out; this is one of those books.

Isaiah Quintabe is also known as IQ. This is a truly brilliant high school drop-out living in an area of Los Angeles where he is able to help out his neighbors. IQ acts as a public detective for the community and his services usually get paid with baked goods instead of cash. Trouble is, IQ has a definite need for money. This is when his old roommate, Dodson, shows up with an offer for IQ

that will pay him some real dollars. Dodson asks IQ to help him find out who was behind the killing of a famous rapper, Calvin "Black the Knife" Wright. Dodson, of course, is a hustler that IQ doesn't really trust, but he decides to take the case. His only lead is a security film of a huge attack dog that was turned loose on the rapper in his own house. But when he gets on a trail, it will lead him directly to a killer who really loves his work.

As Isaiah is a very independent guy who can figure out common sense logic based on what he sees, his type of investigating can be very cold and disturbing to other people. Tarantino-like disturbing, if you will.

Apart from a few Sherlock Holmes connections, this is also a very fast mystery/thriller with a list of suspects a mile long. From Cal's ex-wife Noelle to a whole bunch of rapper fans who just won't go away and who are all greedy enough to kill Cal using a dangerous attack dog, IQ has his work cut out for him.

This is one heck of a "first try" for an author. The plot is dramatic, frightening, and blunt. But most importantly, IQ is a truly impressive character who could easily grow a huge fan base and be around just as long as that much beloved Sherlock Holmes.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

DEATH BY PUMPKIN SPICE

By Alex Erickson

The Bookstore Café Mystery series continues with this third installment. A smooth narrative where most of the characters are normal, down-to-earth folks, combined with suspects galore and twists and turns make this a great afternoon read.

Vickie Patterson and best friend Krissy Hancock own a combination coffee shop/bookstore called Death by Coffee, located in the picturesque village of Pine Hills. Will Foster, who is a local doctor, invites Krissy to a Halloween party being held at the mansion of recent widow, Margaret Yarborough.

Early in the evening, Pebbles Quentin proposes marriage to his girlfriend Unfortunately Jessica. him, she turns him down and embarrasses him in front of all the guests. After a short while, Jessica, who happens to be dressed as Marilyn Monroe, is found strangled to death in a room that is filled with jacko'-lanterns; her head has been turned at an angle and smashed into a pumpkin. All the signs point to a crime of passion at first because of the messed-up way she trounced Quentin's proposal. However, when the hostess's jewelry comes up missing, a robber may also play a large part in the crime of murder.

Police Officer Paul Dalton is a guest at the party. Because of a nasty storm there are road closures, and Officer Dalton seems to be the only lawman on hand to investigate the crime. He asks Krissy to help him out as no other officials are able to get to the crime scene and some of the guests have gone missing. Happy to help investigate, Krissy jumps on board to help find these mysteriously missing party-goers and, instead, finds herself in deep trouble.

It's no surprise to say that Alex Erickson has created yet another mystery that is so much fun to read!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

A MEMORY OF MUSKETS

By Kathleen Ernst

Chloe Ellefson is the Curator of Collections at Old World Wisconsin, a historic site. Chloe's significant other, Roelke McKenna, is a police officer working in the nearby village of Eagle. The couple has purchased Roelke's old family farm with plans to fix up the original cabin for Chloe's use. Yet when Chloe enters the cabin, she is shocked by the sudden feelings she gets from her surroundings. Looking into the past, Chloe uncovers a sad, but inspirational backstory regarding the place.

At present, Chloe is also helping Bryon Cook, Curator of Interpretations, with his plans for a special Civil War program. His plans will involve a group of Civil War Reenactment programmers; he believes they have the seriousness needed when it comes to putting on a "show" that takes into account all the facts of the Civil War period. The group will stage a big battle, but when a body dressed in period clothing, with no identification, is found on one of the farms, Roelke's not too sure whether the reenactor's death is an accident or outright murder.

Add in a parallel story that comes from another time period involving past residents of the town, and all tales come together perfectly as drama from the past ultimately sheds light on what's happening in the present.

As this is the seventh book in the *Chloe Ellefson Old World Mysteries* series, and having read the previous stories, I must say this murder mystery is certainly believable and extremely well-written. Readers will be able to begin this series out of order, as the author explains just what you need to know about the characters to completely enjoy the tale.

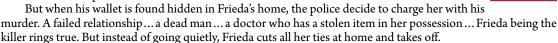
Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

FRIDAY ON MY MIND

By Nicci French

A man's body is spotted floating in the Thames River; the only means of identification for the corpse is a bracelet he wears from a hospital with the name Dr. F. Klein engraved on it.

When Dr. Klein is tracked down and shown the body, she's stunned to find that it is none other than her ex-lover, Sandy Holland. She shudders, seeing as that Sandy had never accepted the end of their relationship.



Frieda goes on the run, believing that she can solve Sandy's murder by herself. Cool and deliberate are the two main qualities of Dr. Klein. Her friends she has met along the way: Josef, Sasha and DCI Karlsson, know her well and support her as much as they can, but she is always in control. Add in a killer from Frieda's past who is believed to be dead by the police, and the story grows anxious and tense as she tries to figure out the truth and stay alive before the cops catch up to her.

A great story with a twist at the end that's as surprising as it could get when the perpetrator is finally exposed. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

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A DARK AND STORMY MURDER

By Julia Buckley

Budding novelist Lena London has been a fan of Camilla Graham's bestselling suspense novels for years. So when a close friend tips her off that Camilla is looking for a new personal assistant, Lena applies. And gets it! Lena's thrilled that she's been hired to help her idol craft her latest novel, and that she'll also be living rent-free in Camilla's home in the quiet town of Blue Lake, Indiana. Camilla is equally delighted to have Lena as her new assistant, as Lena has a special affinity for the novelist's work. It seems to be a perfect match.

It doesn't take Lena long to figure out that the bucolic Indiana town has a few secrets. And when she befriends Camilla's neighbor, Sam West, several of the locals are quick to criticize. It seems that Sam's wife disappeared under suspicious circumstances while the couple was in the middle of a divorce, and although no body has ever been found, Sam is suspected of murdering her. Gotta love small town gossip. And things get even more complicated when Lena discovers the dead body of a man on her new boss's lakefront property.

There also seems to be something odd going on after dark in Camilla's Gothic home, according to the two watchdogs-in-residence, Rochester and Heathcliff, who sound an alarm which wakes both women soon after Lena finds the dead body. Although an investigation by the local police determine that nothing is wrong, the two women are still nervous, especially when the odd noises continue a few nights later. Could real life be imitating Camilla's novels?

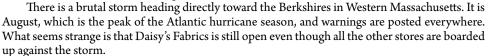
"A Dark and Stormy Murder" is the first entry in the *Writer's Apprentice* mystery series. It's a page turner and, in an intriguing plot twist, the author sets up the second book in the series at the end of book one. I hope Julia Buckley writes the second one quickly. I can't wait to find out what happens next!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

CANCELLED BY MURDER

By Jean Flowers

Who knew that reading about a postmistress working in the small post office in North Ashcot, Massachusetts, could be so exciting?





Nicci

Daisy Harmon is the owner of Daisy's Fabrics where Postmistress Cassie Miller has purchased her many fabrics to use for quilting. It seems that keeping the business open has caused Daisy to meet her demise. At first it seems that Daisy was killed by the branches of a tree, but ... perhaps the culprit was something or someone a little more disturbing. You see, Daisy was a vibrant young woman, a gifted teacher, and a generous businesswoman, but she tended to get under the skin of a great many people.

Daisy's husband has asked Cassie to help him in the murder investigation; Cassie just happens to be friends with Police Chief Sunni Smargon. In addition, it seems Cassie is far more interested in solving crimes than making the mail go through on time.

As the imminent storm turns out to be more "talk" than actual "action," its winds cannot be blamed for Daisy's death. Police learn that her death has nothing to do with bad weather, and Cassie soon receives sinister letters at the post office telling her to watch her back before she becomes the next victim of a so far invisible killer. Unfortunately, Cassie hasn't changed since the first book and, with determination galore, she still moves forward to uncover the murderer.

If books one and two are any inclination of the fun, action, suspense and great characters that North Ashcot has to provide for all mystery lovers out there, then we'll all be waiting impatiently for book number three to arrive!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

THE OBSIDIAN CHAMBER



By Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child

As any reader of suspense knows, Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child write a series of books featuring one of the best characters in the history of suspense literature: Aloysius Pendergast. Now the wealthy, strange, slightly eerie, always intelligent FBI Agent is back ... or is he?

The news arrives that Pendergast is missing and has been presumed dead after helping a friend. At Pendergast's mansion in New York City, life has turned gloomy to say the least. Pendergast's 'Man Friday,' Proctor, is keeping a stiff upper lip as he is sure that his boss must be

alive somewhere out there. Yet the other person in the house, Pendergast's ward, Constance, is depressed. Not only did Pendergast reject her announcement of love for him, but now he's gone forever.

Then, out of nowhere, Proctor believes that he "sees" Constance kidnapped. There are a few clues left behind, so Proctor picks up his emergency go-bag and charters jets to pursue the kidnappers to Namibia. When in Namibia, Proctor's SUV computer is hacked and he becomes stranded on the very hot sands of the Kalahari Desert. Proctor knows that poor Constance was kidnapped by an age-old nemesis who was supposed to be dead. He is right ... yet, wrong.

Constance is with Pendergast's black sheep brother Diogenes, who also was presumed dead. Arriving in NYC, Diogenes told Constance that he loved her and whisked her off to an island paradise at Florida's Halcyon Key. In other words, everyone is on their own quest going in different directions. However, is Pendergast alive and ready to appear in order to save Proctor, Constance and take on his own evil brother in a battle to end all battles? You'll have to read to find out.

No surprise to say that this is an excellent story by these two unbelievably talented authors. A page-turner, a deluxe suspense, a perfect mystery—Preston & Child remain the best of the best and never let their huge fan base down!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

A TIME FOR TORMENT

By John Connolly

Former NYPD detective Charlie Parker is back from a fatal encounter with a Neo-Nazi group. He was left for dead and was, actually, dead, but was revived and came back stronger than before. Now he's patched up and ready to battle demons and particularly evil humans. This book is called a thriller, but it reads like more of a supernatural horror tale of carnage and killing while righting terrible wrongs, and featuring rather graphic violence.



The first character to appear is Roger Ormsby, outwardly a small, colorful man who is well liked and generous in the community. Inwardly, he is the Gray Man, who wants to destroy as many lives as he can—those of cherished, good people—as slowly as possible. This sets the tone for the swirl of complex, interwoven events.

Charlie wades through the tangled web of evil, backed by two dangerous men, Angel and Louis. Together, the three are a formidable team.

The story centers around a West Virginia place called The Cut, which is home to a rough bunch of primitive people who have been isolated—and inbreeding—for many long years. They serve an entity they call "The Dead King." That's the real enemy Charlie has to try to ferret out and defeat.

Fans of the series will love this new one. Readers new to the series can pick this one up without reading the first twelve. It's a long book, but a quick read because it's breathtakingly hard to put down. Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Death on the Trek" •

MORAL DEFENSE



By Marcia Clark

In this latest book by the famous Marcia Clark, her character, Samantha Brinkman, is back for more fascinating drama and lots of back-biting in the legal world.

Samantha Brinkman is a Los Angeles criminal defense attorney who is about to be appointed as a legal advocate for a girl by the name of Cassie Sonnenberg. Cassie's family has been murdered; her father and brother are dead and her mother is not expected to live. Cassie has no idea why she would have been spared. What she does know, however, is that she needs someone to help.

Sam is eager to get started with Cassie. She knows the poor girl has been through the wringer and wants to do all she can to protect her from the press while trying to get to the bottom of the horrific crime.

Pulling her team together, Sam starts her investigation. But the amount of strange information just keeps coming. It seems that someone stabbed high school senior Abel Sonnenberg to death, and a sudden case of food poisoning sent mom and dad home early from their night out, leading to an attack being taken out on them. The detective handling the case, Weston Emmons, is looking closely at Cassie. He has a gut feeling that the girl may have a hand in all this, or at least been the person who started the process.

Adopted at a very young age, Cassie fit nicely into their family. But as Sam delves further into the facts, she finds that Cassie's statement about the night of the murder is not altogether true. Abuse issues are unveiled and Sam tries her best to not get so deeply involved in Cassie's case. There's something wrong with the girl. But what that something is ... has yet to be discovered.

Marcia Clark has done a wonderful job weaving a very creepy web, offering up twists and turns that are not easily figured out.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

MUD BOG MURDER

By Lesley A. Diehl

The new *Eve Appel Mystery* is here and it is absolutely terrific.

This time around, Jenny McCleary makes up her mind to lease her swampland property to the annual Mud Bog Races that are held in the small town of Sabal Bay, Florida. Sadly, this brings in a crowd of environmental activists that want to protest the event loud and clear. Along with these folks come monster truck fans, and soon the situation turns into one of divided camps: activists versus devout fans.

Eve Appel and her friend join with the environmentalist group on the first day of the event. But in the middle of the first race, Jenny McCleary's head goes flying by (literally) and lands by the wheel of a truck. Now, of course, all the protesters have become suspects in Jenny's murder.

Eve sets out to solve the horrible crime. What's left of Jenny is found near the airboat business of Eve's Indian friends, Sammy Egret and his grandfather, and when more evidence comes to light, Sammy's grandfather is arrested for the murder.

Eve is in all kinds of quandaries at this point. She had wanted to protest the mud bog event even if it meant that the repercussion would be losing customers at her consignment shop. In addition, Eve's protesting may make it impossible for her to move into her new home because the townspeople may not forgive her for disrupting their annual event. And in the romance department, Eve is also struggling to decide between two very handsome men; Alex, a local PI, and Sammy, one who can only be described as "wow!"

As her investigation moves forward, the anger between the people heats up, and a killer may just focus his or her sights on Eve's demise.

A great mystery that is all about a fun cast combined with an excellent plot, readers will be thrilled with this one.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

21

POISONFEATHER

By Matthew FitzSimmons

A sequel to FitzSimmons's amazing tale, "The Short Drop," this time around main character Gibson Vaughn, who was once a very troubled teenager, is now trying his very best to be a good father and family man.

When an old friend, Judge Hammond Birk, reaches out for Gibson's help, he doesn't pause whatsoever. He offers aid to the man who once saved his life by letting him choose between going into the Marines, or going into a prison cell for an extended stay. Sadly, the judge is now suffering from dementia and is living in a trailer in Virginia. Gibson's intuition tells him to walk or run away and not get involved in such an impossible situation, but because of his loyalty and gratefulness, he agrees to the challenge.

It seems that a convicted swindler, Charles Merrick, has hidden a fortune of money that he'd taken from his victims, and the judge was one of those he swindled. Merrick will now be released from federal prison in only a few weeks and a slew of people scammed by Merrick are all wanting a piece of his hide.

Gibson is determined to find this cache first and recover the judge's money; not to mention, pay back the other victims of this horrible man. But when the smell of money is wafting through the air, every "bad guy" comes out of the woodwork. Add in a massive secret referred to only as "Poisonfeather," and Gibson will need all his fighting skills just to stay alive.

The introduction of Gibson and the judge in the first book made for a great plot and an incredible suspense novel. With this one, the author has knocked it out of the park, as they say. The characters' layers are being peeled back further and further, allowing readers to really root for the good guys! FitzSimmons has put together a great plot that doesn't let you rest for even a minute.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT

By Andrea Camilleri

The sincerely distressed manager of a local supermarket, Guido Borsellino, has called Police Inspector Montalbano to tell him that his supermarket has been robbed. Guido seems to be a lot more upset at the police than about the money that was stolen overnight, and when the inspector arrives at the market to help his officers, he finds the manager is so terrified of the police that he actually believes the law "wants to see him sentenced to death." Also in question for the inspector is the fact that he can find no sign of forced entry, which seems suspicious when talking about an overnight robbery. Could the manager possibly be in on the crime?



With the initial questioning complete, the inspector returns to the police station. There he must deal with another issue. Giovanni Strangio was arrested by the inspector because a girl was found killed in Strangio's apartment, but Strangio seems to have a perfect alibi in place for the time of death. The inspector finds, however, that Strangio is also the son of the province president and he knows that the interests of local politicians and the Mafia are very much involved.

Sadly, when the inspector looks in on Guido, the man is found hanging in his office, extremely dead, and Strangio is back in his presence to report the killing of his girlfriend, Mariangela. As both deaths raise more and more red flags, the inspector has to start working late at night to catch killers when they least expect it. Killers that certainly have the talent to silence the inspector before he can put them behind bars.

Although the book is a translation and, at times, a bit difficult to understand, the many clues and the surprising disclosures make this a great mystery, well worth reading.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

DARK MATTER

By Blake Crouch

Blake Crouch's mind and imagination don't function like the rest of us. They function in a world far more advanced. At least, that's what I keep telling myself. It's the only way I can wrap my head around his brilliance. "Dark Matter" will hit you over the head and suck the air from your lungs from page one until the very last word, when the final drip of emotion is wrung from your body, leaving you as limp as a dish towel.

Crouch takes us into the world of Quantum Physics and String Theory by exposing us to its raw elements—each decision we make takes us down a different path. But, what if those infinite paths paralleled each other, and what if we found a way to reach into this fifth dimension and travel between these worlds? Sounds pretty cool, doesn't it?

Now imagine that one of our 'selves' realized he liked our life and the decisions we made better than his own, and he has found a way to trade his life for ours. Your family is now his: all you love and cherish stolen from you. How far would you go to try and find your way back?

Please don't misinterpret my words. "Dark Matter" is 'not' about physics; it's about love, relationships, and choices. It's about realizing that the lives we lead, although not perfect, are perfect for us, and if someone stole all we loved, we would fight tooth and nail to claw our way back and find 'our' reality.

The mind that gave us the Wayward Pines trilogy gives us another mind bending story, and helps us realize

that every choice we make, big and small, changes and shapes who we are today. "Dark Matter" is not to be read; it's to be savored and devoured at the same time. It's one of the best choices you'll ever make!

Reviewed by J.M. LeDuc, author of "Painted Beauty," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine.

NIGHTMARES: A NEW DECADE OF MODERN HORROR

Edited by Ellen Datlow

Well...if you want the pants scared right off you, this is one of the greatest collections of horror stories ever printed. And that is not an exaggeration. "Nightmares" is the perfect title for this assemblage of twenty-four tales that will have any reader running around the house making sure that every light in every room is on. Heck, you'll probably even ask your neighbors to light up their houses so that the backyard will not own any shadows.



A handful of extremely talented writers have compiled their best chilling stories, reminding readers that all sorts of evil walks among us and will not disappear just because we want them to. Here is just a short sampling that will have you staying awake for a good, long time:

The story is called *The Goosle* by Margo Lanagan, which is an unforgettable take on the story of *Hansel and Gretel*. Written beautifully and bloody, these are two characters well-known in the world of fiction whose backstory, if you've forgotten it, you will never forget again.

In *The Clay Party* by Steve Duffy, a group of folks set out for the state of California with their leader... a man that leads them to disaster and sounds a lot like the "bloodfest" of the Donner Party.

For two completely different tales, check out *Lonegan's Luck* by Stephen Graham Jones, that takes the reader on the road with a snake oil salesman who offers remedies for just about everything. And in *Mr. Pigsny* by Reggie Oliver, meet a gangster who never wants to die, yet soon learns that there are far worse things than 'meeting his maker.'

This review could go on and on, but this reviewer needs to find a fun-filled, colorful, children's book to read (with illustrations) just so my heart rate can slow back down. Enjoy, horror fans. In this frightening tome, there's something for everybody.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by Suspense Publishing •

CAKEWALK



By Rita Mae Brown

For all those long-time, loyal Rita Mae Brown fans, this book is the first to be seen in *The Runnymede* series in over a decade (the first story being "Six in One" published back in 1979). Taking place in the spectacular community of Runnymede, Maryland, where the Mason-Dixon Line runs right through it, readers are transported back to 1920.

America is just pulling itself up by the bootstraps now that WWI has come to a close. Prohibition is sneaking up on the country and women are working hard to get the vote. Two sisters, Louise (AKA: Wheezie) and Julia (AKA: Juts) Hunsenmier are our main characters. The very beautiful and wealthy Celeste, along with her prim sister Carlotta, and Best Friends Forever Fairy and Fannie Jump, are also inhabiting Runnymede.

Wheezie's time is spent setting the town's fashion at the Bon Ton; Juts, who is in the tenth grade, is in battle mode with an unbearable schoolmate named Dimps Junior, starting fights and scrapes and counting the days until she's out of school. The lovely Celeste is dealing with a troubling situation; her long-time lover, who happens to be a woman, is expecting a baby and has married the baby's father. Obviously this has left Celeste in limbo, to say the least, but now she's intent on finding herself a man of her own.

With each new day, and the way the world is changing all around Runnymede, readers get a full, colorful, vibrant story that encompasses everything good in life. This huge tale that moves along quite quickly delves into everything from love to whiskey to religion, fashion and even baseball, as it explores the small town that had "one foot in the North and one foot in the South."

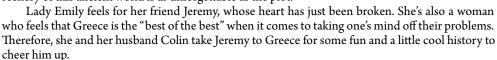
According to the author these characters were inspired by her family members, and Ms. Brown's exceptional writing is something that all readers are sure to love. Hopefully it will not take another decade to see these fantastic characters again.

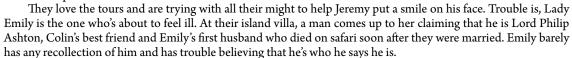
Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

A TERRIBLE BEAUTY

By Tasha Alexander

"A Terrible Beauty," the newest book in Alexander's extraordinary *Lady Emily* series, is certainly one of the very best. Sending readers to a stunning location, the island of Santorini in Greece, the scenery of this ancient world is as unforgettable as the plot.





His appearance has changed, of course, in the last ten years, yet he's privy to many details of Emily's life. His claim for not returning is that he was attacked by friends of a man who deals in illegal antiques; a man who's positive that Philip is in possession of an ancient treasure.

Lady Emily and Colin are determined to find out the truth about this so-called Philip, as well as this mysterious treasure. But with this "ghost" of a husband and a dealer who will stop at nothing to get what he wants, Emily is in far more danger than she thinks.

This is a truly fantastic story. Plot is incredible, and Lady Emily and the gang, as always, are as vivid as the Grecian world. Readers and fans of Tasha Alexander will be over the moon for this one!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by *Suspense Publishing* •



NIGHT WATCH

By Iris Johansen and Roy Johansen

This is the fourth book featuring Kendra Michaels; born blind, she sees the world for the first time at the age of twenty, after participating in a new stem cell restoration process developed by English scientists working with something called the "Night Watch Project."

Following her miracle, Kendra has become an exceptional investigator because of her remarkable new vision, and her superior senses of both smell and sound that she earned during her time without sight.

When Dr. Charles Waldridge, the man who gave Kendra her sight goes missing, along with two others connected with the "Night Watch Project," she finds herself on a mission to locate and help them by any means necessary... even if it means delving into some truly disturbing activities.

Through flashbacks, readers will learn about the procedure that gave Kendra back her sight and the moment she saw the world. While moving forward, this amazing thriller unveils the world of stem cell research and what it would mean to many people looking for help. Kendra is an interesting character, almost a superhero when she uses her high intellect and abilities to help both the CIA and the FBI. Unfortunately, this time out Kendra is about to confront a lethal enemy who will send her to the very limits of those abilities, making her fight for her own survival.

As always, the name "Johansen" is synonymous with incredible writing!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

FLASH POINT

By Thomas Locke

"Flash Point" is a psychological/science-fiction/murder mystery that ensures you will stay awake reading into the wee hours of the night because you simply will not be able to put it down.

The major question right off the bat is one that, if you're anything like me, should make your skin grow cold. Would you go into the future if it meant that you could make positive changes in your present life? If you said yes to this, just think about what the future could mean.

Junior financial analyst, Lena Fennan, is acting on orders given by herself in the future. This all begins with a simple dare, yet corporate intrigue, fear, danger and even romance all come from taking that simple 'step' into the unknown.

Dr. Brett Riffkind and Roger and Marjorie Foretrain are characters working to prevent neurobiology skills from coming to pass; information that was stolen by an obscure organization that Reese Clawson, the bad guy from "Trial Run" (the previous book in this author's Fault Lines series), is now working for.

The action is neverending. A powerful narrative that grips you from page one, it's almost impossible not to imagine what your life would be like if you took a dare like this; yet instead of changing things for the positive added major negatives that you might not be able to survive. Many storylines go on at the same time in this one, but readers will be so engrossed and the author does such a wonderful job with the flow and progression of the tale, that it's easy to hang on to every detail.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

REMEMBER ME THIS WAY

By Sabine Durrant

It's the darkest anniversary you can imagine. It has been one year since Lizzie, a sweet British school librarian, lost her husband Zach, and she has come to visit the lonely stretch of highway where he died in a one-car accident. Today is also Valentine's Day, so Lizzie stops to pick up flowers that she can leave at the site of the accident. While there, however, Lizzie notices that someone else has beaten her to the punch, as there is a bouquet "For Zach," signed by a mysterious, "Xenia."

A very troubled Lizzie decides to go to Zach's vacation cabin. What she's expecting to find there is a letter she had mailed just before he died, telling him that she wanted a divorce. She plans to burn the letter and is glad that he died before he had the chance to read it. However, when she gets there she finds yet another surprise: the letter has been torn up and thrown into the bottom of a garbage can. Suddenly a terror grows in Lizzie's chest, and a strange feeling that she's being watched takes over her mind.

Digging into her controlling husband's past, she finds out things that makes her question what she thought to be true. In fact, the more she uncovers, the more Lizzie realizes that she never actually knew the man she'd married. And with each step she takes, accident or no accident, it seems that Zach may still be very much alive and waiting to claim her once again.

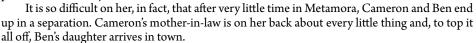
Sabine Durrant has done a spectacular job with this plot and the layout of the story. Some chapters are told by Zach and dated over several years leading up to his accident. A complicated, disturbed brain is revealed owned by an insulting, scheming man who may be playing with Lizzie like a puppeteer. This is definitely one story you will not forget when it comes to a close.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

DEADLY DOG DAYS

By Jamie M. Blair

Cameron Cripps-Hayman and her husband Ben are relocating to Ben's hometown: Metamora, Indiana. Cameron is trying her best to adjust to this move, although she's never been part of such a strictly run town before.





As if her life weren't complicated enough, Cameron suddenly finds the dead body of a woman in the canal. The chief of police feels that Cameron is his prime suspect, seeing as there is a rumor moving around town that her estranged husband was dating the dead woman. Cameron, of course, denies the story. But things really jump ahead when she adopts the dead woman's five guard dogs.

Cameron sets out to solve the killing before she is put in jail for a crime she did not commit. Setting out to clear her name, she takes in the motley crew of canines that lived with the deceased and tries to deal with the mother-in-law from hell. She is certainly at war, but finally begins to fight back. Even her own husband wants to reconcile. Until, that is, another corpse joins the party.

Cameron may not come off very warm-hearted, but she takes very good care of the dogs. Readers have to remember, however, that Cameron went from a positive, happy life to a sincerely difficult town where everyone seems to be against her no mater what she does. The plot is very, very good in this one. The dogs are fun, the mystery is difficult to solve, and all the characters make this a great afternoon read.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

THE MIRROR SISTERS

By V. C. Andrews



This is classic V. C. Andrews—dark and gothic, with a pair of tormented sisters. In this case, they're tormented by their mother, who is obsessed with them being identical twins. Not just identical, but absolutely the same in every aspect. Not only their hair and clothing, but the treatment they get, the food they eat, comments made to them and equal hugs and kisses. Kaylee, Haylee's twin, begins to think that her mother considers them one person: Kaylee-Haylee, Haylee-Kaylee, which is what she often calls them. She always makes sure to say the other name

first the next time. The excruciating rituals wear thin on their father, who dares to think that maybe they might want to be considered as individuals some day. He seems to be their only hope for eventually becoming whole persons.

The girls are home-schooled so that nothing and no one can ruin their perfection. Their mother loves the fact that people stare at them when they eat out. They always respond in tandem to comments. Their mother would be upset if they didn't.

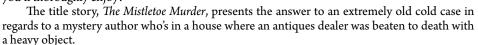
However, the mother relents at last and lets them attend public high school. Predictably, cracks appear in the mirror. We've already seen that Haylee is growing adept at creating little eddies of turmoil that reflect badly on her sister. In high school, the eddies turn into dangerous whirlpools.

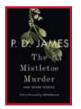
It's very good that a second and third installment are planned soon. You'll see what I mean when you finish the book. It seems to read slowly and there's a lot of repetition, but the story is always building and the tension increasing. If you like Andrews or gothic horror, you'll race through this book, shivering with dark delight. Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Requiem in Red" •

THE MISTLETOE MURDER & OTHER STORIES

By P.D. James

This great little holiday book gives readers not one, but *four* mysteries by P.D. James that you'll thoroughly enjoy!





A Very Commonplace Murder begins with an alibi witness. This witness has not come forward to tell what he saw as he was looking through a window and caught sight of a murder in progress. By holding back, the real killer may not be brought to justice.

The third story, *The Boxdale Inheritance*, pulls readers into the world of Chief Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh's godfather, who asks Adam to reinvestigate a notorious killing that might help his godfather settle a problem. It seems that his godfather has been named as an heir to a fortune, but the man feels badly taking the money seeing as he thinks it was stolen to begin with. Adam agrees to look into the old case, and readers will be thrilled with the end of the tale and what Adam chooses to unveil.

Last, but definitely not least, comes *The Twelve Clues of Christmas*. After there was a suicide inside a huge old house, the chief superintendent comes upon the incident by accident. He's traveling to his sister's house to enjoy the Christmas holiday, but this pure Agatha Christie-type investigation causes his instincts to come alive.

It is always a fantastic holiday gift to get a P.D. James story in one's hand. But to have four makes for one of the best holidays ever. This quartet of puzzles will definitely please all mystery fans, even going so far as to offer up one that you may just have to solve all by yourself.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

THE TWENTY-THREE



By Linwood Barclay

The incredible *Promise Falls* trilogy comes to an end with this, the final installment. Beginning with disorder and turmoil to the 'nth' degree, readers will be absolutely thrilled, yet completely sad to say so long to this 5-Star story.

In upstate New York, Detective Barry Duckworth has his hands full dealing with the many crimes, murders and disasters in his town. Recently, a group of residents living in a complex began to get violently sick. People are passing out, falling into critical condition in one of the worst events

ever seen in the history of the town. More and more people are dying, and it seems that someone or something has tainted the town's water supply.

Because of this, one suspect is the hateful former mayor, Randall Finley, who just so happens to own a water bottling company. However, water doesn't seem to be the only thing killing people on this Memorial Day weekend. A knife-toting bad guy is actually on the loose targeting women.

People are literally dropping like flies in Promise Falls when a young girl, just eleven years of age, tells Detective Cal Weaver that her mother, who died from the water poisoning, had previously been thought to be the person who had started the whole thing. But ... why?

There are many characters in this story, and readers should go back and begin this trilogy at the very beginning so as not to miss the background and backstories of the characters. The most gratifying plotline in the book is the mystery of the number 23, which keeps coming up again and again, and provides the reader with the ultimate payoff to the whole story.

Even though the trilogy is over Barclay is one author who continues to create, and his imagination will continue to keep readers on the edge of their seats for years to come.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS

By Maureen Milliken

Whoever coined the slogan, "Maine: The Way Life Should Be," was certainly not referring to the fictional town of Redimere, the setting for Maureen Milliken's second *Bernie O'Day Mystery*. That is, unless that person liked to hunt in Maine's dark woods for more than just deer. The book begins with a grisly discovery in the woods. And I'm not kidding about the "grisly" part. The discovery is traumatic enough to resurrect town police chief Pete Novotny's nightmares about an unsolved case of a missing boy. The case has affected his professional judgment to such an extent that at times he is barely able to function.



As Pete struggles, local newspaper editor Bernie O'Day is also thrown off-balance by the surprise appearance of her younger brother, Sal, a non-tenured college professor who announces he's quit his job and needs a place to stay. Turns out Sal is hiding secrets of his own, including the fact that he didn't voluntarily leave his position. He was fired several months ago for plagiarizing. The lies continue when Bernie finds out that Sal has been hiding out for months at a farm owned by his former girlfriend, who is now missing. As is Sal's car.

Bernie has demons of her own, including an ADHD diagnosis, and she turns for help to a local doctor, whom she nicknames Dr. Chomp because of his annoying habit of snapping gum. Dr. Chomp—real name, Chapman—has a pill to solve all her problems, and doesn't hesitate to prescribe strong doses of antidepressants to Bernie so she can get through each day. But she finds it hard to sleep and she's prone to taking long walks after midnight. Bad idea, especially when she witnesses a domestic violence incident involving the manager of the town transfer station and his wife.

The violence continues as Bernie's and Pete's nightmares collide in a terrifying climactic scene. Millikin takes readers on an ever-escalating ride that left me breathless.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

WILD MONTANA SKIES

By Susan May Warren

"Wild Montana Skies" is a brand new tale in the *Mountain Rescue* series that always offer up action, danger, handsome men (look at the covers), romance and suspense.

Kacey Fairing is home on leave in Mercy Falls, Montana. It's been twelve years after she joined the military to get away from her past, and now she has a job waiting for her as pilot of Peak Rescue in Glacier National Park. Kacey is happy to be able to reconnect with her now-teenage daughter that she only sees once in a while. What she doesn't know is that someone else is also back home.

Ben King and Kacey Fairing were high school sweethearts but have not seen each other for years. But with Kacey becoming a pilot for search-and-rescue, her new life brings her back in contact with the one man who broke her heart. And it quickly seems that the two of them never stopped caring for each other.

Ben has been building his country music career since Kacey turned him out of her life. But things have a way of working out, as Ben's father has been injured and he calls Ben home to help run Peak Rescue until he recovers. Dear old dad, however, has an ulterior motive; he wants Kacey Fairing to walk back into his son's life. Because of flash floods, Mercy Falls is in a state of emergency and Kacey and Ben will have to work together to save lives.

The romance, tension and intrigue abound as readers get the action of search-and-rescue pilots, along with watching a couple who must strive to do the best work they can despite their tumultuous history.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

THE SHATTERED TREE

By Charles Todd

This book begins during the last days of the Great War, WWI, in October of 1918. Bess Crawford is a nurse who works close to the front lines, helping to save the lives of wounded soldiers.

On this day, a casualty crosses her path. The soldier's feet are cut up terribly from walking miles without his boots, and his French uniform has been reduced to nothing but tattered pieces of cloth. Strange thing is, however, that when the man shouts out in pain he doesn't speak French; this wounded man is German.

This seems odd to Bess for a man who was found on the far side of the Allied lines, but the Matron in charge of the nurses explains why the man is speaking German. She believes that he must be from the area of Alsace-Lorraine—a province that was at one time French, but had been held by Germany. However, Bess isn't convinced. She has a gut feeling about the man who states that he is Lieutenant Philippe Moreau.

Tragedy occurs for Bess when she takes the bullet of a sniper. Pulling through, she is sent to Paris for her recovery where she sees, strangely the enough, mysterious Moreau. Bess, who always has her "detective mode" running, sets out to discover if this person may just be a German spy. Following the trail of the so-called French officer, Bess finds an old friend along the way who can offer her help. It's Captain Barkley—an American in the city of Paris looking for deserters.

As with all other stories featuring this incredible character, "The Shattered Tree" is a true spellbinder. From spies to the brutal facts of war to Bess's unwavering determination to uncover the truth, author Charles Todd has penned yet another fantastic thriller.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

SECRETS OF NANREATH HALL

By Alix Rickloff

It is 1913, and WWI has only just begun, when the wealthy daughter of a more than wealthy Earl, Lady Katherine Trenowyth, decides she wants to choose her own future and experience far more than the sheltered life that comes with money.

Her father wants to have her portrait painted, and he hires an artist who comes to the house and brings an assistant, Simon Halliday, with him. Simon soon becomes more than a friend to Katherine, who then confides in him-telling Simon of her wish to prove to her family that she can get along just fine on her own. Her choices take her on a journey through the real world, which is much more difficult than she thought it would be. Finally stranding her all alone, with a child, and nowhere to go.

Shoot ahead twenty-five years later. It is now WWII and Katherine's daughter, Anna, is a Red Cross nurse searching for answers. When Anna comes back to England, she's posted to the Trenowyth's family estate, Nanreath Hall, which has been turned into a hospital for soldiers who are too ill or wounded to return to the fighting. Anna hopes to learn more about the mother that she hardly remembers and a father that she never met, but her arrival isn't welcomed by anyone.

As she tends to the wounded, drama ensues and Anna is drawn into her mysterious family's lives, loyalties, tragedies and a lot of heartbreak. She must decide if the past is too dangerous to uncover, and readers will be absolutely fascinated by what path she chooses to walk down.

This story offers a myriad of tales and scenery involving the British world following the war. The character of Anna is a brave woman, determined to keep one step ahead while moving forward on her search for the truth. Rickloff has done a spectacular job bringing her tale to life.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

SAY NO MORE

By Hank Phillippi Ryan

This is the latest installment in the adventures of Boston's greatest investigative couple, TV reporter Jane Ryland and Detective Jake Brogan, who readers have already fallen in love with.

We begin with what appears to be a hit-and-run highway accident witnessed by both Jane and her new producer, Fiola. Jane knows that she may be called as a witness, which doesn't please her or her bosses at the station. But she stops thinking about the accident as she has a whopping story she must report on at the moment. She must gather interviews for a documentary about sexual assaults on college campuses. One of the victims seems prepared to tell all, but has still not given Jane



and Fiola her real name.

In the meantime, Jake, along with other members of Boston's finest, has been sent to a housing development referred to as The Reserve. The dwellers call themselves an 'off-the-official-map' closed society of blue-blooded affluence. It is here that Jake must look into the suspicious drowning of a Hollywood screenwriter, a visiting

professor at a nearby college who just happens to be the same one Jane's would-be interviewee wants to discuss.

It seems a resident told the police about the screenwriter's fall into the swimming pool, which gives him a good reason for staying anonymous if he wants to stay alive within The Reserve.

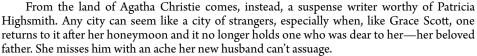
This story is full of all sorts of odd folks; from egotistical college administrators to witnesses who most definitely do not want to talk to the cops. And when another mysterious death occurs at The Reserve, more and more obstacles are thrown in the way of Jane and Jake as they try to uncover a startling truth.

It is never a surprise that this author provides a thrilling tale, but with this one she absolutely knocked the proverbial ball out of the park.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

CITY OF STRANGERS

By Louise Millar



When they get home, Mac goes out to get groceries and she enters the new apartment alone—and finds a dead man. She's a journalist and her camera helps her process her thoughts,

so she quickly takes some pictures, then dials the police.

The reader learns, right away, of Mr. Singh's newsagent shop below the apartment, and the presence of a mysterious man in the storeroom. We revisit him throughout the book as his mental state deteriorates. Grace feels a connection with the poor dead man, as she thinks of him, who has been killed in their place and tries to follow any progress on finding his killer. Mac is much too busy supervising the conversion of a warehouse into flats with a restaurant and gym, and a bar/photography studio/rehearsal space.

But the authorities make slow progress. They don't know the man's name. She finds a discarded envelope addressed to her. On it, he, or someone, has scribbled the words: I am not that man Lucian Grabole. Running alongside this story is one of two people found dead in other places. One is said to be an Australian tourist and one a drug dealer. Grace, convincing her boss to let her work on the story, embarks on a quest to find missing pieces of the puzzle and makes astonishing discoveries that cause her to question everything she knows.

Meanwhile, back in England, the mysterious man still crouches in a small space one floor below her new apartment, hiding.

Lucian Grabole proves to be as illusive in life as in death. Can she trust the people who say they're helping her track down who he was?

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Requiem in Red," for Suspense Magazine

NO FARM, NO FOUL

By Peg Cochran

Shelby McDonald, the owner of Love Blossom Farm, absolutely adores her home. It's hard work for the widow, but there isn't anything she won't do to take good care of the farm. She gardens, cooks, and even sells homemade food. And, if that's not enough, she also keeps an online blog where she shares her delicious recipes and gardening tips with the masses. All of this fills her day, along with her job of raising a teenage daughter, an eight-year-old son, as well as a calico barn cat, a Westie, a Mastiff, and a myriad of barnyard animals. It's hard to imagine when the poor woman is allowed to sleep.



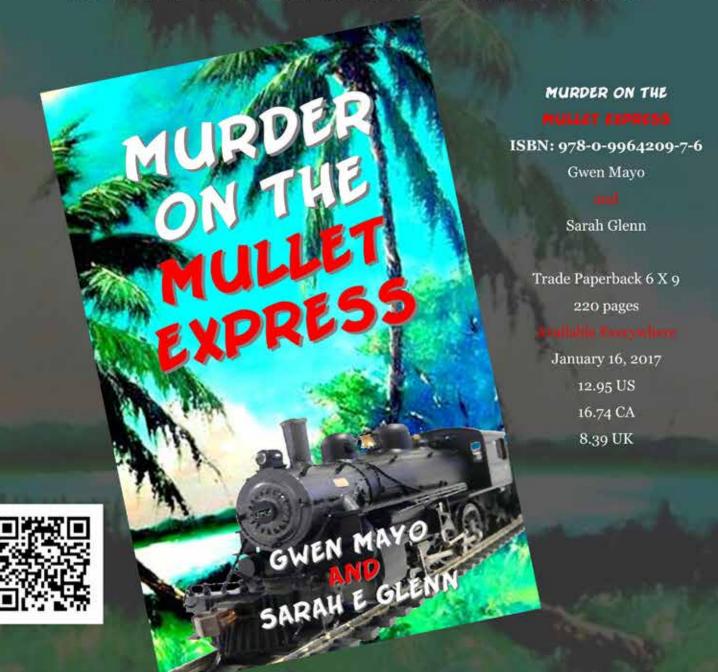
Shelby's church is holding a fundraiser on the farm, but a tragedy occurs. The pastor's wife is found in the mudroom late in the day... strangled to death. The sheriff's department is called in and immediately begins to investigate. Shelby's very good friend, veterinarian Kelly Thacker, becomes the first and only suspect. Which means, of course, Shelby must find the hours in her already busy days to learn who the real murderer is in time to save her friend.

Peg Cochran has done a wonderful job in laying the foundation for what is sure to become a great series. The story is set in a peaceful, country setting where she builds various small town characters and instills quirks while casting doubts on many a citizen. Like a great mystery, the murder will be solved, yet the cast of characters has far more than one among them that disliked the poor victim. It will be interesting to see Shelby and her farm again soon.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

"MURDER ON THE MULLIT LIPESS" IS AN ACTION-PACKED CRIME CAPER SET DURING THE FLORIDA LAND BOOM, AS BOOTLEGGERS, MOBSTERS AND GRIFTERS GALORE FEED ON THE DREAMS OF SUN-SEEKERS. TEDDY AND CORNELIA, WELL-NIGH UNSHOCKABLE AFTER THEIR WWI TOURS OF NURSING DUTY, ARE AT FULL STRETCH AS IT IS - WRANGLING THEIR ECCENTRIC UNCLE PERCY - WHEN A MURDER HIJACKS THEIR TRIP AND THROWS THEM IN AT THE DEEP END. TRULY ORIGINAL AND TREMENDOUS FUN WITH A BIG HEART. MAKE THAT TWO BIG HEARTS."

CATRIONA MCPHERSON, AGATHA, ANTHONY AND LEFTY-WINNING AUTHOR OF THE EDGAR-NOMINATED THE CHILD GARDEN.



THE LAST DAYS OF NEW PARIS

By China Mieville

This is one title that, although it may seem "out there" at times, you will not soon forget. It's all about presenting an alternate history. That said, we delve into World War II, and are immediately hit with as much oddity as one could possibly imagine.

A group of refugee artists come together at a house in Marseille. Here they find a scientist/occultist named Jack Parsons who wants to somehow "capture" the artists' creative power. What he does is create a device that sets off an "S-Blast," releasing an explosion of surrealistic energy in Paris.

Jump to 1950. Germany still occupies France, but the Nazis are not the only bad guys in town. There are new "citizens" of the city that came from the S-Blast. Called "manifs" (AKA: manifestations) these are surrealist works of art that have literally come to life on the streets of Paris. For example, there is a bicycle minus a rider. There is a giant plant bearing fruit that not only looks surreal, but it also comes up from the ground to catch passing aircraft. There is also a tall knight who walks around on a pair of women's highheeled feet.

Now the Nazis, who certainly had egos bigger than all outdoors, don't exactly have an easy time with these manifs. So, being Nazis, they do what they do best. Since they can't defeat these things, they seal off the city of Paris from the rest of the world. No one gets out; no one gets in. In addition, they try to create their very own super-manif. Hiring a renegade priest, the man succeeds in summoning demons that will help aid the Nazi cause.

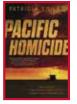
This book has the weirdest twists and turns a reader could ever find in a story, from an author who is one of the most renowned writers of contemporary sci-fi and fantasy. Although you may get "lost" every once in a while, the imagery is well worth it.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

PACIFIC HOMICIDE

By Patricia Smiley

LAPD Homicide Detective Davina "Davie" Richards finds herself on a moral line. She has just killed a suspect in order to save her partner's life. While she's waiting, more than a little impatiently for the shooting to be seen and ruled as being justified, she receives a call about a body found in the Los Angeles sewer system.



Davie goes out to investigate the crime, knowing full well that if she messes up she's in trouble, as she can't afford to make a mistake if she wants to keep her job. The fatality she discovers is a young Russian woman named Anya Nosova. But at the same time she's making sure to keep things "by the book," Davie is also being watched. Not by her superiors, mind you, or the press; Davie and her

family are being watched by an enemy who wants to settle a score.

As she moves forward with the Russian's murder investigation, strange clues come to light. Does this tie in with the investigation being done on her by newly appointed Inspector General Malcolm Harrington? You'll have to read and see.

This is one of those high-quality plots, meaning interesting characters mixed together with technical details that, even though there are many cop books available, seem new to the eye. The playing out of both investigations, personal and the murder of Nosova, go well together, and the bits and pieces that come up throughout the book allow Davie to keep a fast pace when it comes to her work.

There is more police procedure to sink your teeth into, and Davie is definitely not your "usual" detective. "Pacific Homicide" is an excellent book about the emotions that drive some of the best policemen and women to go after their own justice, no matter what the cost.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

KILLER TAKEOUT

By Lucy Burdette

Every October tourists flock to Key West, Florida, for Fantasy Fest, a week-long, totally over-the-top celebration. Which is saying a lot, because Key West is party central all year. But this Mardi Gras-style combination of non-stop parties and parades has tourists and locals alike lining up for costumed (and non-costumed) revelry.

In "Killer Takeout," the seventh in the Key West Food Critic Mystery series penned by Lucy Burdette (Roberta Isleib), Haley Snow, food critic for Key Zest magazine, is assigned to write a feature story on Key West's many grab-and-go food eateries. She can't wait to begin her mouth-watering "research." Not wanting to miss out on the action herself, Haley's geriatric housemate, Miss Gloria, convinces

of the events.

Part of the fun of Fantasy Fest is the election of a Queen, King, and their court, and Haley's *Key Zest* officemate and dear friend, Danielle, is hoping to be selected as Queen. As Miss Gloria and Haley are being trained in their ambassador duties, word arrives that there's a catfight going on between two Fantasy Fest Queen contestants. Yep, you guessed it. One of them is Danielle, who has just been crowned Queen, and the other is her sore loser rival, part-time resident, Caryn Druckman.

Haley that they should both volunteer to be parade ambassadors, patrolling the city's sidewalks during some

When Carryn dies during the Fantasy Festival's zombie parade, Danielle is Suspect Number One, followed by her doting mother and equally doting aunt, who will do almost anything to be sure Danielle gets to keep her rhinestone crown.

As if Haley's not stressed enough, she also has to organize the Key West wedding of her mom and long-time boyfriend, Sam, as well as prepare for Hurricane Margaret, which is threatening to make landfall.

"Killer Takeout" is a delightful addition to a satisfying series. But with all the food references, as well as the yummy recipes at the end, readers are advised not to read it when hungry!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* •

IT'S YOUR PARTY, DIE IF YOU WANT TO

By Vickie Fee

Liv McKay, a party planner living in Dixie, Tennessee, is up to her neck planning a Riverboat Gambler themed engagement party, and a murder mystery dinner for charity, while also getting ready for a businesswomen's retreat, when Morgan Robison asks her to "babysit" this year's guest: celebrity ghost hunter, Lucinda Grable. Poor Liv is wondering if she will be able to do all that she has to do with yet another responsibility added on.

Di, Liv's best friend, and Liv, find themselves following said ghost hunter down to an old (and I do mean old) graveyard in order to attempt to summon the dead. Almost immediately, surprise, one of the retreat's guests goes missing and the search is on.

Just when the excitement seems to be settling down, Liv stumbles onto the dead body of Morgan Robison, who, if truth be told, is the local party girl who is rumored to have a thing for all the married guys in town. Of course, that makes for a long list of suspects, and makes Liv want to join the folks who are helping to find Morgan's killer.

This is a wonderful cozy mystery set in a small town where 'everybody knows your name,' along with every piece of your personal business. And just to have an added extra, Fee has also offered up tips in the back of the book for Hosting a Murder Mystery Dinner, and for Hosting a Riverboat Gambler/Casino Party. Now that's something that would be great fun to do!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

LITTLE BOY BLUE



By M.J. Arlidge

This fifth book starring Detective Helen Grace will certainly not disappoint the readers out there. As always, we follow Dr. Grace's personal and professional life, but this time it is her own past and present that meet up with one another and blow the lid off an astounding mystery.

A crime has occurred. And, unfortunately, someone Helen knows has lost their life. We are taken into the back streets, the shadowed corners where a killer lurks in the midst of the nightclubs and revelers. The murder has happened, but no one is saying anything. In fact, there's not one

witness to the crime.

Helen has no help whatsoever when it comes to solving this one. And without clues, it comes as no surprise when another murder occurs and a possible serial killer takes over. The detective who is more than dedicated and has a long history of using her talents to bring in the bad guys, is thrust into a world where her own secrets cause her pain. Her past that includes abuse and tragedy comes back to haunt Helen, and readers will have to hold their breath as they watch the detective struggling to stay within the lines of the law.

Arlidge knows her character backwards and forwards. The writing is so well done and so vibrant and realistic that it feels like we're always standing over Detective Helen Grace's shoulder while she takes on these horrendous crimes. A definite A+ has to be given for one of the best, if not *the* best series detective in suspense fiction.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

LITERALLY DEAD

By Lois Winston

Gracie Elliott is back, and fans of Lois Winston's hilarious *Empty Nest Mystery* series couldn't be happier. After her disastrous attempt to earn cash by starting an introduction service for seniors in Book 1, "Definitely Dead," Gracie decides that she wants to be a published romance author. She's thrilled when her first manuscript wins the Cream of the Crop award, a contest for unpublished writers. And off she goes, along with her hunky husband, Blake, to accept her award at a three-day conference in NYC.



Naturally, being Gracie, things don't go exactly as planned, beginning with the moment she learns her idol, Lovinia Darling, a.k.a. the Queen of Romance, is nothing like the friendly author she expects. In fact, if her peers gave a prize for most-hated romance author, there's no question that Lovinia would win. Not only is Lovinia an odious bully who treats her peers and assistant like dirt, she's also being sued for plagiarizing.

There are some helpful people at the conference, however, including bestselling author Paisley Prentiss, who takes Gracie under her wing and guides her through the intricate backstage politics of the event. Paisley insists that the real place for Gracie to make contacts isn't at the conference sessions but at the hotel bar, where she introduces Gracie to her own agent. Gracie is thrilled when the agent asks to see her manuscript. She's on her way!

A short time after leaving the bar, Gracie discovers Lovinia's lifeless body in the hotel stairwell, apparently, the victim of a fall. But since Lovinia was hated by so many people, the always curious Gracie suspects her death was no accident and decides to figure out whodunit.

"Literally Dead" is a well-crafted mystery that will delight and entertain cozy fans, as well as offer a backstage look at what can happen at a high-powered publishing conference. I can't wait to see what trouble Gracie will get herself into next. I loved this book. Literally!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •



RULER OF THE NIGHT

By David Morrell

This is the final installment, the amazing conclusion to David Morrell's Victorian mystery trilogy. And, boy, does it pack a wallop! Once again history, mystery and fiction are seamlessly woven together in a web that is, for lack of a better term, enticing.

It is the year 1855, and murder has occurred on an English train. Thomas De Quincey and his daughter, Emily, just happen to be on the train, placing them in the middle of the investigation. This brings the detectives from Scotland Yard, Ryan and Becker, to the pages, who are both looking

forward to seeing Emily again.

The victim is Daniel Harcourt. A lawyer with important clients, he's found murdered in his first-class compartment while traveling with his investigator to deliver important papers. Along with Harcourt, who has told many lies concerning these papers, the body of his investigator is also found dead. Ryan and Becker, who at first are blocked from the investigation because of Harcourt's lies, finally get a chance to look for the killer.

Thomas, meanwhile, becomes re-acquainted with Carolyn, a woman he knew when she was a young girl. Carolyn is now married to a very important man. When Thomas and Emily go with her to her daughter's estate, the plot explodes and the story takes off like a speeding bullet.

Mr. Morrell has no equal when it comes to placing the reader in a Victorian England setting filled with murder, mystery and mayhem. As the reader "sees" the fog close in on them and "listens" to the horses' *clip, clop* on the cobblestones, it becomes impossible not to say that this author's writing is so vibrant that the words come to life. The only unfortunate part of this experience is that as the words come to life, the *De Quincey* trilogy comes to an end. But knowing the mind of Morrell, there is likely something up his sleeve that will have us hanging on his every word very soon.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

REBELLION OF THIEVES

By Kekla Magoon

This second Robyn Hoodlum Adventure by Kekla Magoon is a great YA for all ages.

Barely surviving the first adventure ("Shadows of Sherwood"), Robyn is now back and robbing from the government to help the poor people in her district. Robyn Loxley will not be defeated nor deterred by anyone, going on with her life as a twelve-year-old outlaw protecting her home, Nott City, against the rule of the wicked dictator, Governor Ignomus Crown.

Robyn's popularity grows bigger with the citizens of Nott City, but she keeps her focus on her absolute goal: rescuing her parents from the governor's castle and satisfying her fate as told by moon lore. All Governor Crown wants to see is a quick end to Robyn's little revolution. He has increased the reward for her capture and put more and more security methods in place so that Robyn has a harder time getting to her family without getting caught first.

She wants desperately to get her mother out of jail, so she comes up with a plan. Robyn will enter the Iron Teen competition as a way to gain access to the government facility where her mother is being held. There is, however, a problem. The sheriff is right behind her, and her friends don't want her to enter the competition for fear of her being captured and punished by the military police.

This is definitely a fun, futuristic adventure based on a tale from long ago. Robyn and her friends are on a fast-paced ride that has them headed directly into Governor Crown's path. The characters stand out and Robyn is definitely one of those, like the fabulous Harry Potter, that gets under your skin and makes you anxious while awaiting the next adventure to be released.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

FRACTURED

By Catherine McKenzie

Julie Prentice is the writer of a best-selling book and has also now become the victim of a stalker. Her husband, Daniel, is willing to make a complete career move and takes the journey from Seattle to Cincinnati, Ohio, in order to get his wife and family away from this person who has made their lives miserable ever since "The Murder Game" was published. With the kids, sixyear-old twins, now in school, and Daniel back at work in the new area, Julie sits down, takes a deep breath, and attempts to write her second novel now that they have left their "problem" behind.

Sadly, Julie's problems are just getting started. Her anxiety isn't going away like it should, so Julie decides to try running each morning to see if that will help. She begins her new workout regime with her next door neighbor, John Dunbar. Julie has always had a difficult time meeting new people so she thinks it's a bit unusual that they became good friends so quickly. Other than her running partner, however, the only friend she makes in the neighborhood is a woman named Susan.

As their friendship grows, John helps Julie set up her computer webpages, etc. But while all this quality friendship time is being had, John's wife and son take an instant dislike to Julie. They see her as someone who could break up their whole happy neighborhood. As anger creeps back into Julie's world, she must decide if her former stalker has tracked her down... or if someone else simply wants her out of the picture.

This novel certainly was given the perfect title. Definitely one that you won't want to put down, author Catherine McKenzie has created a tale that will hold your interest... except for the short intervals when you suddenly feel like glancing out your window to see if your neighbor is looking in.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

CAT GOT YOUR DIAMONDS

By Julie Chase



I am always excited when a new cozy series begins. I love meeting a brand new cast of characters, seeing their towns or communities, and falling in love with all of their nosy ways. What Julie Chase has done is create a new "world" that is entertaining, and will introduce all those feline fanciers who love to read Rita Mae Brown to a couple of brand new four-footed friends

To start with, we're introduced to Lacy Marie Crocker, the owner of a pet store who is a real treat. The name of the establishment is Furry Godmother—a pet boutique and organic treat bakery located in the famous New Orleans Garden District.

Sadly, an intruder who was in the store earlier in the day and acted strangely attacks Lacy in her storeroom. However, Lacy sends him packing with a glitter gun (love it!). A few hours later, Detective Jack Oliver accuses Lacy of killing the man, Miguel Sanchez, with said glitter gun (uh, oh). Sadly, Lacy's only witness to Sanchez's earlier attack is Pearl, a customer who was in the store looking for tutus for her dancing dogs. In the meantime, Lacy's financial backer, Mr. Tater, is holding back funds until she is cleared, which means she is now bound to begin her own investigation to save her name and her store. Thus, intending to take a stand, she has decided to put her brain to work and try to figure out just what happened to Sanchez and how he went from being an attacker to the victim.

This is really a fun beginning to what I already know will be great future stories. Even if you're not a cat/dog lover, you'll appreciate this one. And for one last treat in the back of the book, recipes for Furry Godmother's Peanut Butter and Banana Pupcakes, Furry Godmother's New Orleans Pawlines and, last but not least, Furry Godmother's Tiny Tuna Tarts can be had by all!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

HIGH HEAT

By Richard Castle

The television series *Castle* might have been cancelled, but that doesn't mean Richard Castle has stopped writing. His latest *Nikki Heat* novel hits close to home for the new police captain. A video is uncovered that shows an ISIS execution, and the terrorists announce that their next victim is her husband, Jameson Rook. She tries to warn him, but he suddenly is not answering his phone or emails. She has to find them before they can harm him, but appearances are deceptive.

This is another awesome entry in the *Nikki Heat* series, and the cliffhanger ending hints at more novels to come.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, panel master, and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery "The Fourth Lion" (with Kevin Lauderdale) published by Suspense Publishing •

NCIS: LOS ANGELES: BOLTHOLE

By Jeff Mariotte

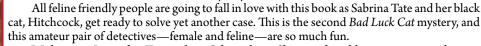
The first spinoff of the popular *NCIS* franchise has started its eighth season on CBS, and this novel finds Callen, Sam and their colleagues investigating the torture murder of a former Navy SEAL. This leads them to another SEAL who has gone into hiding, while a bank robbery leads to an officer getting shot who is a friend of Deeks. Of course, everything isn't as it seems, and the personal connection for both Deeks and Sam makes it more difficult for them to uncover answers.

Mariotte has the voices of the characters perfect, making it very easy to see this novel as a never filmed two-hour episode. He has an NCIS: New Orleans coming out early next year, and hopefully more novels set in the world of NCIS are forthcoming.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, panel master, and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery "The Fourth Lion" (with Kevin Lauderdale) published by *Suspense Publishing* •

THE BLACK CAT KNOCKS ON WOOD





We begin in Lavender, Texas where Sabrina lives. She is undeniably a cat person and seems to spend a great deal of her time correcting people on the fact that, even though Hitchcock is a black cat, he is obviously not bad luck. In fact, Sabrina attests that he is her lucky charm.

The owner of a local antique store, Twila, is convinced Hitchcock is Sabrina's familiar: (AKA: witch's companion). Of course, Sabrina thinks the woman is crazy. But ... is she? In addition, Sabrina has an Aunt Rowe who she constantly has to watch out for. Rowe has a way of always falling into something dangerous or making rash decisions that shouldn't be made.

This time around, Aunt Rowe and her friends are planning to take part in the Texas Hill Country Senior Pro Rodeo, even though they haven't any skills to be in a rodeo whatsoever. One of Aunt Rowe's friends, Pearl, asks Sabrina to borrow Hitchcock as she wants to bring bad luck to a local businesswoman. Sabrina offers a resounding, "no." Yet a case springs wide open when the business owner is later found dead and a black cat was reportedly seen in her office.

Hitchcock is being blamed. Did someone steal Hitchcock and put him in the wrong place at the wrong time? No matter what the case may be, killing is in the air and Sabrina and Hitchcock won't rest until they find out who in Lavender is to blame.

Finch has, yet again, offered a great tale of female and feline that cozy readers will love! Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

THE SEMI-SWEET HEREAFTER



By Colette London

The third in *The Chocolate Whisperer Mystery* series is absolutely fascinating and readers will be guessing until the very end to find out exactly 'whodunit.'

Main character, Hayden Mundy Moore, is the Chocolate Whisperer who knows everything there is to know about the world's most delectable delights. This time out she is headed off to London to work with Phoebe Wright at her *chocolaterie-patisserie*, Primrose. She will be staying in Phoebe's guesthouse and also meeting Jeromy Sebastian Wright, Phoebe's husband, who's a

world-renowned chef.

Hayden does meet the fine cook; however, she meets "up" with him while he's lying on the floor in the guesthouse with his head bashed in. Detective Mishra is asked to take charge of the investigation and thinks Hayden is the perpetrator. Danny Jamieson, who is Hayden's friend and security expert, has traveled to London to be with her and is staying in the guesthouse even though they're both more than uncomfortable considering the victim lost his life there.

As everyone tries like heck to prove Hayden's innocence and find the real killer, a perpetrator lurks right in the middle of the townhouses and pubs. Along with her friends, the Chocolate Whisperer will have to uncover who, exactly, clobbered the famous cook or her career and her life is liable to end far sooner than she wants it to.

Complete enjoyment is what this mystery provides. Readers of cozies and those who thrive on great mysteries that lead to the killer being revealed by a colorful, unforgettable cast will absolutely love this series. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

THE BIG BOOK OF JACK THE RIPPER

Edited and With an Introduction by Otto Penzler

Saying you have a bit of an obsession with Jack the Ripper will not make people at a dinner party flock to your side. Trust me, I've done this. The point they're missing, however, is that people who are intrigued by the one and only famous serial killer who never got caught because his real identity is still a mystery, are not insane. People intrigued by this topic don't want to walk in his bloody footsteps, we really are just fascinated with how he got away. Every year tomes, novels, murder mysteries, documentaries, etc., about Jack the Ripper come to the marketplace, making this one legend that's not about to disappear quietly. So getting this title in the mail was awesome.

This is the ultimate anthology on the man who grabbed headlines and made everyone in the East End of London hide under their beds and lock their doors (if they were smart, anyway) back in 1888. Forty-one fictional stories have been compiled, ranging from classic tales told by masters like Ellery Queen to present-day names like Deaver and Estleman.

But...that's not all. Fiction is not the only thing readers get in this almost 900-page treasure. Genuine witness statements, autopsy reports, newspaper articles and more, are also given. And never leave those *Ripperologists* out. Their various views and beliefs on who the Ripper really was are handed out like candy on Halloween.

If you're a writer who wants to get more data because you're writing your own book about these unsolved mysteries or the psycho behind them all, then this is the book for you. If you're just one of those slightly off-balanced fans of the subject (like me), then this book is a must for the shelves of your den. Either way, it cannot be missed.

I give this "5-stars" and ... yes, I no longer go to dinner parties.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by Suspense Publishing

THE TRESPASSER



By Tana French

The members of the Murder Squad in the Dublin Police Department are as hard-hitting as you might expect, but there's one focused on in this tale who may just be more hard-hitting than the rest. Meet the only woman on the squad: Antoinette Conway. And let's just say she's not very popular with her coworkers. In fact, she is very disliked by one and all.

Her partner, Steve Moran, seems to be the only one who has good feelings for Antoinette and is actually happy they're partners in the squad. He doesn't have to be at the end of Antoinette's

unpleasant behavior a great deal, and her snarls are usually not aimed in his direction.

Faced with a new murder case, Antoinette refers to the victim as a good looking blonde woman: AKA: "a dead Barbie." Her real name is Aislinn Murray, a beautiful girl found dead in her living room next to a table already set for a romantic dinner for two. There's nothing really unusual about the case, most likely it was a lover's quarrel. But the fact that Antoinette knows she's seen the victim somewhere before opens up a whole new path to the killer.

As they move forward to find out who killed Aislinn, the more complex a person she becomes. Suspicion, of course, falls on the man that she was about to have dinner with on the night of her death. Antoinette, however, is convinced that a crooked detective is somehow involved. Money, bribery, crooked cops, and members of the Murder Squad who will do anything to see Antoinette gone from the crew all play a role in this incredible suspense. And with everyone either angry, yelling, or on the verge of a meltdown, the suspects continue to grow with every page. This is one thriller that will keep you guessing for a good, long time. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

WEDDING BELL BLUES

By Ruth Moose

Beth McKenzie, who was a citizen of Littleboro, North Carolina, has returned to renovate and repair her family home and open it to the public as the "Dixie Dew Bed and Breakfast." Her old high school beau, Scott, and her right-hand woman, Ida Plum, are helping her keep the place on track, but it's a battle to continue the restoration and keep a business going at the same time.

One afternoon Beth receives a call from Crazy Reba, the town's homeless and mentally challenged woman, with the news that she has killed God. Going to see what the woman is talking about, Beth discovers Reba trying to revive a man that doesn't have a mark on him. Calling Police Chief Ossie DelGardo to the scene, Beth and the chief have a bit of tension between them. They've come up against each other previously when Beth found herself involved in another earlier murder case. There's no love lost between the two.

According to most people in town, Reba is soon to marry and is walking around with a huge, fake diamond ring on her finger. As she's loaded into a squad car on her way to jail, Beth, being just a little nosy, finds a motel key next to Reba's cell phone and goes to investigate. She finds that the room was used—not by the scrawny guy or Reba, but by a trucker for General Overnight Delivery (AKA: G.O.D.).

Beth continues to snoop, although her list of worries is long. She's supposed to be catering the sheriff's wedding and helping out with the Green Bean Festival, while also looking for a rabbit named Robert Redford who has decided to go off on his own. Then, to top it all off, murder commences once again when one of the festival judges dies at Beth's very own B&B.

Did you get all that? The action, the fun, the characters, the plots—everything about this book makes it an unforgettable read.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

MURDER, D.C.

By Neely Tucker

This exceptional story takes place in the year 2000, in a place called Frenchman's Bend; this area is in Washington, D.C. where the Potomac and Anacostia rivers meet.

This is what you would call "open ground," where D.C. went to get rid of people that needed to be killed. Most murders that took place in The Bend were never solved, but back in history, it was the main site of Washington's most infamous slave market.

Sullivan 'Sully' Carter who was once a war correspondent for "The Paper" is now a reporter at home in D.C. What you would call a guy who loves to have a good time, Sully actually left the war to return home with a very serious case of PTSD. Yet even with this illness and his tragic problem with alcohol, he still seems to be able to solve crimes.

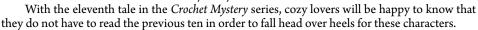
"The Paper" has just learned of the death of Billy Ellison, the twenty-one-yearold son of an African-American family with a long history in the nation's capital. His father died many years ago but his mother is still on the White House social list. She worked as a very skilled strategist for Shellie Stevens, a powerful attorney who meets with Sully and warns him to stay off the case. Sully, of course, takes her words as nothing more than a challenge, and sets his sights on tying the murder to the pain and anguish of The Bend. He wants to check out the subjects of other recent deaths that have occurred in the horrible area because he has a feeling that a small war is starting up between drug gangs there. When interviews lead him to think Ellison was involved in these crimes, Sully begins chasing down the story in order to reveal the truth to one and all.

A terrific, engrossing read, Tucker has done a fantastic job presenting an intricate work of suspense.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

HOOKING FOR TROUBLE

By Betty Hechtman



Molly Pink no longer likes looking out her window. Her neighbors have created more of an eyesore than anything else. And this eyesore does not improve when a dead body falls into the mix ...

One day, Molly does take a glance into the yard beyond her house. Spying something truly ugly, she suddenly watches her neighbors have a struggle on the balcony. This appears to be one of those domestic disturbances; however, when she sees what looks like a corpse just lying on the ground, Molly becomes frightened.

She immediately calls in the law, her ex-boyfriend Detective Barry Greenberg. But by the time he arrives, there is literally nothing to find. No corpse. And things are just fine between the neighbors. What ex-flame Barry does tell her is to forget about being an amateur detective and just go back to her crocheting. Trouble is, Molly knows something is terribly wrong and she's not going to stop until she figures out exactly what that something is.

It seems that author Betty Hechtman writes a better story every time, and for crochet mavens she is a great teacher of the craft. The plot of the story is full of suspense and humor, and you do not have to own the crocheting skill in order to enjoy this speedy, memorable mystery.

In the back of the book, the author also provides a pattern for a crocheted scarf, a couple of delicious recipes, and a preview of her next incredible title.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

GRACE SEES RED

By Julie Hyzy

There's trouble afoot at Marshfield Manor, a magnificent museum and manor house whose buildings and grounds are open daily for appreciative visitors to tour. Marshfield has been in Bennett Marshfield's family for generations, and the current curator and estate manager is Grace Wheaton, Bennett's niece and heir, with the able assistance of tart-tongued Frances Sliwa. In the seventh mystery in this series, "Grace Sees Red," Grace receives a mysterious phone call from Frances demanding that Grace meet her in a neighboring town as soon as she can. Mystified by the urgency conveyed by the usually unflappable Frances, Grace enlists her uncle to come along, too.



Following the directions Frances has given, Grace and Bennett are surprised to find themselves on the grounds of what first seems like a luxury resort, but is actually an upscale and very expensive assisted living facility. The surprises continue when they realize that one of the residents at the facility is none other than Frances's ex-husband, Percy, who is paralyzed from a long-ago accident. But the biggest surprise of all is that one of Percy's roommates has died and the police suspect he was murdered. And because he and Frances were seen arguing earlier in the day, Frances is the authorities' only suspect.

Grace and Bennett refuse to believe that Frances is guilty of anything more than having too tart a tongue and the bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But as the evidence against Frances continues to mount, Grace realizes that it is up to her to clear Frances once and for all.

"Grace Sees Red" is packed with intriguing plot twists and a cast of believable, likeable characters that will delight cozy mystery readers, for sure!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine

INTO THE LION'S DEN

By Linda Fairstein

Leave it to author Linda Fairstein to produce yet another female character that foils the bad guys and makes your heart beat like crazy as you watch her uncover the crime, discover the clues, and stop the madness! Of course, this particular heroine is doing all this at the ripe old age of ... twelve. In other words, if you loved Nancy Drew, you will absolutely love Devlin Quick.

Devlin hears that a rare map has recently been stolen from that incredible building—the New York Public Library. She decides that this is a case for her to solve, along with her friends,

Booker and Liza, and her grandmother Lulu. Trust me, this is one amazingly snoop-worthy team. As clues come to light, Devlin and her friends focus on the new exhibition that's coming soon to the NYPL. And while they are planning to attend the exhibition, they try to work out if or when a criminal may appear, or how exactly to set up a criminal in order to get them to reveal themselves to the world. Not to mention, find out why that map was so important in the first place.

This book is the very first in Ms. Fairstein's brand new *Devlin Quick Mysteries* and is a bigger, cooler mystery than you can imagine. It is also her first book geared for young adults/children. A first-person tale full of great tidbits and facts on the NYPL and famous authors from the past (Dickens, Poe, Jane Austen, etc.). Kids and adults will love this fun story and will look forward to seeing more to come. From Devlin to her cohorts to her mom, who just happens to be the Police Commissioner, this is one cast of characters that will be thrilling to watch "grow" in the years to come.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

CHASING SHADOWS

By Karen Harper

Karen Harper is definitely a name in the suspense world that can always be counted on to deliver a fast-paced, truly thrilling story that hits on all suspense cylinders.

This time, Claire Britten is the main character who enjoys a very interesting career as a forensic psychologist. By day, she deals with a tough personal health issue—a neurological condition which she has a good chance of beating. She is also a single mom of a girl who is just beginning preschool. Thankfully, Claire receives help from her sister who takes care of her daughter, Lexi, when Claire is on the job or simply not feeling well.

KAREN" HARPER CHASING SHADOWS

On one of these not so fine days, Claire is shot outside the courthouse by a bullet that Nick Markwood, an attorney, believes was meant for him. Nick helps her at the time, but once she has recovered from the injury his interest doesn't stop there. In fact, Nick offers her a job proposal. This job requires both of them to travel from Southwest Florida to St. Augustine. Nick wants Claire to help him clear the daughter of a family friend of her mother's murder, although Claire is not aware of Nick's far deeper, more personal need to solve this case as fast as possible.

This story is full of twists that even involve Claire's ex-husband, Jace, who is bound to win Claire back even though it was Jace who started divorce proceedings in the first place. Nick and Claire are also gradually exploring their attraction for one another while on the hunt to solve a crime.

"Chasing Shadows" will most likely keep all readers guessing, and when your mind is made up as to who's who and who did what, you'll probably be wrong. It's a story that will keep you on your toes, as author Karen Harper keeps the action and mystery going at full throttle right up to the very last chapter.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

RENDER SAFE

By Pascal Marco

By taking two unsolved incidents—the crashing of a USAF jet from Davis Monthan AFB in Tucson, and the explosion of a house in Phoenix where an entire family is found dead, except the missing father—Marco has taken these two unrelated circumstances and created an action thriller worthy of Grisham or Ludlum.

In just his second novel, Marco's protagonist, Stan Kobe, a Maricopa County prosecutor, a man with his own secrets, takes on a missing person's cold case. Ten years ago, he had investigated the murder of an entire family, with a wife and two children beheaded and burned beyond recognition, where the father went missing and was suspected of the crime.

Tracking the killer to Arizona's Mogollon Rim, Kobe finds his suspect has disappeared into thin air. A background check of the missing man reveals a complex individual: a specialist in bomb ordnance with clandestine training, he was also a neo-Nazi who joined forces with a local hate group.

Kobe, an African-American, had run into similar hate crimes several times in his career, but when three more beheadings happen ten years later, he links the two instances and discovers a connection to a domestic terrorism plot for the ages. With four missing bombs large enough to take out Roosevelt Dam, and time rapidly expiring, Kobe leads the charge to solve the cold case and unearth the really bad guys behind the worst domestic terrorist attack since the Oklahoma City bombing.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of "Kettle of Vultures"

RENDER

SAFE

HOME

By Harlan Coben

Talk about a Happy Holiday wish come true: a new book by magnificent author, Harlan Coben! And, boys and girls, you are going to love this plot.

It's been ten years since two boys vanished without a trace. One of the boys, Rhys Baldwin, is a relative of Windsor 'Win' Lockwood III, who happens to be Myron Bolitar's best friend. If fans do not remember Myron, he is the ex-basketball player who, because of an accident on the court, became a sports agent, detective, and all around good guy who just happens to be Win's friend.



Due to an anonymous tip, Win goes in hot pursuit to London to look for one of the boys who has supposedly shown up on the streets there. Win makes a telephone call to Myron, who he has not seen in over a year, and his old friend and back-up is on the way.

Myron has just proposed marriage to his girl and they have put their engagement on hold so Myron can meet up with Win and help him out. Win has found one of the missing boys, but not the relative. Instead, he is on the trail of the other boy in question who went missing that day: Patrick Moore.

When Win and Myron meet up, their inquiries take the men to a real piece of work that people refer to as Fat Gandhi, who says he has the boys and demands lots of money for their return. Kidnapping, scam artists, crimes not yet uncovered—what began as a missing persons case has now turned into a far greater mess to unravel.

Coben writes so perfectly that he can draw the attention away, distract readers whenever he feels like it to slip something in that you'll never know or even think is coming straight at you. When you've "got it all figured out," you most definitely do not. As always, you cannot put this one down until all the secrets have been unveiled.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

CREPE FACTOR

By Laura Childs with Terrie Farley Moran

It's hard to believe that this is the fourteenth installment in the fun and intriguing *Scrapbooking Mystery* series. And, yes, the fun has not slowed down even one bit.

We catch up with main character and scrapbook shop owner Carmela Bertrand, with her best friend, Ava, at the Winter Market in New Orleans. The two of them witness a fight between Quigg Brevard—owner of a local restaurant and recent Vintner, and Martin Lash—a food critic whose joy in life is to trash chefs in his reviews.

While the women move on, Martin staggers and falls to his death; a very large serving fork sticking out of his neck. When Carmela's boyfriend, Detective Edgar Babcock arrives on scene, all heck breaks loose in Quigg's world. People are trying to talk to the detective about the victim, while Quigg is being asked about what went on after their fight.

Oh, by the way, Quigg dated Carmela in the past. Immediately, seeing the very real chance of being locked up for life, he asks Carmela to clear his name. He attests that, yes, the fight definitely happened and there were eye witnesses. But Quigg maintains that he was not the one who stuck a fork into the neck of the rude bird. Quigg is also absolutely convinced that Detective Babcock has it in for him, and he pleads with Carmela to come to his aid.

Although her boyfriend warns her to stay away, Carmela decides to help her ex who is still plainly interested in her. Carmela doesn't want to upset Babcock, but can't resist. Jumping in with both feet, she attempts to balance her now unhappy boyfriend with her scrapbooking store, while tracking a killer.

This is a really fun book for cozy lovers who will positively enjoy the cast of characters. Along with crafting tips, the Cajun recipes found in the back of the book are added "gifts" of absolute delight.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

33

AS DEATH DRAWS **NEAR**

By Anna Lee Huber

"As Death Draws Near" is the fifth in Anna Lee Huber's Lady Darby historical mystery series, and fans will love the fact that this is one mystery duo that just seems to be getting better with age.

Kiera and Sebastian Gage have just married but are having a hard time finding any alone time for themselves. Even their honeymoon goes on the fritz when Gage's father sends them a message to go to Dublin and investigate the killing of a nun at an Abbey. No details have been sent to the newlyweds, but they are instructed to find transport to Ireland as quickly as they can.

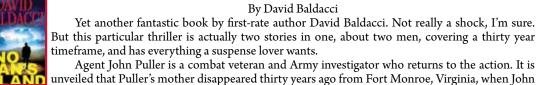
So... off they go. Goodbye picnic. Goodbye alone time. Unfortunately, when they arrive, they find that all the people they question in the area are almost mute. None are offering up any facts, and are providing hardly any information to help them discover what on earth happened to the poor woman. Surprisingly, even the nuns from the Abbey, along with the local Constable, are holding back details for reasons Kiera and Gage simply can't figure out.

investigation As the gears up, they are suddenly stopped in their tracks when yet another nun is found murdered. There may be a serial killer afoot!

Offering readers a great deal of history, especially delving into the religious issues that brought pain, anger and division to Ireland throughout time, this book definitely engages the reader's interest immediately. The new relationship—watching two main characters adapt to marriage and work their first case as husband and wifeis also a whole lot of fun. Hopefully Lady Darby and her circle will be investigating for a long time to come.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

NO MAN'S LAND



was a young boy. In spite of a concentrated search and investigation, she was never seen again. Now,

however, new evidence has come to light that Puller's father, who is now a retired three star General suffering from dementia, had come home to Fort Monroe from overseas on the day his wife disappeared. And now, thirty years later, a man who understands little and remembers even less is suspect number one.

Paul Rogers is the other man this book focuses on. Although in prison for the last ten years, twenty years ago he was at Fort Monroe. On one fateful night, Puller and Rogers's worlds collided with horrific results, and the truth of the matter has been buried by the powers that be for the last three decades. One facet includes a top secret project involving a super-soldier, and the man who is now looking for the ones responsible.

Puller is a CID investigator with the Army and might be officially excluded from working this case if he disobeys orders. When intelligence operatives, including Veronica Knox who is an old friend, shows up, Puller knows that this case is going to be more than interesting.

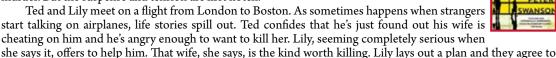
As always with Baldacci's skill, the author carefully brings together two tales that are haunting, thrilling, and beyond memorable. 5-Stars!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

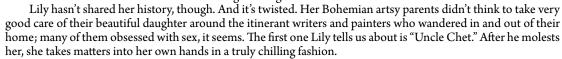
THE KIND WORTH KILLING

By Peter Swanson

This novel is filled with characters who should be unlikeable, but I found myself cheering for...some of them. It's not a murder mystery, as much of the book is spent planning to commit murder. But the suspense and tension are first notch.



meet in the Boston area later if Ted decides to go through with the scheme.



Ted shows up and he and Lily keep meeting and making plans. Lily keeps from sharing her history by saying she will do it when Ted's wife is dead. They are playing a dangerous game which deepens when Ted starts falling in love with Lily. The more we learn about her, the worse this idea seems.

The narrators are switched regularly and, throughout, alternate future paths are hinted at, even laid out. Following the characters along those paths will keep you on the edge of your seat, and guessing. This could end up very badly.

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Requiem in Red" •

THE BLACKLIST: THE BEEKEEPER NO. 159

By Steven Piziks

The fourth season of The Blacklist on NBC is still getting good ratings, and it is primarily due to the awesome depicting a group of people called The Librarians James Spader. Is Raymond Reddington, the character he plays, a hero or a villain? Some of the most deplorable and cunning foes have come from this show, and this novel has two nasty ones: The Bodysnatcher, and the Beekeeper. The Bodysnatcher has ways of kidnapping victims without anyone realizing that an abduction has taken place. The Beekeeper takes the people "rescued" by the Bodysnatcher and inducts them into his cult called, The Hive. Reddington always has ulterior motives for everything he does, and this case is no exception. When the FBI goes after the Bodysnatcher, they don't realize it's a trap designed to capture Reddington for The Hive, and now Elizabeth Keen wants to destroy the world if unleashed. and her FBI partner are prisoners.

Fans of the show will love this diversion while waiting the mix of history, folklore, and adventure. for new episodes to appear early next year.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, panel master, and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery "The Fourth Lion" (with Kevin Lauderdale) published by Suspense Publishing •

THE LIBRARIANS AND THE **LOST LAMP**

THE KIND

WORTH

PETER

KILLING

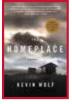
By Greg Cox

The TNT series has just started its third season who are responsible for protecting the world from magical relics. The show is a lot of fun, and this novel is no exception. Greg Cox has a gift for making stories based on established franchises seem like they are actual episodes of the show. The Librarians learn about a criminal organization known as the Forty Thieves. Ten years earlier Librarian Flynn Carsen fought them and now the new Librarians must use every bit of their knowledge and gifts in order to stop the group from obtaining the terrifying prize of Aladdin's Lamp. The genie inside is malevolent and

Those unfamiliar with the series will still love

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, panel master, and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery "The Fourth Lion" (with Kevin Lauderdale) published by Suspense Publishing •

THE HOMEPLACE



By Kevin Wolf

A former high school basketball player from Colorado, Chase Ford was always a very lucky man. The star of his high school, he earned a free ride to college because of his elite basketball skills, and was given the opportunity to play for the Lakers. Unfortunately, pain and sadness came when the fates shifted and Chase hurt his knee in an accident. A future was ripped away from him before it even started; and when he began his reliance on pain pills, he lost his marriage as well.

Chase has fallen apart in every sense of the word. Like many, he decides to travel back home to the place he once knew in order to lick his wounds. Paying this visit to his hometown before he decides whether or not to take on an announcer's job, Chase must deal with the reality of his upbringing. Yes, he was a star... where basketball was concerned. However, Chase actually had an unhappy childhood; his mom was hurt in an accident and his father's relationship with the woman he hired to care for the house produced a child that Chase has never even seen.

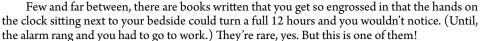
Chase's return just so happens to coincide with the murders of Jimmie Riley, a star of the present-day basketball team; and, shortly after, Chase's former coach. His high school archrival, Lincoln Kendall, is now sheriff and eager to tie Chase's homecoming to the crimes. Luckily, Chase still has friends from school living there: Marty Storm, now a sheriff's deputy; and Birdie Hawkins, who has always been in love with Chase. Before the sheriff can pin the crimes on Chase, these three team up to find out who the criminal really is.

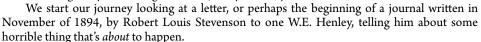
Highly suspenseful and filled with the underlying tones of sadness and desperation, each page brings out a new facet of the town. This is truly an in-depth story of how a person can destroy their life when handed one they never wanted in the first place.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

THE JEKYLL REVELATION

By Robert Masello





In the present day, there is an environmentalist named Rafe who stumbles across a trunk holding this journal, along with a bottle of potion that should stay buried.

And there we have it: a story that has two paths, Rafe and the well-known Stevenson whose journey may have included dealing with a villain of monumental proportions. Yes, Jack the Ripper is back.

Robert Louis Stevenson is a man on the hunt to find, if not a cure, at least something that would help him, seeing as that he's been suffering from bad health since he was a small child. He has moved to Samoa for health reasons and has just learned that a native woman has been killed in the same way that Jack the Ripper's victims were. At this time, Stevenson fears that the killings he thought were over have simply been halted in England. And that the Whitechapel beast has traveled across the world to begin killing again. A beast that may just have a hand in Stevenson's well-known creation "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

Masello has done an incredible job showing you what inspired Jekyll and Hyde, and what horror made London's most infamous slayer of all time sit up and take notice. Enjoy! This is one you will want to read over and over again, no matter what time of day or night it happens to be.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by Suspense Publishing •



DEATH OF A PUMPKIN CARVER

By Lee Hollis

Hayley Powell, Food and Cocktails Columnist, lives and works in Bar Harbor, Maine. As she is getting ready for Halloween and the incoming fun of Pumpkin Spice Season, she finds out that her ex-husband, Danny, is back in town. While she realizes that her kids should spend time with their father, she wonders what is behind his sudden need to see his family. All she can assume is that he's in need of cash and Hayley is determined not to be taken in by the charming man all over

But it seems money is the least of the man's worries. Soon Danny's moonshine brewing uncle is discovered dead next to a tombstone in the local cemetery and Danny is suddenly elevated to suspect number one.

This installment is number eight in the *Hayley Powell Food and Cocktails* series, and is all about the spooky fun of Halloween. Filled with humor, murder and mysteries, author Lee Hollis has created yet another fantastic cozy.

Columns written by the main character, stories from Hayley's life, and fall-themed recipes for delicious foods and great cocktails are interspersed throughout the tale for all to enjoy. Take the Pumpkin Pie Martini, for instance. This one is just right to get everyone into that holiday mood.

The mystery is well-written and interesting and the story will keep any reader's attention. Although it's not essential to read all of the books in this series, after reading just one and meeting these hysterical characters, there is no doubt you'll go back and make sure you've digested them all!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

CATCH AS CAT CAN

By Claire Donally

The return of Shadow...a rather large tomcat owned by Sunny Coolidge.

Sunny is bound determined to be a successful amateur detective in her small Maine town. This time out it is Shadow who has gone exploring and discovered a brand new fish store located right next to Sunny's office. One fine day, while waiting for business owner Neil Garret to open the fish store's doors, someone grabs Shadow by the neck and the once happy tomcat finds himself in sudden danger. In fact, Neil finds Shadow with a piece of rope around his neck. (Don't worry...he's fine.) But it turns out that the dead body found in the freezer of the new fish market didn't have nine lives.

ROBERT MASELLO

Then things really start to erupt. Federal marshals invade the small town in order to protect a witness. The Russian mob finds this area in Maine on their radar, and there even seems to be a gun running incident and a little smuggling going on. Whew! Talk about ruining the serenity.

Oddly enough, Shadow the tomcat plays a pivotal role in all this action, as Sunny and Chief Investigator Will Price, whom she is having a relationship with, find themselves knee-deep in a huge mess.

Donally once again does a fantastic job of staying with the story and allowing her funloving characters filled with down home charm to live out their fabulous lives in Kittery Harbor, Maine. She even adds in an ice storm just for fun. Shadow is a definite thinker and readers will be laughing as they listen to his thoughts on the folks all around him. This is a delightful read that ends with a question. The one thing we do know for certain is that the lovely team of Sunny and Shadow will be back for another adventure.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

THE MADWOMAN UPSTAIRS

By Catherine Lowell

From the very beginning, you have got to love this book. I mean ... don't you just *love* this title? There is a huge percentage of people out there (including myself) who had to deal with just such a woman at least once in their lifetimes!

This particular story focuses on college student, Samantha Whipple, who is just starting out at Oxford. Samantha has the honor of being the last of the famous Brontes. That's right! She is the last remaining descendant of the Bronte family; her father, Tristan, was descended from a

cousin of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte. It seems that Tristan died in a fire when Samantha was a teenager. He had told Samantha that she would inherit something called "The Warnings of Experience." What's that, you ask? Is it a manuscript from one of the aforementioned Brontes? (Of course I'm not going to tell you.)

Anyway, Samantha is a first-year student at Oxford when she meets a banker who will tell her about her legacy. She finds out that her father was beyond obsessed with his ancestors and she now hopes that studying the history of the Brontes will take her to a family legacy that is really nothing more than just a rumor.

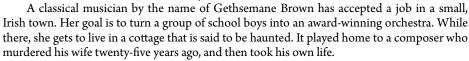
Handed a shoebox that contains a bookmark, Samantha receives this first clue in what will turn out to be quite a treasure hunt. Someone else is also intruding, or perhaps pushing her down the Bronte path. At Oxford, in her 14th century tower room that was once used to quarantine plague victims, is a painting called "The Governess." And as her journey moves forward, copies of Bronte novels start to appear in Samantha's room; not just any old volumes, mind you, but her own dead father's personal copies thought to be destroyed in the fire that took his life.

More to say? Not a chance. Any fans of the Bronte sisters, history, journeys through the past ... all of you will eat this one up!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •



By Alexia Gordon



Taking place in a rich countryside filled with pubs where pints are continuously passed around, Gethsemane finds herself immersed in a town full of strong "manly men" who can be more than a bit rude at times. Thankfully, she's a strong character. And when she settles in, she is even able to deal with her resident ghost, who just so happens to appear in front of her and carries on a conversation.

Not only does she already have a job to do with her students, and must get them ready for a competition that they literally have to win, but now this ghost is asking her to prove that he did not kill his wife so long ago. Someone else was the villain behind the crime and he begs Gethsemane to clear his name so he can finally rest in peace.

A fantastic story with a great ghost, with bad timing. There are parts that are extremely comical, and Gethsemane is a fantastic character that you root for as the pressure continually builds for her to succeed ... in more ways than one.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •

ORDER TO KILL

By Kyle Mills

As readers probably know, the creator of well-known and beloved hero, Mitch Rapp—author Vince Flynn—passed away in 2013, leaving a huge hole in the suspense genre. Thankfully, Mitch Rapp still lives in the hearts and hands (and incredible mind) of Kyle Mills, who continues to write about the agent's daring acts.

When the CIA needs somebody to keep Pakistani nuclear weapons out of terrorists' hands, Mitch is the guy they call. He is looked on with fear by some of the most powerful leaders in the world, but this time he must go undercover and dive behind the "mask" of an American ISIS recruit.

Russian President Krupin is a mastermind, or so he believes. He is thinking that utilizing a half-dozen A-bombs might be able to destroy enough Middle Eastern oil fields that he could re-route money to Mother Russia. Krupin finds his best man to get things done; a very talented killer by the name of Grisha Azarov. This formidable gentleman is not stupid and does not underestimate his enemy on this one. He tells Krupin that Mitch Rapp has shown no evident weaknesses, seeing as that his rivals are all dead. But, for Krupin, he knows they can do this and he and Azarov go head-to-head with Rapp in order to see their goal to fruition.

Craig Bailer, a mechanic who has three PhD's and is decorated with tattoos, is definitely the cleverest guy in the room, and readers will love him. He is also given one of the best lines that should be in a movie one day when he tells Mitch, "It's a beautiful night and we have a cooler full of beer and a stolen A-bomb. It don't get any better than that."

As a reader, I agree completely. A war of words, a war of nations, terrorism, suspense—you name it, this title absolutely shows that an extremely admirable "hand" is in the writer's seat to carry on Vince Flynn's incredible character.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion



THE TEMPLAR ARCHIVE

By James Becker

Get ready for a real treat. This is the second novel in James Becker's new *Templar* series; the last being the incredible installment, "The Lost Treasure of the Templars."

When Robin Jessop and David Mallory return home from their last journey, they walk into a myriad of questions. The cops are asking all kinds of things, seeing as that three dead bodies have just been discovered at Jessop's home. When the duo has satisfied the law in regards to where they've been, they are on to the next clue in their adventures: analyzing the Templar treasure box in their possession and heading out to an old French cathedral.

In the meantime, a Rome based Dominican Order has been operating secretly, keeping tabs on Jessop and Mallory's mission. Thus far, the Order has failed to eliminate the investigative pair. Being the keepers of many Templar secrets, the Order soon realizes that they must stop these inquisitive minds before they can unravel work that's been done for centuries, and unearth secrets that have been buried for even longer.

As Jessop and Mallory go on their merry way, they stumble onto a kind of treasure that could literally allow the Templars to claim most of Europe as their own. Will the Order step in? Can Mallory and Jessop go up against an organization of this size, operating this long, and continue to stay safe? It will be interesting to see who comes out the winner.

This series offers up a cast of characters and history that is completely fresh from the many Templar books written. A true treasure hunt, readers will have an absolute ball while getting a very cool education that never overloads the story or causes the action to slow in any way. These books are extremely rich in history, drama and thrills, and offer just enough to make you wonder what's coming next.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* •

Dear Reader,

When my youngest son, Thad, was diagnosed with diabetes at five, and I learned of the terrible side effects he would likely



face in his lifetime, I could not simply hope for the best. I had to do something to fight back. This is part of that effort. When you buy this digital boxed set filled with wonderful Christmas stories from some of the biggest names in romance, you are not only helping my son, you are helping everyone who suffers with this terrible disease. This year, all proceeds will be going to Dr. Ed Damiano at Boston University (who also has a son with Type 1) to help him finish engineering the artificial pancreas, which will go far toward helping insulin-dependent diabetics remain healthy until that elusive biological cure can be found. So, please, pre-order **ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS** today (which will be released

November 1st and will only be available through December 31, 2016) and encourage your friends and family to do the same. You'll get many hours of enjoyable reading in exchange for a small

donation that will help a lot of people.

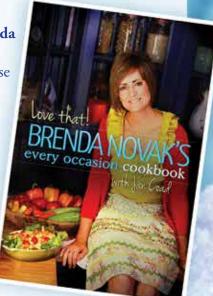


Also for sale is **LOVE THAT! Brenda Novak's Every Occasion Cookbook**.
For more details on both projects, please

visit www.brendnovakforthecure.org.

Happy reading!

Love, Brenda



BRENDA Corthe Corte of Diabetes

MOVIES

By Jeff Ayers

JACK REACHER: NEVER GO BACK 2016

Genre - Action/Adventure/Crime (PG-13)

Fans of the books who can't get over Tom Cruise playing Reacher should give the movies a second chance. The latest in the series has him once again in the wrong place at the wrong time, and in order to save the life and reputation of someone he cares about he will go to all lengths to uncover the truth. The people behind the conspiracy think they have collateral on Reacher since they have uncovered someone they believe is his daughter. The films are fun as you watch Reacher react to everything they throw his way. Trying to bring a dose of sentimentality to the proceedings is a bit forced, but otherwise there are worse ways to spend two hours. •

DOCTOR STRANGE

2016

Genre - Action/Adventure/Fantasy (PG-13)

The latest film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe is a revelation. Benedict

Cumberbatch plays the egotistical doctor who seeks answers after barely surviving a car crash. A surgeon himself, he doesn't want to accept that he will never have the use of his hands again. When he hears about a mysterious

place in Nepal that might provide a cure, he goes, only to have his mind blown with the truth of the universe's secrets. Origin stories usually deliver the best translation from comic book to film, and this is no exception. A sequel would be most welcome, and as always with the Marvel films, stay through *all* of the credits. A minor character delivers a major film going experience.



FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

2016

Genre - Adventure/Family/Fantasy (PG-13)

Special effects and creatures are the stars in this prequel to J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter saga. It's 1926 New York, and wizard Newt Scamander arrives from England with his suitcase. He quickly runs into trouble when a No-Maj (Muggle) accidentally switches cases with him. What Newt has in his case is a practical zoo of magical creatures, and now they are on the loose. The major plot elements are somewhat predictable, but the assorted beasts are wonderful and fun to watch. Two minor characters almost steal the movie from the leads, but is it due to the more interesting storyline for them or perhaps the way the actor Eddie Redmayne portrays Newt? Fans of the franchise will have already seen this, but it is



still worthwhile for those unfamiliar with Harry Potter (and it would probably be a good idea to get out of the cave and go see a movie).

ARRIVAL 2016

Genre – Drama/Mystery/Sci-Fi (PG-13)

Twelveships descend from space and land all over the globe. Linguistics professor Louise Banks has been battling grief, and when she's asked to lead a team to establish first contact and attempt to communicate with the aliens, she reluctantly agrees. As the misunderstandings pile up, other nations begin to calculate means of taking out the ships before they can harm the people of earth. Banks must use all of her knowledge plus expand her mind to learn the true motive behind the arrival. In the end, the movie turns in as surprising direction, and Oscar nominations for Amy Adams who plays Banks and for Best

Picture is guaranteed. Unquestionably one of the best movies of 2016.

MOANA

2016

Genre - Animation/Adventure/Comedy (PG)

The latest Disney animated feature



is an amazing journey that is both beautiful to watch and a boatload of fun. Ever since she was small, Moana had a deep friendship with the ocean. Now a teenager and ready to take over leadership of the village from her

father, she learns a horrifying truth.

The world is dying. Food has become scarce, and her people have forgotten their past of being ocean voyagers. Moana realizes in order to save her people she must journey across the water to find the oncemighty demigod Maui and force him to return something he stole. Great visuals and an awesome soundtrack from Lin-Manuel Miranda (Hamilton) make this a must for everyone, not just Disney fans.

Jeff Ayers co-hosts Beyond the Cover with John Raab, and is a freelance reviewer for the Associated Press, Library Journal, and Booklist. He is the author of several books in the worlds of both fiction and non-fiction, including "Voyages of Imagination: The Star Trek Fiction Companion" and the thriller "Long Overdue."





America's Favorite Suspense Authors On the Rules of Fiction

CHASING THE STORY, EMBRACING THE PANIC HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN'S RULES OF WRITING

By Anthony Franze Press Photo Credit: Iden Ford

In this series, author Anthony Franze interviews other suspense writers about "the rules" of writing. This month, Anthony talks with bestselling author Hank Phillippi Ryan.

Hank Phillippi Ryan has probably won more literary awards than she can keep track of—Agathas, Anthonys, Daphnes, Macavitys, to name a few.

But winning awards is nothing new for Ryan, who by day is a celebrated investigative journalist in Boston, winning 33 Emmys, 14 Edward R. Murrows, and—well, you get the idea. Despite the accolades, when we spoke recently, Ryan carried no literary airs. She was generous with her time, thoroughly prepared for the interview, and excited about her new novel, "Say No More," which came out this month and already is getting rave reviews.

One gets the sense that Ryan brings her infectious enthusiasm to everything she does. She embraces life, the thrill of chasing a story, real or fictional. So it should be no surprise that Ryan's advice to aspiring scribes is to embrace everything—the good and the bad—that comes with becoming a writer.



1. EMBRACE THE PROCESS

"Writing a book is difficult," Ryan said. "And writing a good book is very difficult. It gets even more difficult with each book because you want to show you've gotten better, you're growing as a writer." Ryan said that budding authors need to embrace that writing is hard. Even now, nine novels later, Ryan said she struggles. "Some days my brain is firing so rapidly my fingers can't type fast enough. Other days, I think my work is terrible, every word is a cliché, every line derivative. But I've learned that the answer to my fears is to just move forward."

Ryan's point is that once writers accept that there will be good days—and many, many bad—it frees them to sit down and write without the angst and self-doubt. "There will be no book if you don't write it. Just keep going!"

2. EMBRACE SURPRISE

Ryan said she starts a book with only "one unique gem of an idea—one tiny thing that makes the book different, special." From there, she doesn't outline or plot out the events. As with her journalism career, she chases the story. "I've been a reporter for forty years, and when I investigate I have no idea where the story will lead; I'm following where it takes me. The story is already written but I don't know it yet. I need to discover it. The same is true with my novels."

One of the reasons Ryan does not outline, she said, is that she likes to be surprised. "When my editor asks for a synopsis of my next book, I say, 'How can I send a summary of what's going to happen if I don't know yet?"

Ryan said she subscribes to one of Dennis Lehane's rules: she puts characters in a room and lets them crash into each other. "When you write real characters with real passion, conflict will arise. They will move the story where it's supposed to go; you can't know where until they start behaving the way they behave." Writers should embrace the surprise, she said. "It's the magic of writing."

3. EMBRACE EDITING

Ryan said the best education she's had as a writer was being forced to cut her first manuscript from 723 pages down to 400. "It made me analyze whether each scene was needed, whether each paragraph was needed, whether each line was needed. And whether I had the perfect words. It made me assess my crutches. I realized I was repetitive. I was derivative. I was showing off. So I took all of that out."

Ryan said when you assess your manuscript in this way, what's left is "the book you should've written in the first place." Ryan said editing is one of her favorite parts of the process because it means that she's completed a first draft. The cutting and refining is the fun part.

"THERE'S NOT A SINGLE AUTHOR I'VE MET WHO DOESN'T HAVE DOUBTS; THE MOMENT WHERE WE SAY, 'THE BOOK IS TERRIBLE, I'M A TERRIBLE WRITER, I CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT'S NEXT, AND I DON'T SEE HOW I EVER WILL.' "



Not that it's easy. "When you write one-hundred-thousand words you're so familiar with the book that you can't see it objectively anymore. The best thing you can do is to try to read it through someone else's eyes." One way to do so, she said, is to read the manuscript aloud. Something about hearing the words, she said, takes you out of "writer brain" and into "reader brain." "Reading out loud will identify the peaks and valleys in your story—they will reveal themselves in astonishingly clear ways."

4. EMBRACE PRIORITIES

Ryan said that one of the biggest impediments to becoming a writer is life. Laundry, social media, television. Ryan said she once alphabetized her spice rack to procrastinate writing. "Then I realized that I was the only one who cared about my book. If I didn't finish, someone else would write a better book. If your priority is your novel, you need to write before all that other stuff."

She prioritizes writing by giving herself a daily goal. "I know I need five-hundred-forty words a day to meet deadline. It's silly and childlike, but it gives me great joy to fill in a box with a checkmark after I finish my words. Some days I'll reach my goal in an hour, others it's four hours." Having a daily word-count goal works for Ryan because it helps take the anxiety out of the process. "When I'm behind, I know how far behind. But it gives me comfort because when I do my words per day I know inevitably I'll be done. It's just arithmetic."

Ryan said that the key is finding a time to write that works for you. "I couldn't be one of those writers who gets up early—I'd fall asleep at my desk. But after years working the eleven o'clock news, my brain is humming at eleven, so that's a great time for me to get down those words. Find your sweet spot. My mom always said, 'You will if you want to."

5. EMBRACE THE PANIC

"There's not a single author I've met who doesn't have doubts; the moment where we say, 'The book is terrible, I'm a terrible writer, I can't figure out what's next, and I don't see how I ever will.' But inevitably and absolutely after we go through this panic, the answer emerges."

When Ryan reaches the I-have-no-idea-what-to-do-next point, that means the great idea is coming soon. "This is a point in the journey. The next point is when I figure out the solution. I embrace the panic as just one of the mile markers in the marathon of writing that I'll soon be running past." In Ryan's most recent novel, "Say No More," she crosses the finish line a winner. •

* * *

*Anthony Franze is a lawyer in the Appellate and Supreme Court practice of a prominent Washington, D.C. law firm, and author of "The Advocate's Daughter" (St. Martin's Press/Minotaur, 2016), a family thriller set in the insular world of the U.S. Supreme Court. Franze's next high-court thriller, "The Outsider," releases on March 21, 2017.

Montage Press Photo Credit: Michael Palmer (St. Martin's Press), Tess Gerritsen (www.tessgerritsen.com), Steve Berry (Kelly Campbell), John Lescroart (provided by author), Gayle Lynds (www.gaylelynds.com), Richard North Patterson (Miranda Lewis), Anthony Franze (provided by author), Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child (provided by authors), John Gilstrap (Kensington Publishing), Catherine Coulter (provided by author), Brad Meltzer (Herman Estevez), Heather Graham (provided by author), Andrew Gross (provided by author), Robert Dugoni (provided by author), Michael Connolly (Philippe Matsas), Alexandra Sokoloff (Lawrence Smith), Karen Dionne (provided by author), Jamie Freveletti (provided by author), J.T. Ellison (provided by author), James Bruno (provided by author), and David Morrell (Jennifer Esperanza).

Featured Artist

Interview by Amy Lignor for Suspense Magazine

Evelyne Paniez
SECRÈT D'AR TISTE:
MAGICAL & MYSTERIOUS

SALVATION

Model/Photographer Credit: Stamatoyoshi @ Shutterstock.com



Evelyne Paniez was immersed in the many creative aspects of life. But as time moved forward, it became clear that art and drawing were truly what captured her fascination. Evelyne enjoyed school, yet always loved coming home, picking up the pencil and creating works of art. What she didn't know, however, is that in her future lay the talent of photo manipulation that would one

day become a huge part of her life.

Following the "accepted" path, she took on a "sensible" career, yet she constantly felt the pull of the artistic world calling her back. Believing in words stated by the incredible Walt Disney, she headed back to school and took a Graphic Design course in the evenings. Although a long four years was given to its completion, Evelyne is now a self-employed graphic designer and doing what she absolutely loves on a daily basis.

Inspired by music, books and more, she travels into her fantasy worlds and uses her experiences, memories, and love of design to express true emotion—creating works of art that last forever. *Suspense Magazine* recently sat down with Evelyne to learn more about the artist and what drives her to design.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Where did your love of art originally stem from? A teacher, a parent, a friend, etc.?

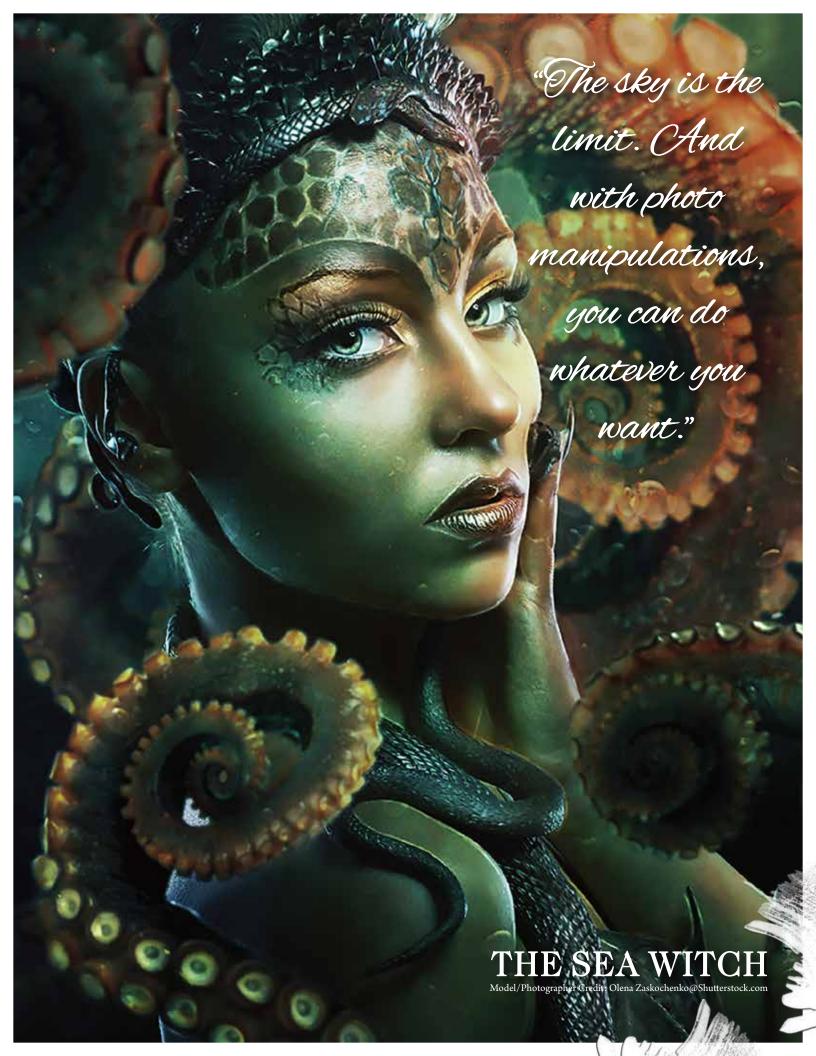
Evelyne Paniez (E.P.): When my mother was a child, she loved drawing, so I think it runs in the family (lol). When the first Lord of the Rings movie came into theaters in Belgium, I fell totally in love with the beautiful concept art, the fantastic characters, and epic storyline. So I collected all the interviews I could find given by the actors, bought all art books and went through them over and over again. I even started reading the sequels, because an open ending (and not knowing what's going to happen next), is just not my cup of tea! ;-) After that, I also discovered the internet and found some other amazing fantasy artists and fell in love all over again. When I was around 21 years old, I discovered DeviantArt where I make new friends on a daily basis and can learn from other fellow artists by watching their tutorials and supporting their work. It's so nice to have friends from all over the globe. (So, if you read this, guys, I would like to say a big thank you for all your kind support over the years!)

S. MAG.: What is your favorite part of the development process of a new piece?

E.P.: When all the pieces of the puzzle have been made and







have their place in the composition, and I can begin with the development of the piece. Changing hair colors, applying several effects, using blending modes, painting, etc. The sky is the limit. And with photo manipulations, you can do whatever you want. It truly is amazing!

S. MAG.: Do you have an emotional connection to your pieces? Of all your pieces, which is your favorite?

E.P.: My favorite series is my "Tales Untold," based upon known fairytales, but transforming them by giving them my own interpretation.

With my best works, I have an emotional connection, yes. They mean something to me... For example, my work "Puppet on a String" was created during a period where I struggled with the fact that people who have a higher position in a company, have a certain power over you and feel invincible, yet they don't take into account the feelings of others. They don't even listen to others, even though these people could also contribute, have a valuable opinion, and really be seen as part of the team. It makes me feel like a puppet on a string, as sometimes I have to perform without thinking—as the thinking was already done by someone else. You see what I mean?

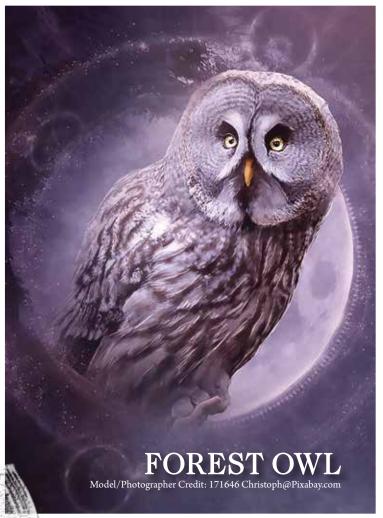
S. MAG.: You are also an incredibly talented photographer. Did that medium draw you to photo manipulation or was it the other way around?

E.P.: Thank you so much for this huge compliment! No, actually it didn't. ;-) When I was around 18 years old, I sometimes was a model for beginning and intermediate photographers—I loved modeling but I always wanted to know how it would be behind the camera. And the photo manipulations started after my interest in fantasy art, as a teenager. When traveling the world, my camera and accessories are the most important objects to carry along with me.

S. MAG.: If you had to choose a quote (or a line) to describe what motivates you day to day, what would it be?

E.P.: A particular quote from Walt Disney: "All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them." This sounds like music to my ears. I like this quote a lot, because it says that it's ok for you to dream and to never give up! Hoping and dreaming are things in life that are/can be crucial for your future. When I was 18, I wanted to go to art school, but was obliged to follow another educational path and wasn't allowed to attend. The primary reasons were, 'there are already enough designers in the world and it will be too hard to find a job' and 'you have





to follow an education close to the one you already followed in high school.' So I did, and finished three years later as a Medical Management Assistant. I started working as a Clinical Trial Assistant at SGS Life Science Services (SGS is an international company, you might know), but there was something missing in my life. I couldn't be creative at all. So I decided on my own to follow a course as a Graphic Designer, taking evening classes. It took me 4 years, but I graduated! It wasn't always easy but, like Disney said, I pursued my dreams. And I don't regret it at all.

S. MAG.: What artists, if any, have influenced your work and how?

E.P.: When I was a teenager, I searched the internet for beautiful fantasy pictures. I saved them on my computer, so I could watch them daily over-and-over again. One day, I promised myself that I would figure out how to make these and create them myself, being that I loved them so much!

Inspirational artists for me (there are a lot, but here is a small selection of them): Luis Royo, Alexandra V. Bach, Clair ObscurArt, Gil Elvgren, and the Dutch Rien Poortvliet.

The most important thing for me when creating art is that other people/fellow artists find inspiration in my works.

S. MAG.: If you could be any character in fiction, who would you be?

E.P.: That's a difficult one, as there are lots of great characters in fiction. But if I truly have to pick one...I would be Lara Croft, I guess. When I was a child, we had a PlayStation 1 (I know, it's like ages ago) and my favorite game was Tomb Raider. I love the adventure and tension in the games, the storylines, etc. For me, when playing this game, I was entering the experience of a real treasure hunter and survivor. Awesome, isn't it? The graphics nowadays are extraordinary (e.g., Rise of the Tomb Raider.) I also look up to the people that design these games and for their game art. Nice work!

S. MAG.: Finish this sentence: If I wasn't an artist, I would be	
E.P.: A photographer!	

S. MAG.: Creatively, what brings you joy?

E.P.: Watching new and inspiring movies, which could be in all kinds of genres, really. Currently I am counting down to the release of Rogue One (Star Wars) and I really would like to see the prequel of Harry Potter (Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them). That's so much fun; going to the theaters, buying some candy or popcorn, and sitting down, all excited, to watch the movie!

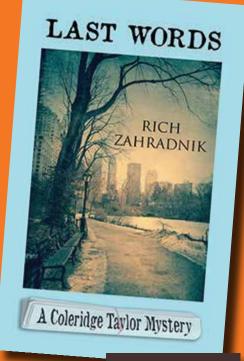
S. MAG.: Tell us a little about your home country/hometown that we would not be able to find in a travel brochure.

E.P.: As most everyone knows, Belgium is well known for its fine chocolates and Belgian beers. We have approximately 1,200 unique beers, in fact. Quite a lot for such a small country (lol). But as I am an artist, I would like to mention some other famous artists from Belgium, like, Peyo (The Smurfs), Hergé (Tintin) and the famous painter, Pieter Paul Rubens. And did you know that actor Johnny Galecki (better known as Dr. Leonard Hofstadter from The Big Bang Theory) was born in Bree, Belgium? At that time, his father was stationed in Belgium while serving in the U.S. Air Force. So there are certainly many creative types that call Belgium home.

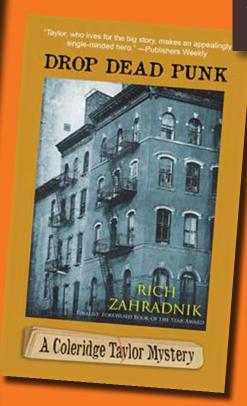
Although Belgium does have a great deal to be proud of when it comes to the "creative category," they can definitely add Evelyne Paniez to the list! Her works are fantastical, emotional pieces of art that, once seen, are impossible to forget. It will be thrilling to see what this amazing soul creates in 2017!

For more information, head to: http://secretdartiste.deviantart.com.

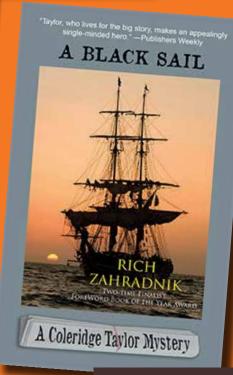
★ "Taylor, while out to get the story and get back to the crime beat, is complex and has a good heart. Verdict: Fans of the late Barbara D'Amato and Bruce DeSilva will relish this gritty and powerful crime novel." —Review of A Black Sail in Library Journal







DROP DEAD PUNK 978-1-60381-209-2 \$14.95, 254 pp.



A BLACK SAIL 978-1-60381-211-5 \$15.95, 264 pp.

Last Words

(Bronze Medal Winner, Mystery, IPPY Awards 2015)

"A fast-paced, deeply entertaining and engrossing novel. Last Words is the first book in a mystery series featuring the intrepid investigative reporter. Readers will be glad these aren't the last words from this talented author."

-ForeWord Reviews

Drop Dead Punk

(Gold Medal Winner, Mystery, IPPY Awards 2016)

"Taylor, who lives for the big story, makes an appealingly single-minded hero."
—Publishers Weekly

4 Stars: "Hours of engrossing entertainment.... A thoroughly satisfying read."

—RT Book Reviews

A Black Sail

"Gritty, tough, and well done—this one's a treat." —Reviewing the Evidence

4 Stars: "Coleridge Taylor is a character fans can firmly stand behind. His dogged pursuit of the truth and commitment to helping others while exposing his foibles is what makes him so sympathetic and complex. Zahradnik ratchets up the action in this novel, which quickens the pace and keeps readers engaged.... a truly enjoyable read." —RT Book Reviews

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DECEMBER MARKS MANY THINGS. It's the holiday season and people are in the giving mood. This is also when you start hearing nominations for the upcoming award shows, letting you know the best music, movies, etc., of the year. To *Suspense Magazine*, December means that we give you our "Best of the Year" in books and one author who has achieved "The Crimson Scribe" award.

Last year we had Kelley Armstrong at the top with "Deceptions." While Kelley and the authors before her will always hold the title, we're sure they're very excited to see another join the club of "Crimson Scribe" winners. This year the winner wrote a book that started a new series with an incredibly complex character. I'm sure you want me to reveal them here, but you should know me better than that, and you need to read the magazine!

We didn't expand our categories this year, and have winners within each of the categories—books we consider a must for all suspense/thriller fans to read and enjoy. Thousands of entries came in this year and, as always, choosing the finalists was much like having a slugfest in the middle of a championship ring, but we think we have a list that is so incredible I can't wait until you see it.

We contacted each author and asked him or her a few questions. If you follow them on Facebook or Twitter, you might already have an idea of who is on the list—something we encourage. Authors should pat themselves on the back for putting out such wonderful work this year. Leaving books off the list is always a supremely tough call, but we consider this list the number one place to find outstanding books.

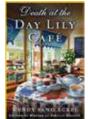
You only have a small window left until Christmas to buy these fantastic authors—not only the titles we've highlighted but also their backlists—and put some joy in someone's life; or be selfish and keep them for yourself, either way is fine with us. I could go on and on talking about how tremendous they are, but I won't bore you with any more details. I will simply let the "Best of 2016 List" as presented by *Suspense Magazine*, and "The Crimson Scribe" award winner, speak for themselves. Now on with the show!

John Raab

CEO/Publisher

Suspense Magazine •





"DEATH AT THE DAY LILY CAFÉ" by Wendy Sand Eckel (Minotaur Books; July 2016): Rosalie Hart has finally opened the café of her dreams. Decked out with ochre-tinted walls and stuffed with delicious organic fare, the Day Lily Café is everything Rosalie could have hoped for. But not five minutes into the grand opening, Doris Bird, a dear and trusted friend, cashes in on a favor—to help clear her little sister Lori of a first-degree murder charge.

With the help of her best friend and head waiter Glenn, Rosalie is on the case. But it's not going to be easy. Unlikable and provocative, murder victim Carl James Fiddler seems to have insulted nearly everyone in town, and the suspect list grows daily. And when Rosalie's daughter Annie gets caught in the crossfire, the

search for the killer becomes personal in this charming cozy perfect for fans of Diane Mott Davidson and Joanne Fluke.

"CRIME AND POETRY" by Amanda Flower (Penguin Group; April 2016): Rushing home to sit by her ailing grandmother's bedside, Violet Waverly is shocked to find Grandma Daisy the picture of perfect health. Violet doesn't need to read between the lines: her grandma wants Violet back home and working in her magical store, Charming Books. It's where the perfect book tends to fly off the shelf and pick you...

Violet has every intention to hightail it back to Chicago, but then a dead man is discovered clutching a volume of Emily Dickinson's poems from Grandma Daisy's shop. The victim is Benedict Raisin, who recently put Grandma Daisy in his will, making her a prime suspect. Now, with the help of a tuxedo cat named Emerson, Violet will have to find a killer to keep Grandma from getting booked for good...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

Amanda Flower (A.F.): 'Sassafras' and 'networking.'

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

A.F.: It's an incredible honor. It especially means a lot to me because of all the mysteries I've written—and there have been over twenty now—"Crime and Poetry" remains my favorite. I'm so thrilled that readers feel the same way about the characters and the story.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

A.F.: In 2017, I will be debuting my Amish Candy Shop Mysteries with Kensington. The first novel is called "Assaulted Caramel" and releases August 2017. The series is about a New York City chocolatier who visits her ailing Amish grandfather only to get tangled up in a murder investigation. Also the third mystery, "The Final Vow," in my Living History Museum Mystery series will release in May 2017 from Midnight Ink.

"MICHELANGELO'S GHOST" by Gigi Pandian (Henery Press; October 2016): A lost work of art linking India to the Italian Renaissance. A killer hiding behind a centuries-old

POETEN

ghost story. And a hidden treasure in Italy's macabre sculpture garden known as the Park of Monsters...

When Jaya's old professor dies under eerie circumstances shortly after discovering manuscripts that point to a treasure in Italy's Park of Monsters, Jaya and her brother pick up the trail. From San Francisco to the heart of Italy, Jaya is haunted by a ghost story inexorably linked to the masterpieces of a long-dead artist and the deeds of a modern-day murderer. Untrustworthy colleagues, disappearing boyfriends, and old enemies—who can Jaya trust when the ghost wails?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Who is your favorite author?

Gigi Pandian (G.P.): Elizabeth Peters is the author who made me want to become a mystery novelist. I discovered her books in high school, and they were unlike anything I'd ever read: the perfect mix of mystery, adventure, travel, history, light-hearted fun, and romance.

When I began writing, I hoped I'd one day be able to create that magic and bring as much joy to readers as her books brought me. It's been one of the biggest thrills of my writing career to have reviewers compare my books to those of Elizabeth Peters.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

G.P.: Jaya Jones is my pre-cancer self, and Zoe Faust is my post-cancer self. Neither character is exactly me, of course—I'm not a history professor who travels the world in search of treasures, nor am I a centuries-old alchemist—but I recently realized how much they overlap with my life then and now.

Jaya Jones hasn't figured out her future. She follows her gut, traveling on a whim and eating adventurously. Like Jaya, I have one American parent and one parent from India. I grew up traveling with them on their academic research trips. In my 20s I took off, traveling to favorite destinations whenever I could, and was known to try any food put before me, no matter how strange.

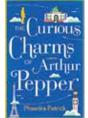
Zoe Faust accidentally discovered the Elixir of Life through alchemy, and while the Elixir extends life it doesn't guarantee good health, so Zoe cooks healing foods from scratch. Shortly after my 36th birthday I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a year of cancer treatments ahead of me, plus food restrictions based on what my cancer responded to. Cancer snapped my life priorities into focus. I didn't want to give up great food, but I wanted to live as long a life as possible, so I learned how to cook delicious food from scratch. I also wanted to travel with more focus than my random trips, and I wanted to write books with elements I loved, regardless how marketable I thought they'd be. While going through chemotherapy, with ideas of the Elixir of Life, cooking, and my love of mysterious gargoyles swirling around my head, I wrote a draft of the novel that would become "The Accidental Alchemist." In a happy surprise, readers loved Zoe and Dorian the gargoyle as much as I did.

I'm now nearly five years cancer free, living vicariously through Jaya while experimenting with new recipes in my kitchen that will go in the Alchemist books, and taking trips to places I've never been.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

G.P.: I write two mystery series, and have one book in each series coming out in 2017. "The Elusive Elixir," the third Accidental Alchemist mystery, will be out in January 2017. I'm currently writing the fifth Jaya Jones Treasure Hunt mystery, scheduled to come out in October 2017. After "Michelangelo's Ghost" took Jaya to Bomarzo, Italy, the next book takes her to Kyoto, Japan.

And for Suspense Magazine readers, I'll share something here that I haven't shared elsewhere: I'm working on a standalone novel I'm very excited about. It features a character from one of my locked-room mystery short stories, and it takes me back to the setting of my first novel, "Artifact": Edinburgh, Scotland.



"THE CURIOUS CHARMS OF ARTHUR PEPPER" by Phaedra Patrick (Mira; May 2016): Sixtynine-year-old Arthur Pepper lives a simple life. He gets out of bed at precisely 7:30 a.m., just as he did when his wife, Miriam, was alive. He dresses in the same gray slacks and mustard sweater vest, waters his fern, Frederica, and heads out to his garden.

But on the one-year anniversary of Miriam's death, something changes. Sorting through Miriam's possessions, Arthur finds an exquisite gold charm bracelet he's never seen before. What follows is a surprising and unforgettable odyssey that takes Arthur from London to Paris and as far as India in an epic quest to find out the truth about his wife's secret life before they met—a journey that leads him to find hope, healing and

self-discovery in the most unexpected places. •





'MURDER IN G MAJOR"

by Alexia Gordon (Henery Press; September 2016): With few other options, African-

American classical musician Gethsemane Brown accepts a less-than-ideal position turning a group of rowdy schoolboys into an award-winning orchestra. Stranded without luggage

or money in the Irish countryside, she figures any job is better than none. The perk? Housesitting a lovely cliffside cottage. The catch? The ghost of the cottage's murdered owner haunts the place. Falsely accused of killing his wife (and himself), he begs Gethsemane to clear his name so he can rest in peace.

Gethsemane's reluctant investigation provokes a dormant killer and she soon finds herself in grave danger. As Gethsemane races to prevent a deadly encore, will she uncover the truth or star in her own farewell performance?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

Alexia Gordon (A.G.): My favorite word is 'frabjous.' My least favorite word is 'should.'

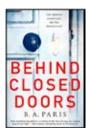
S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

A.G.: "Murder in G Major" is still my only novel but I'd love to see it turned into a BBC or PBS series. Thandie Newton could play my protagonist.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

A.G.: Fans can expect Book 2 in the Gethsemane Brown series, "Death in D Minor," in 2017. ■

"BEHIND CLOSED DOORS" by B.A Paris (Mira; February 2016): Everyone knows a couple like Jack and Grace. He has looks and wealth; she has charm and elegance. He's a dedicated attorney who has never lost a case; she is a flawless homemaker, a masterful gardener and cook, and dotes on her disabled



younger sister. Though they are still newlyweds, they seem to have it all. You might not want to like them, but you do. You're hopelessly charmed by the ease and comfort of their home, by the graciousness of the dinner parties they throw. You'd like to get to know Grace better.

But it's difficult, because you realize Jack and Grace are inseparable.

Some might call this true love. Others might wonder why Grace never answers the phone. Or why she can never meet for coffee, even though she doesn't work. How she can cook such elaborate meals but remain so slim. Or why she never seems to take anything with her when she leaves the house, not even a pen. Or why there are such high-security metal shutters on all the downstairs windows.

Some might wonder what's really going on once the dinner party is over, and the front door has closed.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience that you'd like to share?

B.A. Paris (B.A.P.): One of the things that has touched me most since "Behind Closed Doors" was published are the messages I've received from parents of children with Down Syndrome, who tell me how pleased they are with my portrayal of Millie. It's wonderful to know that I got her right.

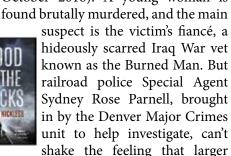
S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

B.A.P.: So much! I'm so grateful to everybody who voted for "Behind Closed Doors," it's been a wonderful year and being chosen as one of the best debuts of 2016 is the icing on the cake.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

B.A.P.: My second novel, "The Breakdown," is coming out next June. And I'll be working hard on my next two books, which will also be psychological thrillers.

"BLOOD ON THE TRACKS" by Barbara Nickless (Thomas & Mercer; October 2016): A young woman is



forces are behind this apparent crime of passion.

In the depths of an icy winter, Parnell and her K9 partner, Clyde—both haunted by their time in Iraq—descend into the underground world of a savage gang of rail riders. There, they uncover a wide-reaching conspiracy and a series of shocking crimes. Crimes that threaten everything Parnell holds dear.

As the search for the truth puts her directly in the path of the killer, Parnell must struggle with a deadly question: Can she fight monsters without becoming one herself?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What does having your book chosen as "Best of" mean to you?

Barbara Nickless (B.N.): Being chosen as one of Suspense Magazine's "Best of 2016" is an incredible honor. It is impossible for a novelist to know, in the throes of writing, how a book will be received. As I was writing my novel, I worried if what I had to say would resonate with readers. I wondered if people would care about a railroad cop or be curious about what it feels like to have served in war. And if I could write well enough about either of those things. Whenever these doubts surfaced, I had to push them aside and keep writing. Being chosen for Suspense Magazine's "Best of" list means I was right to persevere. Thank you so much!

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

B.N.: People who know me well might answer differently, but I don't think I'm like any of my characters. That said, I'm sure there's a piece of me in all of them. And certainly the grit and tenacity of my protagonist, Sydney Parnell, helped me get through a tragedy—writing about her made it easier for me to navigate a difficult time in my life. She and I learned about resiliency together.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

B.N.: The second book in the Sydney Parnell series, "Dead Stop," comes out next summer. Sydney and her K9 partner Clyde return, along with homicide detective Michael Cohen. They're joined by FBI agent Mac McConnell as they work to track down a violent killer and save a little girl before time runs out. Sydney is still haunted by the shadow of Iraq, and even as she works this new case, she must watch over her shoulder for the mysterious Alpha. When someone from her past reveals a stunning truth, she knows it will change her life forever.

"IQ" by Joe Ide (Mulholland Books; October 2016): East Long Beach. The LAPD is barely keeping up with the neighborhood's high crime rate. Murders go unsolved, lost children unrecovered. But someone from the neighborhood has taken it upon himself to help solve the cases the police can't or won't touch.



They call him IQ. He's a loner and a high school dropout, his unassuming nature disguising a relentless determination and a fierce intelligence. He charges his clients whatever they can afford, which might be a set of tires or a homemade casserole. To get by, he's forced to take on clients that can pay.

This time, it's a rap mogul whose life is in danger. As Isaiah investigates, he encounters a vengeful ex-wife, a crew of notorious cutthroats, a monstrous attack dog, and a hit man who even other hit men say is a lunatic. The deeper Isaiah digs, the more far reaching and dangerous the case becomes.



"SUMMIT LAKE" by Charlie Donlea (Kensington; January 2016): "No suspects. No persons of interest. Just a girl who was alive one day and dead the next."

Some places seem too beautiful to be touched by horror. Summit Lake, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, is that kind of place, with

charming stilt houses dotted along the pristine water. But two weeks ago, Becca Eckersley, a first-year law student, was brutally murdered in one of those houses. The daughter of a powerful attorney, Becca was hard-working, accomplished, and ambitious. Now, while the town reels with grief and shocked residents gather to share their theories, the police are baffled.

At first, investigative reporter Kelsey Castle thinks of the assignment as a fluff piece. But the savagery of the crime, and the determined efforts to keep the case quiet, all hint at something far more than a random attack by a stranger. As Kelsey digs deeper, pushing on despite danger and warnings, she feels a growing connection to the dead girl. And the more she learns about Becca's friendships, her love life—and the secrets she was keeping—the more convinced she becomes that learning the truth about Becca could be the key to overcoming her own dark past...

Romanie DESTOT 2016 SUSPENSE

"TRIPLE SIX" by Erica Spindler (Erica Spindler; November 2016): A string of shocking home invasions...

The desperate search for the child who holds the secrets to them all...

A series of sixes tattooed on a victim's neck...

The countdown continues...

Detectives Micki Dare and Zach Harris are back. It's been three months since that night—the night that Micki almost died. Physically, she's healed but the nightmares remain, and she can't shake the feeling that more happened that night than Zach is telling her. But why would her partner lie to her? Micki focuses on putting the past behind her and solving the latest case she and Zach have been assigned to.

A string of brutal home invasions are rocking New Orleans, and the families targeted seemingly have nothing in common. Why were these victims chosen? And why do the victim's children have such startlingly different accounts of the invasions? The deeper Micki and Zach go into the case, the more they realize these are no ordinary crimes and there's something terrifyingly familiar at work. Their worst fear has been realized—the dark force they'd fought has returned, more powerful than ever. Suddenly, those Micki loves most are targeted and she has to decide if she really wants to learn the truth about that night...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is your favorite word?

Erica Spindler (E.S.): I've always liked the word 'exquisite.' It's eloquent, fun to say, and is itself an exquisite word!

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/ antagonist?



E.S.: I would love to see The Lightkeeper series made into a movie(s)! Emma Stone would be perfect as the protagonist, Micki Dare. Her partner Zach has a knock-out smile and is a serious charmer. He would be perfectly played by Chris Hemsworth.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

E.S.: In August 2017, "The Other Girl" will be released. And all I can say is—What would you do if you'd been kidnapped and nobody believed you? Also in late 2017, the 3rd in my Lightkeeper series, "Fallen Five" will be out, and the countdown continues....

"SHADOW RIDER" by Christine Feehan (Jove; June 2016): Whether it's fast cars or fast women, Stefano Ferraro gets what he wants. When he's not fodder for the paparazzi, he commands Ferraro family businesses—both legitimate and illegitimate.

While their criminal activity is simply a rumor yet to be proven, no one knows the real truth.

The Ferraros are a family of shadow riders capable of manipulating light and dark, an ability Stefano thought ran in his family alone—until now...

With little left to her name, Francesca Cappello has come to Chicago in hopes of a new life. She wasn't expecting to attract the attention of a man with primal hunger in his eyes, driven to claim her as his to protect and to please. And if he discovers her secret, it could ruin her...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

Christine Feehan (C.F.): Moviepilot.com has written a couple of articles suggesting my Dark series be made into a television series or movie, and though I'd love to see that happen, I think my Ghostwalker series would be great as an original show for Netflix or Amazon Studios. They're military men enhanced by science and women who were genetically engineered. They have different missions they go out on, but some of them are experiments gone wrong and are hunted. So there's a thriller and sci-fi element.

As far as who might play the protagonist, I have no idea! If someone has some suggestions I'd love to hear them.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

C.F.: Wealthy and secretive family deals justice while using shadows to teleport.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

C.F.: I'm a prolific writer and try to write one book for each of my series each year. "Power Game" will be out in late January, "Bound Together" in March, "Shadow Reaper" in May, "Dark Legacy" and "Leopard's Blood" later in the year.



"INTO THE WHIRLWIND" by Kat Martin (Zebra; May 2016): A bodyguard, a bounty hunter, a private investigator, no one can handle the heat like the men of BOSS, Inc.

Megan O'Brien is at her wit's end. Her three-year-old son has been kidnapped. No police, says the ransom demand. Fearing for her son's life, Meg has no choice but to turn to her former bodyguard, Dirk Reynolds.

Dirk's never forgiven Meg for the way she left him after their brief affair. But with bounty hunter Luke Brodie on his side, Dirk knows he's got to help Meg rescue her son.

The few clues they've gathered send them spiraling into a murky world of big banking and international crime. Meg may be way out of her depths, but she's seeing a side of Dirk she never suspected—one no woman could possibly resist. •

"THE OBSESSION" by Nora Roberts (Berkley; April 2016): "She stood in the deep, dark woods, breath shallow and cold prickling over her skin despite the hot, heavy air. She took a step back, then two, as the urge to run fell over her."

Naomi Bowes lost her innocence the night she followed her father into the woods. In freeing the girl trapped in the root cellar, Naomi revealed the horrible extent of her father's crimes and made him infamous. No matter how close she gets to happiness, she can't outrun the sins of Thomas David Bowes.

Now a successful photographer living under the name Naomi Carson, she has found a place that calls to her, a rambling old house in need of repair, thousands of miles away from everything she's ever known. Naomi wants to embrace the solitude, but the kindly residents of Sunrise Cove keep forcing her to open up—especially the determined Xander Keaton.

Naomi can feel her defenses failing, and knows that the connection her new life offers is something she's always secretly craved. But the sins of her father can become an obsession, and, as she's learned time and again, her past is never more than a nightmare away.

INORA
ROBERTS
OBSESSION



"A TIME OF TORMENT" by John Connolly (Atria/Emily



Mark Condren

Bestler Books; August 2016): Dangerous and driven private investigator Charlie Parker returns in the

> latest gripping thriller of internationally bestselling author John Connolly's series, in which ungodly fears haunt a strange and isolated community.

> > Jerome Burnel was

once a hero. He intervened to prevent multiple killings, and in doing so destroyed himself. His life was torn apart. He was imprisoned, brutalized.

But in his final days, with the hunters circling, he tells his story to private detective Charlie Parker. He speaks of the girl who was marked for death, but was saved; of the ones who tormented him, and an entity that hides in a ruined stockade.

Parker is not like other men. He died, and was reborn. He is ready to wage war.

Now he will descend upon a strange, isolated community called the Cut, and face down a force of men who rule by terror, intimidation, and murder.

All in the name of the being they serve. All in the name of the Dead King.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

John Connolly (J.C.): I always struggle with that one because I have a couple that impressed me. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" because he's a bit of a musical blind spot for me, and I think the reviews of John le Carré's conversational memoir "The Pigeon Tunnel" were harsher than the book deserved. My most enjoyable read this year, though, was probably "The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet" by Becky Chambers because it was so unexpected, and the sequel, "A Closed and Common Orbit," is wonderful too.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

J.C.: My favourite word is 'axolotl.' I quite like axolotls themselves, but I'm not sure I'd like them quite as much if they were called something else. My least favourite word printable—is probably 'nice.' 'Nice' is plain biscuits and milky tea, or the TV repairman sending you a text message when vou're ill.

S. MAG.: Is there an interview question you've never been asked but would like to answer?

J.C.: If I have only a short time left to live, I might like to unburden myself of certain opinions about one or two authors I've met. So it would have to be, "What do you really think of *X*?"

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

J.C.: Most of my fan experiences are quite lovely. I have very kind fans, and I don't think I've ever had a bad experience with them. Mind you, I did an event in Edinburgh where a young woman came up to me and just burst into tears, but her friend assured me that she was crying in a good way. I think.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/ antagonist?

J.C.: I never answer the question about who might play my protagonist as I think readers create their own images of characters, and the worst thing an author can do is impose some other face or identity on them and cause strife. I'd like to have seen what Guillermo del Toro had planned for H.P. Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness." It's a shame that movie hasn't yet been made.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

J.C.: Living, and in the genre: James Lee Burke. Deceased, and in the genre: Ross Macdonald. Other than those two, Dickens and P.G. Wodehouse.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

J.C.: It's very flattering to be recognized, and it perhaps brings a book to the attention of readers who might otherwise have missed it. Every little helps.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

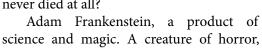
J.C.: I put a little of myself into all of the characters, but there's a lot of me in Parker, and in David, the boy at the heart of "The Book of Lost Things."

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

J.C.: A Parker novel entitled "A Game of Ghosts," and another book which may surprise people. •

"ADAM FRANKENSTEIN: A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES"

by Sheila English (CreateSpace Independent Publishing; August 2016): What if the Frankenstein creature didn't die in a fire, a crumbling castle or on a glacier? What if he never died at all?

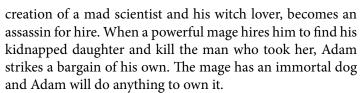


come-to-life. In this re-imagining of Mary Shelley's famous creature, Adam is still alive and his stories are that of legend. A lonely and reluctant hero looking for redemption and salvation through the ages.

Four stories, through the years, follow Adam as he struggles to understand his place in a world of men who would reject him, kill him. He looks to create humanity in himself while questioning those who were born with it.

Mary Shelley's League of Supernatural Hunters: Origins of Adam: Mary Shelley learns of supernatural creatures and real meaning of the word monster as she encounters a man unlike any other. A creature not born of woman, but created from the body of a circus strongman killed while trying to save a lion tamer. She must decide who to trust, the vampire, the witch, the mad scientist or the creature. Either way, Mary's seen enough to know she will need an army to fight those things not easily killed.

Frankenstein's Companion: 19th century England, friendless and alone in the world, Adam Frankenstein, the



The Therapist and the Dead: Brooklyn, New York in the 1980's was a place where monsters could blend in. Life has been long and cruel, so Adam keeps his appointment with Dr. Stein, the most expensive and sought after psychologist in the city, to talk of immortality and murder.

Adam Frankenstein, U.S. Marshal: Adam joins the 21st Century, and takes up residence in Houston, Texas. While waiting for his next mission from the League of Supernatural Hunters, he becomes Adam Frank, U.S. Marshal. His new partner is Marshal Rebecca Hughes, a by-the-book woman with a no-nonsense approach to life, with no idea who he really is, but that's all about to change. When he wakes up dead and learns someone has stolen his dog, Texas may not be big enough to hold his wrath.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

Sheila English (S.E.): Justified *meets* Supernatural *in modern day Texas*.

S. MAG.: What does having you book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

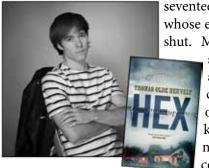
S.E.: I've read many of the past winners so this is an immense honor for me. "Adam Frankenstein: A Collection of Short Stories" begins my journey to Adam's eventual novel, which I hope to see released in late 2017, so winning lets me know people feel Adam's stories are good and it encourages me to keep writing. Being an author is a lonely job and it's times like this where you feel connected to readers and appreciated as a storyteller.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

S.E.: I read a great deal and in many genres so I have many favorite authors. I've read all of Christine Feehan's novels, J.D. Robb, Dean Koontz, Andrew Peterson, Karen Rose, Charlotte Bronte, Mary Shelley, the list could go on. I love storytellers who can capture my attention and hold it as though they own a piece of my soul while I'm reading.

"HEX" by Thomas Olde Heuvelt (Tor Books; April 2016): Whoever is born here, is doomed to stay 'til death. Whoever settles, never leaves.

Welcome to Black Spring, the seemingly picturesque Hudson Valley town haunted by the Black Rock Witch, a



seventeenth century woman whose eyes and mouth are sewn shut. Muzzled, she walks the

> streets and enters homes at will. She stands next to children's bed for nights on end. Everybody knows that her eyes may never be opened or the consequences will be too terrible to bear.

The elders of Black Spring have virtually quarantined the town by using high-tech surveillance to prevent their curse from spreading. Frustrated with being kept in lockdown, the town's teenagers decide to break their strict regulations and go viral with the haunting. But, in so doing, they send the town spiraling into dark, medieval practices of the distant past.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Thomas Olde Heuvelt (T.O.H.): I have zillions of the same one: when "Hex" came out in the Netherlands a few years ago, I got hundreds of emails and tweets from readers telling me that after reading the book, they were unable to sleep, or had to sleep with the lights on. This is the best reaction you can get to a book like this. And it's spreading like a virus. Because ever since "Hex" was published all around the world—it's sold to nineteen countries now—these messages have been coming in from everywhere: from the US, Australia, Argentina, Japan, you name it. What more could you wish for as an author of a horror novel?

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

T.O.H.: Stephen King. Many horror writers avoid listing him when they're asked about their influences, as if that's too easy. But King has done more than writing dozens of great and scary novels—he has influenced an entire generation of new writers. I am from that generation. I grew up as a kid reading King's novels, and they changed my life. He was one of the few horror novelists I could read in Dutch translation as a kid, as we don't have a history of literary horror ourselves. So I was very grateful when King read "Hex" last May and tweeted about it to all his fans.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

T.O.H.: Currently, a TV series based on "Hex" is in the works. I am very excited about it. I've spoken to the screenwriter and love his vision—it's going to be spectacular. Also, the paperback edition of "Hex" will be out in the US in spring, and the book

will appear in more and more countries. I am working on two new novels—dark and twisty and a bit humorous as well, like "Hex." As we're dealing with translation, I'm not sure if they'll be out for English speaking readers in 2017, but they'll definitely come to the US and the UK.

"THE HATCHING" by Ezekiel Boone (Atria/Emily Bestler

Books; July 2016): An astonishingly inventive and terrifying debut novel about the emergence of an ancient species, dormant for over a thousand years, the march.



Deep in Press Photo Credit: Laurie Willick the jungle of Peru, where so much remains unknown, a black, skittering mass devours an American tourist whole. Thousands of miles away, an FBI agent investigates a fatal plane crash in Minneapolis and makes a gruesome discovery. Unusual seismic patterns register in a Kanpur, India earthquake lab, confounding the scientists there. During the same week, the Chinese government "accidentally" drops a nuclear bomb in an isolated region of its own country. As these incidents begin to sweep the globe, a mysterious package from South America arrives at a Washington, D.C. laboratory. Something wants out.

The world is on the brink of an apocalyptic disaster. An ancient species, long dormant, is now very much awake.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

Ezekiel Boone (E.B.): Jurassic Park *meets* The Walking Dead *but with spiders*.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

E.B.: I'm thrilled. Every author hopes that when they send their book out into the world, readers will finish it and immediately start badgering their friends to read it. It's great to know that "The Hatching" is the kind of book that people have loved.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

E.B.: The second book in the series, "Skitter," comes out in April of 2017, followed closely by the third and final book in The Hatching series. And past that, I've got another (non-spider) novel in the queue.

"NIGHT SHIFT" Charlaine Harris (Ace; May 2016): At Midnight's local pawnshop, weapons are flying off the shelves—only to be used

> in sudden and dramatic suicides right at the main crossroads in town.

Who better to figure : out why blood is being spilled than the vampire Lemuel, who. while translating mysterious texts. discovers what

makes Midnight the town it is. There's a reason why witches and werewolves, killers and psychics, have been drawn to this place.

NIGHTSHIFT

And now they must come together to stop the bloodshed in the heart of Midnight. For if all hell breaks loose—which just might happen—it will put the secretive town on the map, where no one wants it to be...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read : in 2016?

Charlaine Harris (C.H.): The best book, and the one I most anticipated, was "Stiletto," Daniel O'Malley's sequel to "The Rook." There were others that were very close, of course.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

C.H.: My favorite word is 'adjacent,' but sadly I don't often have occasion to use it. My least favorite is 'oily.'

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

by : C.H.: Having a book chosen as 'best of' anything is a huge confirmation that someone, somewhere, has appreciated my vision. I don't write with an audience in mind, but to please myself, so I'm never sure if people will share my pleasure or not. That's true with every book I write, and I guess it will be true forever! •

"KILL SWITCH" by Jonathan Maberry (St. Martin's Griffin; April 2016): What do you do when the power goes off?

Terrorists acquired a terrible new weapon that can crash the power grid and plunge America into new dark age. coordinated attack is planned



to shut out all lights

and emergency services to ten major cities. Planes will fall, hospitals will go dark, no help will come.

And in that terrible darkness, a dreadful plague will be released. If the lights go off, nothing can stop the bioweapon from killing millions.

At the same time, the intelligence services are being torn apart from within by a plague of betrayal, murder, and suicide. Even the Department of Military Sciences is stumbling in its response to the growing threat.

Time is running out, and Joe is being hunted by a terrifying new kind of assassin. A team of remote viewers have the ability to take over any person and turn ordinary citizens into killers. Where can you turn when there's nobody left to trust?

Joe Ledger faces his deadliest challenge as friends and

allies become enemies and all of the lights begin to go out...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

Jonathan Maberry (J.M.): I was absolutely blown away by David Morrell's "Rule of the Night," the last (sadly) of his Thomas De Quincey historical thrillers. David sent me an advance reading copy and I devoured it. I already bought a bunch of copies to give as Christmas presents to friends who will appreciate a superb piece of writing.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

J.M.: My favorite word as a writer is the name of the fictional elder god 'Cthulhu.' I was introduced to the character (and its creator, H.P. Lovecraft) at the house of L. Sprague de Camp way, way back when I was a teenager. He was having a gathering of writers and my middle school librarian (who did some secretarial work for Sprague) brought me along. Lin Carter was there, and Robert Bloch and Harlan Ellison. I was in awe. So it was a delight to be able to include Cthulhu, however tangentially, to my mainstream thrillers in "Kill Switch."

My least favorite word is 'can't.' Aspiring writers and even some seasoned pros in the writing business use it too often when discussing taking creative risks or trying new genres; and they are seldom correct.

S. MAG.: Is there an interview question you've never been asked but would like to answer?

J.M.: In all the hundreds of interviews I've done I've never been asked why I waited so long to switch from writing nonfiction to fiction. I did nonfiction as a part-time gig for twenty-eight years, starting when I was in college—more than a thousand feature articles, a few thousand columns and reviews, college textbooks, and some mainstream nonfic books. I didn't sell my first novel until 2005 and it was published in 2006. Why the wait? As a teenager I was fascinated by the Watergate Scandal, which was unfolding, and the book, "All the President's Men" by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein was published in 1974, when I was in tenth grade. I was drawn to investigative journalism, and by the time I was applying for college I decided that's the kind of writing I wanted to do. I enrolled in the Temple *University journalism program and planned to be a newspaper* reporter, fighting the good fight, exposing corruption. However, when I took a class on magazine feature writing that changed me, and instead, I began selling feature articles while still a college kid. My daytime jobs after college included bodyguard, jujutsu teacher, college teacher (teaching Martial Arts History and Women's Self-defense) and so on. I never actually worked as a reporter. Then in 1999, I sold a nonfiction book on the folklore, myths and legends of supernatural predators—"The Vampire Slayer's Field Guide to the Undead," written under the pen name of Shane MacDougal. It was in the years following:

the publication of that book that I began to develop an interest in trying fiction, specifically about the folkloric monsters I'd been researching. I wrote my first novel, "Ghost Road Blues," as an experiment to see if I'd (a) enjoy writing fiction and (b) be any good at it. Turns out the book got me an agent, she sold it quickly, and it won the Bram Stoker Award for Best First Novel. Talk about validation. That book debuted in June 2006 and now it's December 2016 and I'm writing my 30th novel. I've had New York Times bestsellers, I just completed my 100th short story, and I write comics for Marvel, IDW and Dark Horse. All fiction. It makes me wonder whether I should have taken a swing at the whole fiction thing a tad sooner.

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

J.M.: I had two great ones recently. A young woman who is a huge fan of my teen post-apocalyptic fiction named her baby girl Phoenix, after my character Phoenix 'Nix' Riley. Yeah, that one brought tears to my eyes. And the other day someone adopted a rescue dog and named him 'Mr. Church' after the enigmatic boss in my Joe Ledger thrillers. When you become a writer you never expect moments like that to happen.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/ antagonist?

J.M.: A bunch of my stuff is in various stages of development for film or TV, but I think my upcoming mystery-thriller series for teens, "Watch Over Me" would make a great movie. It's about a high school kid who wants to be a bodyguard like his parents, and who gets embroiled in deadly problems at school. It'll be out in 2018 from Simon & Schuster.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

J.M.: I have so many favorites that they're categorized by genre and subgenre, living and dead. But if I had to pick one living author whose books I absolutely must read the day they come out, it's James Lee Burke. I read his stuff in print and then listen to the audiobooks narrated by the amazing Will Patton. My favorite dead author is John D. MacDonald, and I just wrapped up listening to all twenty-one unabridged audiobooks in the Travis McGee series, narrated by Robert Petkoff.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

J.M.: "Kill Switch" is Mission Impossible meets Hellboy with a heavy dose of 24.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

J.M.: It's an incredible honor. That goes without saying. : And it's startling, because I read extensively in the genres of suspense, thrillers, mysteries, and weird-science and to even be considered for inclusion with some of the best in the business is humbling. And it honors the readers who have embraced that book and who have been so enthusiastic about it.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

J.M.: Joe Ledger is my road dog. He's my favorite character I've ever created and I love finding new ways to make him miserable. Hey, let's face it, we're not in the business of giving our characters a comfortable or easy life. Aside from the novels in the Ledger series, I've introduced him into my comics (V-Wars: All of Us Monsters; IDW Publishing), my teen fiction (the Rot & Ruin novels; Simon & Schuster), and plenty of short stories, including some set in some of my other literary 'worlds.' One weird thing, though, is that Joe is substantially funnier than I am. When I'm writing his dialogue he says stuff that cracks me up, and it always feel as if he's saying it, not me. Not sure how that works.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

J.M.: 2017's a big year for me. I have a lot of stuff coming out, so buckle up! In January I have a young adult novel about Dana Scully as a fifteen-year-old in the first of a new series, "X-Files Origins: Devil's Advocate" (Imprint), then in April, the new Joe Ledger novel, "Dogs of War" (St. Martin's Griffin) debuts. It's the 9th in the series and I'm just about to start writing the 10th. And I have two new collections of my short fiction coming out—"A Little Bronze Book of Cautionary Tales" (Borderlands Press) and "The Wind Through the Fence" (JournalStone). But it's going to be a big year for me as editor of anthologies. I have the following all hitting stores in 2017: "Baker Street Irregulars" (co-edited with Michael Ventralla; Diversion Press), "Aliens: Bug Hunt" (Titan), "Hardboiled Horror" (JournalStone), "Nights of the Living Dead" (co-edited with George Romero; St. Martin's Press), and "Joe Ledger: Unstoppable" (co-edited with Bryan Thomas Schmidt). That last one features all-new stories about Joe Ledger and the Department of Military Sciences written by some of today's top authors of suspense, science fiction, horror and thrillers: Aaron Rosenberg, David Farland, James A. Moore, James Ray Tuck, Steve Alten, Javier Grillo Marxuach, Jennifer Campbell-Hicks, Jeremy Robinson, Joe McKinney, Jon McGoran, Keith R.A. DeCandido, Larry Correia, Nicholas Seven, Seanan McGuire, Scott Sigler, Weston Ochse, Bryan Thomas Schmidt, PG Charles, and Dana Fredsti.

"FEVERBORN" by Karen Marie Moning (Delacorte Press; January 2016): When the immortal Fae destroyed the ancient wall dividing the worlds of Man and Faery, the very fabric of the universe was damaged, and now Earth is vanishing:

bit by bit. Only the long-lost Song of Making—a haunting, dangerous melody that is the source of life itself can save the planet.

But those who seek the mythic song must contend with old wounds and new enemies, passions that burn hot and hunger for vengeance that runs deep. The challenges are many: the Keltar at war with nine immortals who've secretly

ruled Dublin for eons, Mac and

Jada hunted by the masses, the Seelie queen nowhere to be found, and the most powerful Unseelie prince in all creation determined to rule both Fae and Man. Now the task of solving the ancient riddle of the Song of Making falls to a band of deadly warriors divided among—and within—themselves.

Once a normal city possessing a touch of ancient magic, Dublin is now a treacherously magical city with only a touch of normal. And on those war-torn streets, Mac will come face-to-face with her most savage enemy yet: herself.

"Thank you so much!!! What terrific news—I'm honored to be included in such stellar company!"

-Karen Marie Moning ■

"PRINCE LESTAT AND THE REALMS OF ATLANTIS" by Anne Rice (Knopf; November 2016): At the novel's center: the vampire Lestat de Lioncourt, hero, leader, inspirer, irresistible



Press Photo Credit: Michael Lionstar

force, irrepressible spirit, battling (and ultimately reconciling with) a strange otherworldly form that has somehow taken possession of Lestat's undead body and soul. This ancient and mysterious power and unearthly spirit of vampire lore has all the force, history, and insidious reach of the unknowable Universe.

It is through this spirit, previously considered benign for thousands of vampire years and throughout the Vampire Chronicles, that we come to be told the hypnotic tale of a great sea power of ancient times; a mysterious heaven on earth situated on a boundless continent—and of how and why, and in what manner and with what far-reaching purpose, this force came to build and rule the great legendary empire of centuries ago that thrived in the Atlantic Ocean.

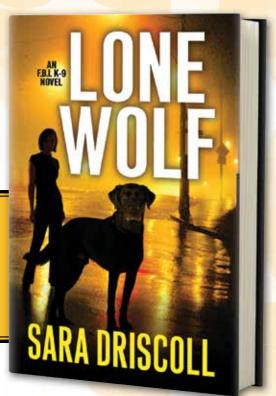
And as we learn of the mighty, far-reaching powers and perfections of this lost kingdom of Atalantaya, the lost realms of Atlantis, we come to understand its secrets, and how and why the vampire Lestat, indeed all the vampires, must reckon so many millennia later with the terrifying force of this ageless, all-powerful Atalantaya spirit.



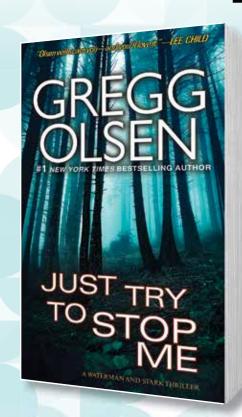
F.B.I. Special Agent Meg Jennings and Hawk, her loyal search-and-rescue Labrador, must race against time to find one of the deadliest killers in the country.

"Exciting."

—RT BOOK REVIEWS, ★★★★



HEART-STOPPING CRIMES, UNIQUE DETECTIVES, RIVETING READS...



The Waterman & Stark Thriller Series

The New York Times bestselling author's terrifying new thriller pits sheriff's detective Kendall Stark and native American pathologist Birdy Waterman against a killer whose dark desires know no limit.

"Olsen will **SCARE YOU—**and **YOU'll love it.**"

LEE CHILD







"THE SEVEN YEAR DRESS" by Paulette Mahurin (Early Girl Enterprises, LLC.; May 2016): One of the darkest times in human history was the insane design and execution to rid the world of Jews and "undesirables." At the hands of the powerful evil madman Adolf Hitler, families were ripped apart and millions were slaughtered. Persecution, torture, devastation, and enduring the unthinkable remained for those who lived. This is the story of one woman who lived to tell her story. This is a narrative of how a young, beautiful teenager, Helen Stein, and her family were torn asunder, ultimately bringing her to Auschwitz. It was there she suffered heinous indignity at the hands of the SS. It was also there, in that death camp, she encountered compassion, selfless acts of kindness, and friendship. Written by the award-winning, best-selling author of

"His Name Was Ben," comes a story of the resilience of the human spirit that will leave you thinking about Helen Stein and "The Seven Year Dress" for years to come after the last page is shut.

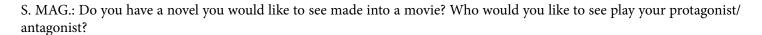
"A WILD FRIGHT IN DEADWOOD" by Ann Charles (Ann Charles; August 2016): Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned...especially a dead one holding a grudge.

Back on Deadwood's list of Usual Suspects, Violet Parker is hip deep in wild frights and firedup females. After juggling bitter threats, haunted buildings, and vengeful ghosts, the last thing she needs is a pair of bullheaded detectives trying to pin another murder on her

Can Violet find the real killer before she ends up behind bars? Or worse, on a slab at the morgue.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Is there an interview question you've never been asked but would like to answer?

Ann Charles (A.C.): I've always wanted to be asked which I prefer—boxers or thongs? I'd have to choose boxers, because thongs give me blisters between my toes, not to mention that there's no support for my flat feet. Boxers, on the other hand, are so cute with their square muzzles, pink tongues, and wiggly tails.



A.C.: I would love to see my Thanksgiving novella, "The Wild Turkey Tango," made into a holiday movie. The pie scene done well would make me laugh until I cried. As for who I'd like to see play the protagonist, I think that having Melissa McCarthy behind the wheel of the Jeep would be hilarious. My daughter and I are huge fans of Melissa's movies and her comic delivery.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

A.C.: Probably Elvis the chicken in my Deadwood Mystery series is the most like me. We both like to shake our tail feathers and tend to molt when scared by ghosts. Seriously, most of my characters have pieces of my personality (except the jerks, of course). All of the heroines share elements of my sense of humor, my stubborn determination to succeed despite all odds, and my tendency to laugh at my own screw ups. It appears that through writing fiction I have found a way to be at ease with my multiple personality

disorder.

Joking and fun aside, thank you to the contributors, staff, and fans of Suspense Magazine for choosing "A Wild Fright in Deadwood" as a Best of 2016 in the Indie category. I am extremely honored to have received this award and will display it proudly with the book.

"THIRTY-SIX AND A HALF MOTIVES" by Denise Grover Swank (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; May 2016): Rose Gardner should be celebrating the arrest of her fiercest enemy, J.R. Simmons. But problems are like weeds—pluck one and five more spring up. Rose's boyfriend

is on the verge of leaving her for good, her best friend, Neely Kate, is grappling with marriage problems, and her sister has a devastating secret. To make matters worse, she discovers J.R. Simmons has not been neutralized. His network of allies and henchman extends further than she suspected, and J.R.'s so intent on revenge, his lackeys might just destroy Fenton County to get it for him.

But the girl who once spent her days alone and afraid is now a strong, independent woman with a network of her own, including Neely Kate, Skeeter Malcolm—the reigning king of the Fenton County underworld—and other loyal friends on both sides of the law. Racing against time, they must dig up J.R.'s empire by the roots, unmasking his allies and unearthing his secrets, both the behind-the-scenes manipulation he's been orchestrating in Fenton County for decades and the dark stains of his personal life.

If Rose succeeds, she tells herself the quiet and peaceful life she once dreamed of will

be at the end of the tunnel. But her quest to destroy J.R. will require her to explore the person she has become, what she wants, and what that means for her future.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

Denise Grover Swank (D.G.S.): I would love to see the Rose Gardner series made into a TV series. I get asked all the time who I would want to see play Rose, and I really struggle with this one and often ask my readers for suggestions on Facebook.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

D.G.S.: That's like asking me which of my six children is my favorite. When asked that question, the answer is usually whoever is behaving the best at that time. Ha! It's like that with my characters. It's often the characters I'm writing at the time, but I will say that I am always ready and eager to get back to writing Rose.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

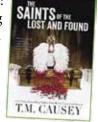
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Motives

DENISE GROVER SWANK

D.G.S.: I just released "Family Jewels," the first book of the Rose Gardner Investigations series, so I'll be working on the second book ("For the Birds") as well as a companion book about Rose's best friend Neely Kate. (Trailer Trash: Neely Kate) But I'll also release the last two books of my Magnolia Steele Mystery series just in time for readers to start my new Summer Butler Mystery series which releases in January 2018.

"THE SAINTS OF THE LOST AND FOUND" by T. M. Causey (The Road Runner Press; March 2016): Avery Broussard has the curse of seeing lost things (and make no mistake about it, it is a curse). Missing belongings and beloved pets, lost love and loved ones—she sees it all. Long ago, that curse destroyed her own chance at true love, causing her to flee her Louisiana home, vowing never to return. She's kept that promise too, until a phone call from her estranged grifter father forces her hand. Her big brother is dying, and she may be his last remaining hope.



Avery wants nothing more than to rescue her brother, but doing so pulls her into a labyrinth of lies and deceit rooted in her own lost love and her family's twisted history. It doesn't help that a little girl has gone missing, and the abduction is tied to a killer Avery failed to help the FBI catch. With no time to spare, Avery realizes her curse might well be the only thing she can trust. Is it too much to hope that she might save her brother and find the missing girl before she becomes the killer's next victim?

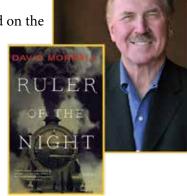
HISTORICAL BESTOR 2006

"RULER OF THE NIGHT" by David Morrell (Mulholland Books; November 2016): 1855. The railway has irrevocably altered English society, effectively changing geography and fueling the industrial revolution by shortening distances between cities: a whole day's journey can now be covered in a matter of hours. People marvel at their new freedom.

But train travel brings new dangers as well, with England's first death by train recorded on the very first day of railway operations in 1830. Twenty-five years later, England's first train murder occurs, paralyzing London with the unthinkable when a gentleman is stabbed to

death in a safely locked first-class passenger compartment.

In the next compartment, the brilliant opium-eater Thomas De Quincey and his quick-witted daughter, Emily, discover the homicide in a most gruesome manner. Key witnesses and also resourceful sleuths, they join forces with their allies in Scotland Yard, Detective Ryan and his partner-in-training, Becker, to pursue the killer back into the fogbound streets of London, where other baffling murders occur. Ultimately, De Quincey must confront two ruthless adversaries: this terrifying enemy, and his own opium addiction which endangers his life and his tormented soul.



Press Photo Credit: Jennifer Esperanza

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

David Morrell (D.M.): I once had a signing in which the store manager decided to make the event like a party. As I gave my talk, the manager's nephew set up a microphone and electric guitar and interrupted me to sing "Puff the Magic Dragon." A fan rose from a chair, approached me, and whispered, "Do you want me to kill that singer for you?"

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

D.M.: Hollywood can be a tease. Years ago, Michael Douglas bought the rights to my novel, "Extreme Denial." He would have been great as the jilted lover/ex-CIA protagonist, but the project never moved forward. "Murder as a Fine Art" (the first of my Victorian mystery/thrillers) is now in development for a TV series. I can only hope that this project has a better outcome.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch "Ruler of the Night" in ten words or less?

D.M.: On a Victorian train, no one could hear you scream.

"THIS WAS A MAN" by Jeffrey Archer (St. Martin's Press; November 2016): Harry Clifton sets out to write his magnum opus, while his wife Emma completes her ten years as Chairman of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, and receives an unexpected call from Margaret Thatcher offering her a job.

A MAN

Press Photo Credit: Broosk Saib

Sebastian Clifton becomes chairman of Farthings Kaufman bank, but only after Hakim Bishara has to resign for personal reasons. Sebastian and Samantha's talented daughter, Jessica, is expelled from the Slade School of Fine Art, but her aunt Grace comes to her rescue.

Meanwhile, Lady Virginia is about to flee the country to avoid her creditors when the Duchess of Hertford dies, and she sees another opportunity to clear her debts and finally trump the Cliftons and Barringtons.

In a devastating twist, tragedy engulfs the Clifton family when one of them receives a shocking diagnosis that will throw all their lives into turmoil.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

Jeffrey Archer (J.A.): "My Brilliant Friend" by Elena Ferrante.

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

J.A.: The couple who flew from Australia to London to hear me speak at Cadogan Hall for the launch of "This Was a Man"—I was very touched.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

J.A.: "Paths of Glory" with Damien Lewis as George Mallory.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

J.A.: Stefan Zweig.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

J.A.: Charlie Trumper from "As the Crow Flies."

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

J.A.: A set of 12 new short stories. •

"THE LAST DAYS OF NIGHT" by Graham Moore (Random House; August 2016): New York, 1888. Gas lamps still flicker in the city streets, but the miracle of electric light is in its infancy. The person who controls the means to turn night into day will make history—and a vast fortune. A young untested lawyer named Paul Cravath, fresh out of Columbia Law School, takes a case that seems impossible to win. Paul's client, George Westinghouse, has been sued by Thomas Edison over a billion-dollar question: Who invented the light bulb and holds the right to power the country?

The case affords Paul entry to the heady world of high society—the glittering parties in Gramercy Park mansions, and the more insidious dealings done behind closed doors. The task facing him is beyond daunting. Edison is a wily, dangerous opponent with vast resources at his disposal—private spies, newspapers in his pocket, and the backing of J. P. Morgan himself. Yet this unknown lawyer shares with his famous adversary a compulsion to win at all costs. How will he do it?

In obsessive pursuit of victory, Paul crosses paths with Nikola Tesla, an eccentric, brilliant inventor who may hold the key to defeating Edison, and with Agnes Huntington, a beautiful opera singer who proves to be a flawless performer on stage and off. As Paul takes greater and greater risks, he'll find that everyone in his path is playing their own game, and no one is

Press Photo Credit: Matt Sayles

quite who they seem.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

Graham Moore (G.M.): A friend of mine wrote me, after reading my first novel, to say that I had pretentiously used the word 'chiaroscuro' not once but twice in the book. Apparently I am obsessed with that word and need to let it go! My least favorite word is easily 'very,' which I have to remind myself to remove, line by line, from everything I write. It almost never adds meaning to a sentence, and I think I just lean on it as a crutch for purposes of rhythm.

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

G.M.: How about an experience of my being a fan? Some years back, I got to meet Erik Larson, who is one of my favorite writers in the world, on a film project. We had a few drinks, and I spent the whole meeting terrified that I would say something stupid and he would see right through me. A few years later, after I finished this book, I sent a copy to him. And not only did he read it, but he wrote me the most lovely, kind, and thoughtful message in response. Receiving that from a writer of his skill was the most encouraging thing I could have experienced.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

G.M.: I'll tell you a secret: Even though I write historical fiction, I tend to feel like everything I do is stealth autobiography. I didn't live in the 19th century, or invent the lightbulb, or become the most accomplished scientist in a generation, but I still feel this intense kinship with the characters I've chosen to write about. That's probably why I choose them. This novel was all about people who create things for a living, and how they approach their process of creation. I don't make lightbulbs—I write books and films instead—but I feel as if I've come to learn so much about my own creative process from writing about these brilliant scientists who had such amazingly creative processes of their own.

"THE MURDER OF MARY RUSSELL" by Laurie R. King (Random House Publishing Group; April 2016): Mary Russell

is used to dark secrets—her own, and those of her famous partner and husband, Sherlock Holmes. Trust is a thing slowly given, but over the course of a decade together, the two have forged an indissoluble bond.

have lorged an indissoluble bond.

And what of the other person to whom Mary Russell has opened her heart: the couple's longtime housekeeper, Mrs. Hudson? Russell's faith and affection are suddenly shattered when a man arrives on the doorstep claiming to be Mrs. Hudson's son.

What Samuel Hudson tells Russell cannot possibly be true, yet she believes him—as surely as she believes the threat of the gun in his hand. In a devastating instant, everything changes. And when the scene is discovered—a pool of blood on the floor, the smell of gunpowder in the air—the most shocking revelation of all is that the grim clues point directly to Clara Hudson.

Or rather to Clarissa, the woman she was before Baker Street.

The key to Russell's sacrifice lies in Mrs. Hudson's past. To uncover the truth, a de his anguish and push deep into his housekeeper's secrets—to a time before her

frantic Sherlock Holmes must put aside his anguish and push deep into his housekeeper's secrets—to a time before her disguise was assumed, before her crimes were buried away.

There is death here, and murder, and trust betrayed.

And nothing will ever be the same.

Press Photo Credit: Chris Schmauch,

GoodEye Photography

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

Laurie R. King (L.R.K.): Favorite? I enjoy onomatopoeic words, which are beautifully specific. 'Susurrate'; 'murmur.' But disliked words? For some reason, the word 'munch' sets my teeth on edge.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

L.R.K.: For "The Murder of Mary Russell"? Sherlock Holmes' housekeeper: has her past killed his young wife?

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

L.R.K.: "Lockdown" is a contemporary standalone thriller built around a middle school career day. Lives intersect, hidden pasts come to light, and someone brings a gun. •

DESTOR 2016 ANTHOLOGY

THE THRILL LIST

VALUE OF THRIBE OF

"THE THRILL LIST" by Catherine Lea and Others (Brakelight Press; September 2016): Catherine Lea and Brakelight Press are thrilled to bring together *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestsellers Russell Blake and Diane Capri, Amazon #1 Bestseller Joe Konrath, *Edgar* nominee

and Mystery Booksellers Association Bestseller Austin Camacho, short story award-winning author Arthur Kerns, plus Cat Connor, J.H. Bogran, Mark Bastable, Helen Hanson, Jerry Hatchett and Ken Isaacson in a collection of riveting thriller crime reads.



"THE BIG BOOK OF JACK THE RIPPER" Edited by Otto Penzler (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard; October 2016): Of the real-life serial killers whose gruesome acts have been splashed across headlines, none has reached the mythical status of Jack the

Ripper. In the Ripper's wake, terror swept through the streets of London's East End in the fall of 1888. As quickly as his nightmarish reign came, Saucy Jack vanished without a trace—leaving future generations to speculate upon his identity and whereabouts. He was diabolical in a way never seen before—a killer who taunted the police, came up with his own legendary monikers, and, ultimately, got away with his heinous crimes.

More than a century later, the man "from hell" continues to live on in the imaginations of readers everywhere—and in some of the most spectacularly unnerving stories, both fiction and nonfiction, ever written. "The Big Book of Jack the Ripper" immerses you in the utterly chilling world of Red Jack's London, where his unprecedented evil still lurks. •



"ECHOES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: STORIES INSPIRED BY THE HOLMES CANON" Edited by Laurie R. King and Leslie S. Klinger (Pegasus Books; October 2016): In this follow-up to the acclaimed "In the Company of Sherlock Holmes," expert Sherlockians Laurie

King and Les Klinger put forth the question: What happens when great writers/creators who are not known as Sherlock Holmes devotees admit to being inspired by Conan Doyle stories? While some are highly-regarded mystery writers, others are best known for their work in the fields of fantasy or science fiction. All of these talented authors, however, share a great admiration for Arthur Conan Doyle and his greatest creations, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

To the editors' great delight, these stories go in many directions. Some explore the spirit of Holmes himself; others tell of detectives themselves inspired by Holmes's adventures or methods. A young boy becomes a detective; a young woman sharpens her investigative skills; an aging actress and a housemaid each find that they have unexpected talents. Other characters from the Holmes stories are explored, and even non-Holmesian tales by Conan Doyle are echoed. The variations are endless!

Although not a formal collection of new Sherlock Holmes stories—however some do fit that mold—instead these writers were asked to be inspired by the Conan Doyle canon. The results are breathtaking, for fans of Holmes and Watson as well as readers new to Doyle's writing—indeed, for all readers who love exceptional storytelling.

"NIGHTMARES: A NEW DECADE OF MODERN HORROR" Edited by Ellen Datlow (Tachyon Publications; November 2016): Unlucky thieves invade a house where *Home Alone* seems like a playground romp. An antique bookseller and a mob enforcer join



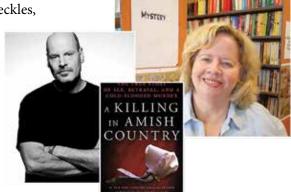
forces to retrieve the Atlas of Hell. Postapocalyptic survivors cannot decide which is worse: demon women haunting the skies or maddened extremists patrolling the earth.

In this chilling twenty-first-century companion to the cult classic "Darkness: Two Decades of Modern Horror," Ellen Datlow again proves herself the most masterful editor of the genre. She has mined the breadth and depth of ten years of terror, collecting superlative works of established masters and scene-stealing newcomers alike.

TRUFFICE 2016

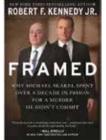
"A KILLING IN AMISH COUNTRY" by Gregg Olsen and Rebecca Morris (St. Martin's Press; July 2016): At just 30 years old, with dark-blonde hair and freckles,

Barbara Weaver was as pretty as the women depicted on the covers of her favorite "bonnet" stories—romance novels set in Amish America. Barbara had everything she'd ever wanted: five beautiful children, a home, her faith, and a husband named Eli. But while Barbara was happy to live as the Amish have for centuries—without modern conveniences, Eli was tempted by technology: cell phones, the Internet, and sexting. Online he called himself "Amish Stud" and found no shortage of "English" women looking for love and sex. Twice he left Barbara and their children, was shunned, begged for forgiveness, and had been welcomed back to the church.



Barb Raber was raised Amish, but is now a Conservative Mennonite. She drove Eli to appointments in her car, and she gave him what he wanted when he wanted: a cell phone, a laptop, rides to his favorite fishing and hunting places, and, most importantly, sex. When Eli starts asking people to kill his wife for him, Barb offers to help. One night, just after Eli had hitched a ride with a group of men to go fishing in the hours before dawn, Barb Raber entered the Weaver house and shot Barbara Weaver in the chest at close range.

It was only the third murder in hundreds of years of Amish life in America, and it fell to Edna Boyle, a young assistant prosecutor, to seek justice for Barbara Weaver.



"FRAMED: WHY MICHAEL SKAKEL SPENT OVER A DECADE IN PRISON FOR A

MURDER HE DIDN'T COMMIT" by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (Skyhorse Publishing; July 2016): On Halloween 1975, Martha Moxley was found brutally murdered outside her home in swanky Greenwich, Connecticut. Twenty-seven years after her death, the State of Connecticut spent some \$25 million to convict her friend and neighbor, Michael Skakel, of the murder. At Michael's criminal trial, the State offered no physical or forensic evidence, no fingerprints or DNA, no eyewitness linking Michael to the killing. The trial ignited a media firestorm that transfixed the nation.

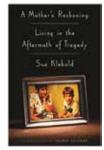
Now, Skakel's cousin, acclaimed attorney and award-winning writer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. solves the baffling whodunit and clears his cousin's name.

Kennedy, with meticulous research and reporting, proves that Michael Skakel did not and could not have murdered Martha Moxley. He chronicles how Skakel was, nevertheless, railroaded amidst a media frenzy by the devious actions of a crooked cop, a trio of mendacious writers, a treacherous family lawyer nursing a secret grudge, a narcissistic defense attorney obsessed by the spotlight, a craven prosecutor gone rogue, and a parade of perjuring witnesses. These colorful characters leap off the pages like seedy villains in a dime-store crime novel... But it's all true.

Kennedy also shows how he tracked down the likely killers, a pair of ghosts who moved in and out of Greenwich and whose presence was detected by neither police nor press during 30 years of costly yet shoddy investigation. Today, those men walk free.

This startling expose—an explosive exploration of murder and fame—is the tragic true story of Skakel's conviction

that the public has never heard. It is the product of hundreds of interviews with Skakel and those who knew both him and Martha Moxley. Kennedy gives us a real-life thriller with twists and turns, and finally answers the 40-year-old question, "Who killed Martha Moxley?"



"A MOTHER'S RECKONING" by Sue Klebold (Crown; February 2016): On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Over the course of minutes, they would kill twelve students and a teacher and wound twenty-four others before taking their own lives.

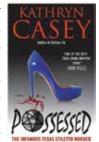
For the last sixteen years, Sue Klebold,

Dylan's mother, has lived with the indescribable grief and shame of that day. How could her child, the promising young man she had loved and raised, be responsible for such horror? And how, as his mother, had she not known something was wrong? Were there subtle signs she had missed? What, if anything, could she have done differently?

These are questions that Klebold has grappled with every day since the Columbine tragedy. In "A Mother's Reckoning," she chronicles with unflinching honesty her journey as a mother trying to come to terms with the incomprehensible. In the hope that the insights and understanding she has gained may help other families recognize when a child is in distress, she tells her story in full, drawing upon her personal journals, the videos and writings that Dylan left behind, and on countless interviews with mental health experts.

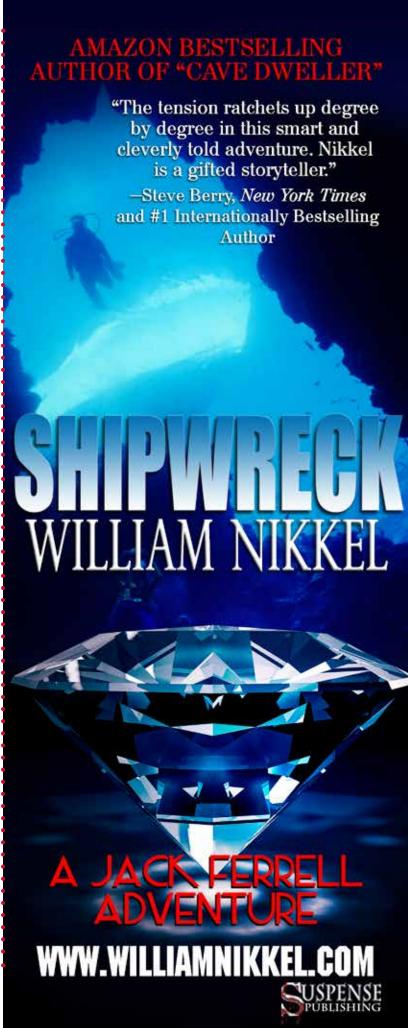
"POSSESSED" by Kathryn Casey (William Morrow; September 2016): A WALKING NIGHTMARE—IN SIZE-NINE STILETTOS...

The officer responding to a 911 call at one of Houston's hippest high-rises expected the worst. After all, domestic violence situations can be unpredictable. But nothing could've prepared him for what he found: a beautiful



woman drenched in blood...an older man lying dead on the floor...and a cobalt blue suede stiletto with tufts of white hair stuck to its five-and-a-half-inch heel.

With her stunning looks, magnetic personality, and erratic behavior, Ana Trujillo had a notorious reputation on the downtown Houston scene. She spoke often of occult powers, though few knew how deeply she believed such boasts. Stefan Andersson was a gentle soul, a Swedish transplant with a good career and trusted friends, who was desperate to find someone special. Theirs is a story of obsession, madness, and tragedy. Because once Stefan fell head over heels for Ana, he was under her control—and he didn't have a chance in hell.



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"ISABEL FEENEY: STAR REPORTER" by Beth Fantaskey (HMH Books for Young Readers; March 2016): It's 1920s Chicago—the guns-andgangster era of Al Capone—and it's unusual for a girl to be selling the *Tribune* on the street corner. But ten-year-old Isabel Feeney is unusual...unusually

obsessed with being a news reporter. She can't believe her luck when she stumbles not only into a real-live murder scene, but also into her hero, the famous journalist Maude Collier. The story of how the smart, curious, loyal Isabel fights to defend the honor of her accused friend and latches on to the murder case like a dog on a pant leg makes for a winning, thoroughly entertaining middle grade mystery.

"GIRL ON THE BRINK" by Christina Hoag (Melange Books: Fire and Ice YA;

August 2016): The summer before senior year, 17-year-old Chloe starts an internship as a reporter at a local newspaper. While on assignment, she meets Kieran, a quirky aspiring actor. Chloe becomes smitten with Kieran's

charisma and his ability to soothe her soul, torn over her parents' impending divorce. But as their bond deepens, Kieran becomes smothering and flies into terrifying rages. He confides in Chloe that he suffered a traumatic childhood, and Chloe is moved to help him. If only he could be healed, she thinks, their relationship would be perfect. But her efforts backfire and Kieran becomes violent. Chloe breaks up with him, but Kieran pursues her relentlessly to make up. Chloe must make the heartrending choice between saving herself or saving Kieran, until Kieran's mission of remorse turns into a quest for revenge.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

Christina Hoag (C.H.): It means flipping off all those agents and editors who rejected my novel! Seriously though, it's tremendously validating after years of toil and countless rejections. I'm thrilled and grateful that readers thought enough of my book to nominate it. It's a real boost to keep writing.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

C.H.: My favorite word is 'twig' as a verb, a colloquialism used in British English. If you 'twig' something, it's the flash of realizing that two plus two equals four. 'It didn't twig' means

I didn't figure it out. It's a great word and totally stumps Americans, which adds to the fun of it.

My least favorite word is 'inexorably.' This word seems to be used by basically every author who aspires to the adjective 'literary.' You can't have a literary novel without an object, person, feeling, etc. 'inexorably' going toward another. Every time I read it, I cringe. Eek!

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

C.H.: I've got a romantic suspense novel called "Heat in the Tropics" coming in the fall from Melange Books' Satin Romance line under my pen name of C.A. Elliott. It's set in the sweltering Miami summer and features an ambitious reporter, hunky homicide detective, and a serial killer. I'm also slogging away on a detective mystery with a Latin American twist set in Los Angeles.



"THE MAY QUEEN MURDERS" by Sarah Jude (HMH Books for Young Readers; May 2016): Stay on the roads. Don't enter the woods. Never go out at night.

Those are the rules in Rowan's Glen, a remote farming community in the Missouri Ozarks where Ivy Templeton's family has lived for centuries. It's an old-fashioned way of life, full of superstition and traditions, and sixteen-year-old Ivy loves it. The other kids at school may think the Glen kids are weird, but Ivy doesn't care—she has her cousin Heather as her best friend. The two girls share everything with each other—or so Ivy thinks. When Heather goes missing after a May Day celebration, Ivy discovers that both her best friend and her beloved hometown are as full of secrets as the woods that surround them.

"CROOKED KINGDOM" by Leigh Bardugo (Henry Holt and Co.; September 2016): Kaz Brekker and his crew have just pulled off a heist so daring even they didn't think they'd survive. But instead of divvying up a fat reward, they're right back to fighting for their lives. Double-crossed and badly weakened, the crew is low on resources, allies, and hope. As powerful forces



from around the world descend on Ketterdam to root out the secrets of the dangerous drug known as *jurda parem*, old rivals and new enemies emerge to challenge Kaz's cunning and test the team's fragile loyalties. A war will be waged on the city's dark and twisting streets—a battle for revenge and redemption that will decide the fate of the Grisha world.

FRILL.

"WHEN SHADOWS COME" by Vincent Zandri (Thomas & Mercer; April 2016): As a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, Nick Angel has seen a lot. But now he sees almost nothing after being struck with PTSD-related blindness resulting from the trauma of his last tour. In an attempt to put the past behind him, he travels to Venice, Italy, with his fiancée, Grace, to recover, reconnect, and rekindle their love.

Despite his physical and emotional setbacks, Nick senses something dangerously amiss in Venice, and his hunch proves right when Grace is abducted right in front of him. Because all he can see are horrific visions in his mind's eye of the village casualties from his last mission, Nick will have to rely on his other heightened senses to discover what happened to his fiancée. To find the truth, he must be willing to open his eyes to the tragedies of his past and the ghosts that haunt him.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

Vincent Zandri (V.Z.): "When Shadows Come," of course. I'm seeing Brad Pitt, protagonist, and Cliff Curtis, antagonist. You gotta think big.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

V.Z.: Temporarily blind man searches desperately for abducted fiancée in Venice.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

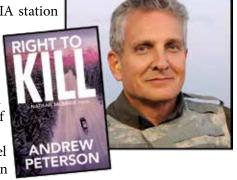
V.Z.: "The Corruptions," the fourth in the Keeper Marconi PI series, will be released in hardcover from Polis Books in January. Plus two new Chase Baker action/adventure novels will be released in the spring and summer respectively. In January of '18, look

for a new standalone, "The Detonator," also from Polis Books.

"RIGHT TO KILL" by Andrew Peterson (Thomas & Mercer; November 2016): When a team of commandos—highly skilled and armed to the teeth—tries to kidnap retired CIA station chief Linda Genneken from her home, trained Marine Nathan McBride and his partner, Harvey Fontana, arrive just in time to join the fight. But their well-honed CIA instincts tell them this is only the beginning.

McBride and Fontana set out to learn who ordered the midnight raid, and why. Is it connected to a rescue mission they conducted with Genneken in South America—a mission that nearly killed McBride? Is it related to the string of assassinations happening simultaneously in that area of the world? Or both?

With the help of their CIA contacts and aided by Genneken, the two men unravel a criminal plot with global implications. And as their race to find answers unspools in



VINCENT ZANDRI

six supercharged hours, McBride and his team will be tested like never before.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

Andrew Peterson (A.P.): Six hours of adrenaline fueled, non-stop action.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

A.P.: I am so thrilled to receive this award! I've never won anything before! I'm humbled by this honor and so pleased that readers enjoy my work enough to vote for "Right to Kill." Many, many thanks to Suspense Magazine and to all the readers who voted.

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

A.P.: Of the characters I write, I consider myself most like Harvey Fontana, the voice of reason to my protagonist Nathan McBride. Nathan is just way tougher than I am; I couldn't carry his water.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

A.P.: I'm currently working on book #7 in the Nathan McBride series to be released in the fall. A collaborative project is being considered with a New York Times bestselling author which would be a spin-off from my original series. A movie option for the McBride series is also being pursued.

"DEEP SIX" by D.P. Lyle (Oceanview Publishing; July 2016): Ex-professional baseball player Jake Longly adamantly refuses to work for his father, wanting no part of Ray's PI world. He prefers to hang out at his beachfront bar and chase bikinis along the sugary beaches of Gulf Shores, Alabama. But Ray could be persuasive, so Jake finds himself staking out the home of wealthy Barbara Plummer, a suspected adulteress. The mission seems simple enough—hang around, take a few pictures, sip a little bourbon. Except Barbara gets herself murdered right under Jake's nose.

When Jake launches into an investigation of his target's homicide, he quickly runs afoul of Ukrainian mobster Victor Borkov. Aided by his new girlfriend Nicole Jemison, and Tommy "Pancake" Jeffers, his behemoth employee with crazy computer skills, Jake tries to peel away the layers of the crime. The deeper the intrepid trio delves, the more murders start to pile up, leading them to Borkov's massive yacht—where they just might be deep-sixed.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

D.P. Lyle (D.P.L.): I'm not sure this qualifies as a "fan experience," but it was definitely memorable. I received an envelope from a woman incarcerated in a prison in Texas. Inside I found 30 handwritten pages that explained how her killing of another person with an ax was an accident. I think the person was slashed a dozen or so times—but it was still an accident. She even included drawings of the crime scene that were colored with pencils and in some cases graphic. I think she had read "Forensics For Dummies" and was requesting my help in getting her conviction overturned. Needless to say, I never responded.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

D.P.L.: I would love to see "Deep Six" become a movie. It's fun, it's fast, and it has some really outrageous characters. As for the star, I've always felt that Timothy Olyphant would make a great Jake Longly. Timothy played Raylan Givens in the Justified TV series that was based on Elmore Leonard's characters and stories. He has the "Jake" look and feel.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2017?

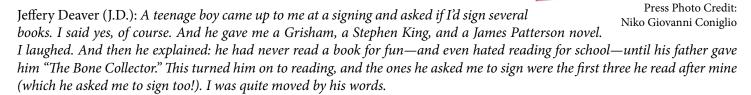
D.P.L.: I just completed the final rewrite of the next Jake Longly story. It's titled "A-List" and in this one Jake and Nicole end up

in New Orleans where a Hollywood superstar has had the misfortune of waking up next to a local girl who happens to be dead. And then, as they say, complications ensue. I'm also working on another book that involves an entirely new character. So 2017 promises to be busy.

"THE STEEL KISS" by Jeffery Deaver (Grand Central Publishing; March 2016): Amelia Sachs is hot on the trail of a killer. She's chasing him through a department store in Brooklyn when an escalator malfunctions. The stairs give way, with one man horribly mangled by the gears. Sachs is forced to let her quarry escape as she jumps in to try to help save the victim. She and famed forensic

detective Lincoln Rhyme soon learn, however, that the incident may not have been an accident at all, but the first in a series of intentional attacks. They find themselves up against one of their most formidable opponents ever: a brilliant killer who turns common products into murder weapons. As the body count threatens to grow, Sachs and Rhyme must race against the clock to unmask his identity—and discover his mission—before more people die.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?



S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

J.D.: Psycho uses microwaves, automobiles, furnaces and baby monitors as weapons.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

J.D.: Everything! My whole philosophy of writing is that I don't do this for myself. I write to give people an enjoyable, entertaining few hours away from work or while traveling or on vacation. That others would recognize that I have, in some way, achieved that goal is an honor that I'll treasure forever!



Press Photo Credit: Ollie Grove gone terribly, terribly wrong...

"THE WOMAN IN CABIN 10" by Ruth Ware (Gallery/Scout Press; July 2016): In this tightly wound, enthralling story reminiscent of Agatha Christie's works, Lo Blacklock, a journalist who writes for a travel magazine, has just been given the assignment of a lifetime: a week on a luxury cruise with only a handful of cabins. The sky is clear, the waters calm, and the veneered, select guests jovial as the exclusive cruise ship, the *Aurora*, begins her voyage in the picturesque North Sea. At first, Lo's stay is nothing but pleasant: the cabins are plush, the dinner parties are sparkling, and the guests are elegant. But as the week wears on, frigid winds whip the deck, gray skies fall, and Lo witnesses what she can only describe dark and terrifying nightmare: a woman being thrown overboard. The problem?

as a dark and terrifying nightmare: a woman being thrown overboard. The problem? All passengers remain accounted for—and so, the ship sails on as if nothing has happened, despite Lo's desperate attempts to convey that something (or someone) has

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

Ruth Ware (R.W.): I am late to this but I finally read "We Have Always Lived at the Castle" by Shirley Jackson and it was as good as everyone had said. I think that might be my read of the year. However, for contemporary authors, Erin Kelly's "He Said / She Said" bowled me over. It's hard to say too much without spoiling the plot, but it's twisty and thought-provoking in the very best ways.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

R.W.: This is a hard one to answer because there are so many criteria I could judge it on—purely on its mellifluous qualities? Possibly 'umbrella' which trips off the tongue in a very satisfying way. The word that represents my favourite things? Would have to be 'home,' or 'family.' I think for a word that sums up the slipperiness of the English language though, it would have to be 'quite.' It has so many different meanings and nuances, some of them completely opposed, depending on how you say the word. Least favourite word would have to be 'hubby.' Nothing against my lovely husband, I just find it unbearably cutesie!

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

R.W.: "Woman disappears off a luxury cruise—but was she ever there?" That's 11. I could lose the a, I guess?

"A GREAT RECKONING" by Louise Penny (Minotaur Books; August 2016): When an intricate old map is found stuffed into the walls of the bistro in Three Pines, it at first seems no more than a curiosity. But the closer the villagers look, the stranger it becomes.

Given to Armand Gamache as a gift the first day of his new job, the map eventually leads him to shattering secrets. To an old friend and older adversary. It leads the former Chief of Homicide for the Sûreté du Québec to places even he is afraid to go. But must.

And there he finds four young cadets in the Sûreté Academy, and a dead professor. And, with the body, a copy of the old, odd map.

Everywhere Gamache turns, he sees Amelia Choquet, one of the cadets. Tattooed and pierced. Guarded and angry. Amelia is more likely to be found on the other side of a police line-up. And yet she is in the academy. A protégée of the murdered professor.

The focus of the investigation soon turns to Gamache himself and his mysterious relationship with Amelia, and his possible involvement in the crime. The frantic search for answers takes the investigators back to Three Pines and a stained glass window with its own horrific secrets.

For both Amelia Choquet and Armand Gamache, the time has come for a great reckoning. •

"BACK BLAST" by Mark Greaney (Berkley; February 2016): Court Gentry was the CIA's best agent. Until the day the Agency turned against him and put out a kill on sight order. That's when the enigmatic international assassin called the Gray Man was born—and Court has been working for himself ever since.

Now, Court is back in Washington looking for answers. He's determined to find out what happened all those years ago that made the Agency turn against him. On his list to interrogate are his former partners and the men who sent him on his last mission. What he doesn't realize is that the questions that arose from that mission are still reverberating in the U.S. intelligence community, and he's stumbled onto a secret that powerful people want kept under wraps. And now, they have Court in their crosshairs.

Court Gentry is used to having people on his trail, but this time, it's on U.S. soil—the last place he wants to be. Now, he'll have to find the answers to his fate while evading capture...and avoiding death.



Press Photo Credit: Carrie Echols

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Mark Greaney (M.G.): Many times when out on tour signing books in the Tom Clancy Jack Ryan series that I write, I am somehow mistaken for Tom Clancy himself. (Even though my name and picture is in huge letters right behind me at the signing table.) I almost always politely set the person straight, even though they might have waited in line for a half hour to get the book signed. Usually they try to hide the fact they are crestfallen, and it is doubly awkward when I have to tell them Tom sadly passed away in 2013. But there was one lady last year who was excited to tears to meet her literary hero, and she was not a native English speaker, and there were dozens of people in line behind her patiently waiting, so I did not correct her impression that I was Tom. I just rolled with it. I thanked her for her kind words about "The Hunt for Red October," signed my own name in her book, and

got a picture with her. Hopefully she enjoyed the book.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/ antagonist?

M.G.: My first book, "The Gray Man," is in Hollywood now, in pre-production at Sony, with Christopher McQuarrie (Mission Impossible, Jack Reacher, Edge of Tomorrow) to produce. In a perfect world I'd love Tom Hardy or Bradley Cooper in the title role, but the studio owns the option and they can go in whatever direction they choose.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

M.G.: I've had such an amazing response to "Back Blast," and it was the book I was least sure of when I turned it in to the editor. Compared to the first four books in the series, in "Back Blast" there is more character development, more back story, more set up of the thriller in the early going, and more raw emotion from my hero, who is normally a very cool customer. I worried some people would think the story was going soft, but I went with my gut because the personal quest "The Gray Man" undertakes in this novel meant he would surely have the depth of emotion to deal with throughout the novel. His inner battle would be as trying to him as the enemies on his tail. But the book has been so well received by the public, that it has given me more confidence to believe in my writing. Now, getting the Suspense Magazine nomination on top of the great sales and great reviews, really shows me that going with my gut on this novel was the right approach, so it is huge for me in the development of my writing.

"DARK MATTER" by Blake Crouch (Crown; July 2016): "Are you happy with your life?"

Those are the last words Jason Dessen hears before the masked abductor knocks him unconscious.

Before he awakens to find himself strapped to a gurney, surrounded by strangers in hazmat suits.

Before a man Jason's never met smiles down at him and says, "Welcome back, my friend."

In this world he's woken up to, Jason's life is not the one he knows. His wife is not his wife. His son was never born. And Jason is not an ordinary college physics professor, but a celebrated genius who has achieved something remarkable. Something impossible.

Is it this world or the other that's the dream? And even if the home he remembers is real, how can Jason possibly make it back to the family he loves? The answers lie in a journey more wondrous and horrifying than anything he could've imagined one that will force him to confront the darkest parts of himself even as he battles a terrifying, seemingly unbeatable foe.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

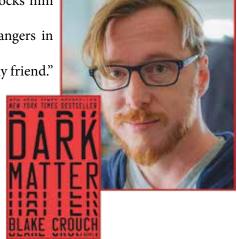
Blake Crouch (B.C.): "When Breath Becomes Air."

B.C.: Cormac McCarthy.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

B.C.: It's a great honor because it means my book connected with fans in all the ways I had hoped it would.

"STRONG COLD DEAD" by Jon Land (Forge Books; October 2016): The terrorist organization ISIS is after a deadly toxin that could be the ultimate weapon of mass destruction. The same toxin holds the potential to eradicate cancer. There is a frantic race to see who can get to it first, even as Caitlin Strong begins to assemble the disparate



Press Photo Credit: Jesse Giddings

pieces of a deadly puzzle.

At the center of that puzzle is an Indian reservation where a vengeful tycoon is mining the toxin, disguising his effort as an oil-drilling operation. This is the same reservation where Caitlin's great-great-grandfather, also a Texas Ranger, once waged a similar battle against the forces of John D. Rockefeller.

In her highest-stakes adventure yet, Caitlin Strong faces off against a host of adversaries that just might include the beautiful Comanche girl with whom the son of her ex-outlaw boyfriend Cort Wesley Masters has fallen in love, along with a mythic monster culled from Native American folklore that the tribe believes has risen to protect its land. The lives of those Caitlin loves most are threatened by the villains she's pursuing; her own moral code is challenged. The fate of both the country and the state she loves are dangling on the precipice of a strong cold death.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

Jon Land (J.L.): I'm going to go with "Razor Girl" by Carl Hiaasen because it was laugh out loud funny, never let up for a minute, and delivered on everything it promised. That makes it the best for me.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

J.L.: Texas Ranger Caitlin Strong faces off against ISIS on Texas soil.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

J.L.: It's such an honor and true thrill to be mentioned in the same breath as some of the true greats in the thriller genre. An affirmation that what I'm trying to do is working.

"THE OBSIDIAN CHAMBER" by Preston and Child (Grand Central Publishing; October 2016): A TRAGIC DISAPPEARANCE.

After a harrowing, otherworldly confrontation on the shores of Exmouth, Massachusetts, Special Agent A.X.L. Pendergast is missing, presumed dead.

A SHOCKING RETURN.

Sick with grief, Pendergast's ward, Constance, retreats to her chambers beneath the family mansion at 891 Riverside Drive—only to be taken captive by a shadowy figure from the past.

AN INTERNATIONAL MANHUNT.

Proctor, Pendergast's longtime bodyguard, springs to action, chasing Constance's kidnapper through cities, across oceans, and into wastelands unknown.

BUT IN A WORLD OF BLACK AND WHITE, NOTHING IS AS IT SEEMS.

And by the time Proctor discovers the truth, a terrifying engine has stirred-and it may already be too late...

Press Photo Credit: Deborah Feingold

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

Lincoln Child (L.C.): A play, actually: "Webster's Duchess of Malfi." I've read plenty of Shakespeare, Jonson and Marlowe, but rarely have I read a work of the time that is so deliciously macabre: corruption, strangulation, "gaslighting," and the bizarre use of a dead man's hand...

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

L.C.: I don't know if I have a favorite word, but I have a least favorite: 'closure' (as in 'finding closure').

S. MAG.: Out of the characters you write, who is the most like you?

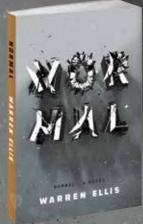
L.C.: William Smithback, Jr. •

"Crackling, Funny, and Frightening."*

"Normal is hectic and smart and brutal and funny, and queasy-making, too.

Like William Gibson and Margaret Atwood, Warren Ellis is one
of those writers who seem to have an all-access
backstage pass to the total weirdness of the
now."—LAUREN BEUKES





NORMAL / A NOVEL

WARREN ELLIS



Illen Roger

Farrar, Straus and Giroux www.fsgoriginals.com



Kirkus Reviews



And the Winner is...

Press Photo Credit: Nancy Rose

"ORPHAN X" by Gregg Hurwitz (Minotaur Books; January 2016): *Who is Orphan X?*

The Nowhere Man is a legendary figure spoken about only in whispers. It's said that when he's reached by the truly desperate and deserving, the Nowhere Man can and will do anything to protect and save them. But he's not merely a legend.

Evan Smoak is a man with skills, resources, and a personal mission to help those with nowhere else to turn. He's also a man with a dangerous past. Chosen as a child, he was raised and trained as an Orphan, an off-the-books black box program designed to create the perfect deniable intelligence asset: An assassin. Evan was Orphan X—

until he broke with the program and used everything he learned to disappear. But now someone is on his tail. Someone with similar skills and training who will exploit Evan's secret new identity as the Nowhere Man to eliminate him.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What's the best book you read in 2016?

Gregg Hurwitz (G.H.): Joe Ide's "IQ"

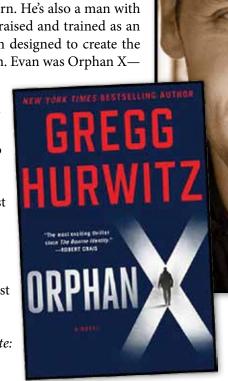
SuspenseMagazine.com

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

G.H.: Favorite: 'Rambunctious.' Least favorite: 'Anxious.'

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

G.H.: Black program assassin with unbroken moral compass goes pro bono.



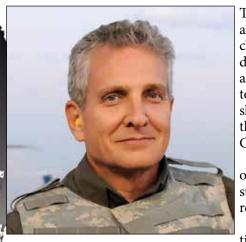


79

ALWAYS EVOLVING

Sit Down With Andrew Peterson

Interview by Sheila English for *Suspense Magazine* Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



The creator of the international bestselling suspense series, *Nathan McBride*, has an incredible bio. An excellent marksman, author Andrew Peterson holds the classification of Master in the NRA's High Power Rifle ranking system. And his indepth familiarity and skill with weapons, as well as his absolute dedication to learning and research, has resulted in speaking engagements that range from craft workshops to ATF canine demonstrations. With hobbies that include flying helicopters, target shooting, scuba diving and more, it's no wonder that Andrew Peterson enjoys more than a few of the skill sets that his thrilling character, Marine scout sniper and former CIA operations officer Nathan McBride retains.

Beginning the series with "First to Kill," the *Nathan McBride* journey is now on its sixth release, "Right to Kill." Fans will definitely be pleased that this author is still offering up fresh, fast-paced plots that keep his characters racing, while keeping readers sitting on the edge of their seats.

We recently caught up with Andrew and he was kind enough to take a little time away from his busy schedule to speak about his writing and the Marine that

suspense lovers just can't stop talking about:

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the most important character trait you've given to Nathan McBride, and why is that so important?

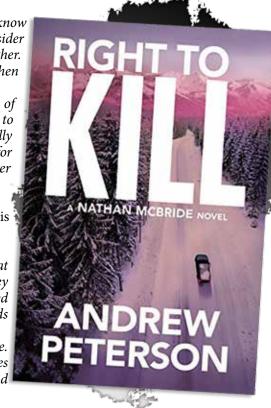
Andrew Peterson (A.P.) Loyalty. It's forefront in his life. Nathan's friends and family know they can depend on him. And the reverse is also true; if it wasn't, he wouldn't consider them friends. The definition of friendship to Nathan is the willingness to die for the other. Nothing less will do. Loyalty ties into accountability. Nathan's a man of his word—when he says he'll do something, he does it.

In a nutshell, he's a tough guy with a heart. Because Nathan adheres to a set of values that govern his life, the way he views the world determines the way he reacts to the situations he encounters. He's not afraid to make the tough choices. Occasionally he'll do some questionable, even unprincipled things, which create ethical dilemmas for him. He doesn't enjoy bending or breaking the rules, but he has to consider the bigger picture.

S. MAG.: Nathan was captured and tortured during a mission. Tell us how this experience changed him.

A.P.: Nathan carries quite a bit of emotional weight from the botched mission that ended his career. After the termination of the Nicaraguan civil war when he and Harvey served as "advisors" to the Contras, Nathan was captured and brutally interrogated over a three-week period before Harvey finally located and rescued him from the hands of a sadistic madman. To this day, he still carries the spiritual and physical scars.

Like all of us, Nathan has issues with trusting people, but his is an extreme case. He doesn't think ill of humanity in general, but people erect shells around themselves and use those to avoid being hurt. Having relationships involves risk. The two go hand



in hand. Nathan's experienced enough hurt for three lifetimes, so he's protective of himself. It's why his friendship with Harvey is so special. Their trust in one another is absolute and unbreakable. Nathan would rather die than betray Harvey's friendship.

He's got a short fuse, and he's constantly fighting a battle to control the darker aspect of his soul. Despite all he endured, he's got a kind heart and sticks up for the little guy. He hates bullies and won't stand idly by if someone's being rude or abusive in front of him. If you want to ring Nathan McBride's bell and see what he's capable of, kick a dog in front of him. You'll wish you hadn't!

As far as evolution goes? Nathan's the same character in "Right to Kill" that he was in "First to Kill." The reader learns new things about him, but he hasn't changed who he is. It's fair to say he learned something about himself in "First to Kill." He learned he didn't have to be alone. He developed a relationship with Holly Simpson who was the special agent in charge of the Sacramento field division when he and Harvey took on an assignment for a friend. So in that sense, he's become less solitary. Nathan doesn't have many friends, so his relationship with Holly is special—something he doesn't take for granted.

S. MAG.: Nathan has an extensive military and intelligence background. Does that make it more difficult to create missions or scenarios that challenge your hero?

A.P.: Nathan's background and skill sets have given him the tools he needs to get missions successfully completed. The biggest challenge he faces is working outside the environs of the military intelligence communities. several instances, he and Harvey are working behind the scenes, without any type of formal authorization from governmental agencies. Sharing elements of their background allows the reader to understand why they're qualified and capable of taking on the tough assignments—often at great personal risk. A hero's journey is never easy, and I make no exceptions with Nathan.

S. MAG.: The military missions, jargon

and weapons seem very realistic in the way you portray them. What kind of background or research do you do/have to make the stories so realistic?

A.P.: I do tons of research. I'm also fortunate to have a number of friends who've worked in law enforcement and the military. How much research do I put into the books? About ten percent. As a thriller novelist, there's an important point to remember. I'm an entertainer, not an educator. It's not my job to write "how to" books. My job is to create compelling stories that keep readers turning pages. It's the kiss of death to bore readers with meaningless filler, research, and character backstory. Don't get me wrong, some of that detail is needed, but it's easy to fall into the research trap. "I did all this research, therefore it needs to be in the book!" Incorrect. I'm constantly asking myself: Is what I'm writing going to be interesting to the reader? If not, I change direction. It's hard to go wrong if you stay close to the main storyline of vour book.

Nathan is a retired Marine sniper, but I don't think the vast majority of readers care about all the intricate details of precision shooting over long distances. I'm always trying to find a balance between over-describing a scene versus not having enough detail to create suspense and drama. I often rely on instinct. Some settings require more detail than others, especially if there's going to be an extended amount of action in that scene. Every so often, I think fiction novelists need to remind themselves that they're entertainers, not educators.

S. MAG.: Nathan is your main character, but he has a partner, Harv. Tell us a bit about their partnership and friendship.

A.P.: Harvey Fontana is the voice of reason and calm in Nathan's life. He's the glue that holds Nathan's soul together. In many ways, they're closer than family. During their botched mission, Nathan made a huge sacrifice for Harv; he allowed himself to be captured so that Harv could escape. Harv has always felt very guilty about that. Harv is not a sidekick by any definition, he's an integral part of the Nathan McBride

series. It's funny, many readers like Harv as much, and some even like him more than Nathan!

S. MAG.: How would you describe a *Nathan McBride* novel? What can readers expect of each book?

A.P.: Although the Nathan McBride novels are character driven, they contain a lot of action. Book six, "Right to Kill," takes place during a six-hour time frame! It's important for an author to know his protagonist inside and out. I'm no different. I have to know Nathan's core motivation. As I stated before, he's not afraid to make the tough choices. He knows the real world, the horrible things few people will ever see or even know about, so Nathan's "world view" isn't seen through rose-colored glasses. Is there violence in the books? Yes. Is it gratuitous? Absolutely not. Nathan isn't a violent man by nature, but he doesn't fight his battles with one hand tied behind his back. When the situation calls for it, he's "all in."

At their core, the Nathan McBride novels are about friendship, loyalty, and honor. What are Nathan and Harvey willing to do in order to help a friend? The answer is: Whatever it takes!

S. MAG.: Where can readers find out more about your series and your upcoming projects and events?

A.P.: The best place to find me online is at: www.andrewpeterson.com. There's loads of information, including my Facebook and Twitter pages. Please feel free to contact me. I'm always happy to hear from folks who've read one or more of the Nathan McBride novels!

Although new readers can begin with this sixth book in the *Nathan McBride* series, "Right to Kill," the experience that comes from meeting the Marine scout sniper from the very beginning is truly unforgettable. This is one character's life you do *not* want to miss a moment of!

For more information about the author, check out: www.andrewpeterson.com; Facebook @ andrew.peterson.author; or Twitter @ apetersonnovels. •

81

WRITING A PI NOVEL WASN'T ALWAYS EASY

With Dana King

Interview by Weldon Burge for *Suspense Magazine*Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



When it comes to crime fiction, Dana King has proven time and again that he has a unique talent for writing great stories. His PI novels have garnered high praise—including a nomination for a coveted Shamus Award for his *Nick Forte* novel "A Small Sacrifice." His novel "Grind Joint," the second in his *Penns River* series, was deemed one of the 15 best noir reads of 2013 by the LA Review of Books.

Dana has worked as a musician, public school teacher, information systems analyst, and consultant—and his broad skills have helped him in many ways to write his fiction (especially his background as a musician). I met Dana a few years ago at the Creatures, Crimes, and Creativity conference, and we hit it off well. He was happy to oblige us with an interview for *Suspense Magazine*.

Weldon Burge (W.B.): I couldn't write a PI novel if you put a gun to my head. Yet it seems to come naturally for you. Does it?

Dana King (D.K.): Not as much as it used to, apparently. When I first started writing, PI stories were pretty much what I read in crime fiction, so I naturally thought that way. Now that I've broadened my reading horizons and begun writing some different stuff, I find the ideas for PI stories don't come to me as easily as they used to. The writing itself comes around pretty quickly, but story

ideas I'm willing to spend a year or more developing are fewer and farther between.

W.B.: I think one reason I'd have trouble writing a PI novel would be maintaining a first-person POV for hundreds of pages. This is an admirable trait for PI novelists. How have you developed this skill?

D.K.: Here's my true confession: when I started writing them, all the PIs I read were in first person, so that seemed natural. Also, I came up through public school during a time when traditional concepts of teaching English were under attack. My school taught something called "Linguistics," which means I learned sentences have two parts—a noun phrase and verb phrase—and there are two tenses, past and present. I was painfully aware of my lack of grammatical background and figured that if I wrote in first person I could blame any grammatical errors on the narrator. Swear to God.

W.B.: Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler?

D.K.: Two years ago, I would have said Chandler. Now it's Hammett. I still love Chandler's work, but Hammett's writing is

cleaner and I find myself more influenced by it all the time.

W.B.: Dialogue is also critical in crime fiction. Names like Elmore Leonard, Ed McBain, and Donald Westlake immediately come to my mind. How much (and how) do you polish your own dialogue?

D.K.: As Sam Spade said in "The Maltese Falcon," "I like to talk." Once I find a topic that suits the situation and characters, drafting dialogue is often a matter of transcribing what I think that person would say. That's well and good as far as it goes, but good dialogue is not a transcription of conversation; it's a distillation. In subsequent drafts I'll go back and trim conversational excesses, like how much time is spent discussing something off-topic. Not necessarily removing all of that. People talk about things other than what they're actually talking about all the time. Leaving some in lends authenticity and can provide characterization. The trick is to cut as many extraneous words as possible. What most people think of as sharp and snappy repartee in a book or a movie would come off as abrupt in real life. My job is to thread the needle between the two.

W.B.: Your *Detective Nick Forte* novels have been well-received, and have been nominated for various awards—including "A Small Sacrifice" nominated for the prestigious Shamus Award. How was Forte "born"?

D.K.: About the time my musical career—such as it was—fell apart; a couple of trumpet playing friends were talking about an orchestral audition some thought had been rigged. I had a little distance from the field by that time and decided it would be fun to write a short story about a rigged audition that came to involve a murder, and how a PI who used to be a trumpet player solved the case. I used my friends as the characters, and, of course, made myself the hero. "Forte" is the musical term for "loud," but, literally, is Italian for "strong." I needed a first name and wanted something that sounded strong and decisive. Hard consonants work there, so I ran with Nick, which sounds a little more Italian than Rick.

W.B.: How much of Nick Forte is Dana King?

D.K.: Originally, pretty much all of him. When I wrote the first short stories and the first novel I was a divorced dad with some guilt and separation issues concerning being away from my very young daughter. Former army band musician, trumpet player, public school teacher. Forte spent time as a cop that I did not, but I needed him to in order to be believable as the kind of PI he was.

An interesting thing I noticed a year or so ago is that Ben "Doc" Dougherty, the lead character in my Penns River novels, is also based on me in many ways. Write what you know, right? What I hadn't caught is that the increasing levels of violence in the Forte stories are making him dark. Doc has, so far, avoided that. It put me in mind of something James Ellroy said about Chandler and Hammett, that Chandler wrote about the kind of man he wanted to be and Hammett wrote about the kind of man he was afraid he was. Without setting out to, I think Ben Dougherty is the kind of man I'd like to think I am, and Nick Forte has evolved into the man I'm afraid I'd be given the wrong circumstances.

W.B.: Tell us about your latest series, the *Penns River* crime novels.

D.K.: I grew up in Penns River and still go back to visit my parents half a dozen times a year. Not "Penns River," Penns River—the three adjacent small towns and one township that make up what I call Penns River. After the Great Recession began in 2008 I became more aware of how economic disparity plays out geographically, even in relatively close quarters. The defining event of my adolescence was the closing of the steel and aluminum mills in the Greater Pittsburgh area. Pittsburgh has since recovered to become a leading city in medicine, education, and finance. Many of the whiter-collar suburbs recovered with them. The blue-collar towns not so much. It was sad to see the town where I grew up and of which I have so many fond memories, critical in shaping the person I have become for both good and ill, to be left behind. Including by me, at least physically, so there's some guilt involved, too. Politicians stand in line to talk about the value of the middle class and what they're going to do for the middle class. No one has much to say about the



working class, and they're the people who actually provided the physical labor for all the great things the middle class gets credit for.

W.B.: So, how did all of this inform your novels?

D.K.: Well, about that time, I noticed the uptick in what's sometimes called "rural noir," led by Daniel Woodrell. Cities never lacked for writers to tell their stories, and now the hills and the country were getting worthy champions. It seemed to me the small towns that served as bridges between the cities and the country were once again being left out. This was an area I knew well and felt strongly about, so I started to set stories there. My father spent years on the zoning committee, so I had some inside background. I also started to subscribe to the local newspaper over the Internet and was amazed at the wealth of stories I'd never been aware of before.

The novels themselves try to show what it's like to be a cop in such a town, where the economy never gets better and crime gets worse. A lot of the older cops in particular signed on when things weren't this bad and have to face conditions much more dangerous and serious than what they expected or wanted. The stories are told from multiple points of view, but there is a lead character, a police detective named Ben Dougherty everyone calls Doc. Doc left town to spend nine years as an MP and turned down well-paying security jobs to come back home and be a cop. He loves the place but has been away long enough and seen enough to view it with objective eyes.

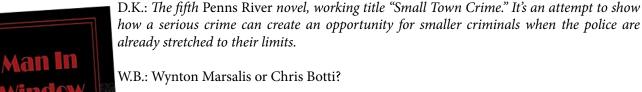
W.B.: Some of your short stories have appeared in anthologies ("Blood, Guts, and Whiskey") and elsewhere (*New Mystery Reader, A Twist of Noir*, and others). Yet you've mentioned that you find writing short fiction difficult. How so?

D.K.: I have trouble with short stories. Not so much with flash fiction. There's something about the range of more than 1,000 but less than 5,000 words that's awkward. If I'm having trouble with the story, I tend to cut it back until it's a flash piece. If it's going well, I'm tempted to expand it into a novel, or at least the germ of one. I'm usually able to produce one short story every year or so, usually for a specific thing, like the Creatures, Crimes, and Creativity conference anthology, for example.

W.B.: Speaking of which, I learned at this year's conference, as you mentioned earlier, that you are an accomplished musician, proficient on the trumpet. How has music influenced your writing?

D.K.: I think it's been a huge help with dialogue. Narration, too, but especially dialogue, because music developed my ear to the point where I can tell intuitively when the dialogue sounds right. Even in narration I'll sometimes use a word that isn't the best if you're going by dictionary definitions, but it sounds better in that context. Because of this, I can't have any music around me when I'm writing. I need to hear the words. It's bad enough they have to compete with all the other voices in my head.

W.B.: So, what are you working on now?

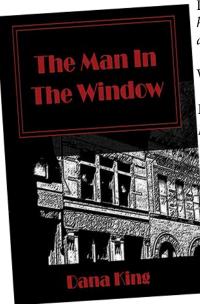


D.K.: Dude, please. Wynton Marsalis. I'm hesitant to call what Chris Botti does trumpet playing.

W.B.: And finally, just for fun: Perry Mason or Matlock?

D.K.: Matlock, but it's close. What pushes him over the top for me is his country-boy, awshucks manner when he's the smartest guy in the room. Lulls people to sleep. Perry's good, he knows it, and he wants to make sure you know it. I'm sure it would be intimidating as hell for opposing counsel, but Matlock's more fun to watch. It's a little like choosing between Sherlock Holmes and Columbo.

For more on Dana King, check out his blog at danaking.blogspot.com.



THE HOURGLASS

ason Clark hated everything involved with time, yet here he was trying to find a cheap alarm clock. His boss had threatened to fire him if he arrived late again. It wasn't his fault that his clock and iPhone alarms both failed on the same night. With the leaps in technology that helped people live to be over a hundred, he was surprised nobody had yet figured out a way to eliminate the need for time.

The streets were as cold as the chill that bit into him, and he glanced warily as he walked, not quite trusting the neighborhood. He felt compelled to continue, even as the surroundings grew more discouraging. He hustled past one gutted shop after another until he caught a glimpse of a wooden sign hanging outside a darkened doorway on Sprague Street, belonging to a place with metal bars over the windows—not unusual for that part of town. Timeworn brick and crumbling mortar made the place look like a death trap. Still, like many old buildings, it had a certain strange charm. The sign was hand painted in palsied script: *THE TIME PEACE*.

Amused, Jason approached the door. It was indeed a clock shop, and nothing but. It reminded him of an antique store he had passed by every day on Third Avenue while he was growing up, long since replaced by a Costco. But the clocks inside that shop had been far more old-fashioned than the ones that now stared back at him through the windows of The Time Peace. He tried the door and found it unlocked, surprising for that late hour. He entered into a quiet, darkened room with hundreds of clocks, which reminded him of how much he despised the fact that the universe ran in a timely manner. Despite the incessant tick-tock, he found the atmosphere surprisingly serene, a welcome change from the dark and cold of the outside. Maybe the store's sign was accurate after all.

"May I help you?"

He turned away from the wall and faced the counter. The speaker was a raven-haired woman of about thirty with a welcoming, engrossing face. Jason cleared his throat.

"My alarm clock broke this morning, and I've been looking for a replacement."

She smiled. "This is not what you would call a modern store, even for a clock shop," she said matter-of-factly. Her voice was melodic, sexy, but in an unstudied way. She drifted over to the shelf, and Jason guessed she was about five foot ten and graceful when she moved. Reaching to the top, she retrieved something he hadn't quite been able to see before, came back, and set it down on the counter: a wooden

hourglass. By Jeff Ayers

Her dark eyes turned almost sultry. "This will help you with everything you need regarding time."

Something in Jason's mind urged him to tell her that she had brought him the wrong piece, but he stayed quiet. The hourglass's red brass frame shone with a rich warm glow, and the crystal containing the sand captured a rainbow from the store's dim lights. Even the sand had a sparkling, ethereal quality to it. He was captivated and, though he had planned on purchasing a simple alarm clock, was oddly pleased to buy the magical timepiece.

Jason arrived at his home in Browne's Addition just in time for the late news on KHQ, and settled down in front of the television with a scotch on the rocks, his typical nightcap. While the broadcaster talked about the latest war, Jason pulled out the hourglass.

The brass and wood frame was handcrafted, with only the faintest of seams. He saw no flaw in the crystal—not a bubble or line—and it had the heavy light-displacing qualities of blown glass. He slowly turned it over, watching the sand fall one way, then the other. The late winter evening seemed to become locked in a stillness that swallowed up all activity. He finished with the news and his drink while the sand continued to cascade in the hourglass. By the time the last grain fell, Jason was asleep.

ome time later, Jason emerged from his slumber like a car motor shuddering to life on a winter morning. His blond hair was matted to the soft feather pillow where his head rested. His eyelids felt like they were covered with lead. Concentrating, he opened his eyes only to find his bedroom completely transformed. But was it his bedroom?

The walls radiated a brilliant white. He blinked. Still white. Still radiant. And completely bare, aside from the intricate, web-like patterns in the plaster. The room was empty. Stark.

He had to wake up. He shook himself, but the strange scene would not depart. He could not find the bedroom that somehow had been swallowed in his sleep. In fact the entire room was empty except for the bed he lay in and the small table next to it. The size of the chamber and the metal rails framing his bed made him think he was in a hospital room. How in the hell did I end up here, he wondered.

He stirred. Something held his hands. The straps around his wrists appeared delicate, yet resisted his attempts to break

free. This couldn't be happening.

He looked down at his chest. There was no shirt. He judged from the feel of the sheets on his legs that he wore no pants. At least over his front he wore a blue hospital gown, soft but clinical. When he was a child they had put something like this on him, and then the torture began. His throat screamed in pain; blood came out of his mouth. He couldn't eat. They called it a tonsillectomy. He shuddered at the memory.

He struggled through three deep breaths. Yawning, he took another look around. It was then he noticed the familiar object on top of the table. The hourglass. Sand had almost finished flowing through its translucent form, and for a moment the sight comforted him, but the feeling quickly passed.

An overwhelming urge to sleep swept through his body. As he started to lose consciousness, he noticed an intravenous unit above his bed, and a tube snaking out of the IV toward him. He followed the tube with his eyes to see where it led. As sleep overtook him, he saw that the IV wasn't connected to his arm, it dangled beside his bed. If he had looked at the hourglass, he would have noticed that at precisely the same instant the sand ran out, he fell asleep.

ason's eyes snapped open and quickly scanned his surroundings. He was still in the strange hospital room, and the hourglass was still there, sand just beginning to flow through its body. Again, he briefly felt glad to see the timepiece, like it was an old friend.

"I see that you're awake."

He turned his head to see who had spoken.

She glided forward and stood at the edge of the bed. Her long, dark hair flowed over her shoulders as she smiled at him. Like the hourglass, she, too, seemed very familiar. Looking at her more closely, he realized she was the woman from the clock shop.

"How are we feeling this morning, Jason?"

"Where am I? And why are you here?"

Her face registered a quick look of surprise, and then softened again. She leaned closer to him. He could see even more clearly how beautiful she was. He tried to move to the side of the bed, but the restraints held him fast. He found it difficult to breathe.

"My name is Cynthia Black. But you can call me Cynthia, if you like."

"What I would like is to call the police. Why have you kidnapped me?"

She smiled. "Let me get you something for your dry mouth." She darted away and reappeared just as quickly with a paper cup in her hand. "Here's some water. Don't swallow it too fast." She leaned down and force-fed it to him. He wanted to gulp it, but he made himself swallow slowly.

She took the cup away from him and smiled. Jason realized he liked her smile, a thought that scared him. He remembered reading something about a condition where kidnapped victims fell for their captors. He took a deep breath and felt a stabbing pain in his ribs, like a Ginsu knife advertisement. He didn't know if the restraints were responsible, but he had never felt anything so god-awful.

"Damn. What have you done to me, Cynthia?"

She looked impassively at him while he was in obvious agony. Glancing at the timepiece, she noticed the sand's flow had almost ceased. "You get some rest now, Jason, and I'll check on you later."

Jason wanted to say, "Please let me go." Instead, he watched her leave as the pain subsided and he drifted off into slumber.

unlight bathed the vast field of corn, ready for harvest. From his viewpoint on the porch of the farmhouse, Jason felt as if he could jump off and, like a high diver, splash into the immense green ocean. As his mind wandered, the old apartment was forgotten, and his wife glanced outside to see what he was up to. She stepped out onto the porch and quietly shut the screen door.

"I thought I heard you. I'm sorry, Cindy. I lost track of time again, didn't I?" Her long, black, wavy hair fell loosely over her shoulders. He thought she looked more alluring than ever.

"Don't worry about it, Jason. I know you're thinking about the harvest."

"I love you; do you know that?"

"Yes, I do. And I love you." She walked over to him. Their arms entwined in a warm embrace and their lips met.

As they stood kissing in the warm brightness of the day, the light gradually extinguished. Their kiss broke, and they looked skyward as a black cloud descended.

"No!" Jason yelled. He let go of Cindy and dashed toward the cornfield.

He ran at full speed through the dense foliage. The brutal gauntlet of stalks flailed and scratched at his body. An especially sharp stalk slashed his left cheek. Gasping, he paused to feel the scratch just as the horde of locusts invaded the cornfield. Each step he took was now like walking through a hailstorm. The sounds of crunching and chirping assaulted his ears. Several locusts found their way onto him and attempted to crawl down his throat, biting him all the while. Jason screamed as he frantically tried to fend them off, only to have more locusts descend upon him, quickly covering his body.

He tried to brush them off with a weary arm. One last time he shook and twisted his body, but he fell to the ground under their combined assault. He could feel the breath being crushed out of him, sapping his last ounce of strength. Lying on the ground with consciousness flickering, he saw the hourglass a few feet away. Painfully, Jason dragged himself toward it. Just as he blacked out, his hand grazed it. In a flash the locusts fled, and the sand in the hourglass ran out.

ason awoke from his seeming nightmare, and it took a few seconds for his foggy vision to regain its clarity. Glancing quickly at the hourglass, he saw the sand in it just starting to flow. He discovered the restraints were a little looser, but he still couldn't move. A newly formed scar itched on his left cheek.

A moment later, Cynthia came into the room. He tried to appear as though he had been resting comfortably. Somehow his pain, his nightmares, and the hourglass were

all connected, and he felt close to figuring it all out.

"Better?" she asked him.

"Not really. My chest hurts worse than ever, and you still have me tied up like a prisoner."

"I'm sorry, but the restraints are necessary. Did you sleep well, though?"

"I haven't done anything to you, so please let me go!"

She ignored his pleas. As Jason stared into her eyes, a question pressed its way into Jason's mind.

"Are you married?"

He immediately regretted asking it; moreover, he had no idea why he had asked. Was it because he had just dreamed they were a couple?

She turned away for a moment and then returned to his bedside. Her expression looked as if she had been waiting for just that question. "My husband passed away about a year ago."

"I'm sorry," he said, and truly meant it. "Is this why you decided to kidnap me? I know a good psychotherapist who can help you overcome your grief. Please let me go, and I promise I will take care of everything."

She leaned down until her face stopped mere inches from his. "Don't patronize me, Jason." She stood up straight and then walked out of the room without looking back.

After waiting a couple of minutes to make sure she wasn't going to return, he tried once again to break the thin, white restraints. The pain was terrible, and he came close to passing out. But he persevered until the restraints were broken and he was sitting upright. His chest was about to explode from the pain. While he waited for the pain to pass, he stared at the hourglass.

The hourglass seemed almost aware of his attention. Jason pushed the covers aside and tried to stand, but his legs gave way, and he fell onto the cold linoleum. He painfully forced himself to his feet, pulling up his body with the assistance of the bed. This time, he slowly adjusted to the weight on his legs so he wouldn't fall again. After staggering over to the table, Jason confronted the hourglass.

He picked up the hourglass and held it up to his face. It was much heavier than he remembered. "What in the hell is happening to me?" he yelled, throwing it against the wall with all of his remaining strength. His hands moved up to protect his eyes from the flying glass, and he waited for the crash. But no crash came. The hourglass ricocheted off the wall and landed upright on the floor. Jason lowered his hands and stared in amazement at the undamaged object. His cry died in the tiny room as the sand stopped flowing.

ason awoke, drenched in sweat, to the sight of the hourglass, whose sand was just starting to flow. He was lying in bed again, but he didn't know how he'd gotten there; his memory told him that he had been standing only moments before. Surprisingly, he was still restraint-free. But the pain in his ribcage felt worse than ever, and he realized that he was in too much agony to run. He just lay back in defeat and watched the sand course through the hourglass until it was finished.

+**

I ynthia entered his room and noticed the sand had ceased flowing. Picking up the hourglass, she looked, almost sorrowfully at the sleeping form of Jason. "Very soon, now," she whispered. She then turned the hourglass over to start the sand again.

e waited in the bedroom for her, underneath the covers, desperately wanting her arms around him. He watched her enter the room.

She walked over to the bed and slowly removed her nightgown, revealing her sensuous curves. She parted the covers and joined him. Sinuously, she snuggled next to him. "I want you," she whispered in his ear. She pulled his body to hers until he found himself enmeshed in the most delicious sensations he had ever thought possible. He put his mouth hungrily on hers, and they made love.

In the warm afterglow, Jason lay in bed with Cynthia sleeping naked in his arms, her long hair streaming over his chest. Jason played with her hair and gently caressed her back, his troubles forgotten for the moment. The sheets were tangled from their earlier gymnastics. Carefully, so as not to wake her, he shifted the covers until they were just below her hips. There, on her abdomen, was a small, red tattoo. It looked exactly like an hourglass.

ynthia awoke from her slumber, observing Jason's sleeping form beside her. Then she glanced over at the hourglass on the table and saw the sand had run out. She got up from the bed and stood naked in front of him. She picked up the hourglass and turned it over to start the sand again.

Immediately, Jason's eyes snapped open. "What the hell is going on? I want the truth, now!"

"All right, Jason, the truth." She looked at him, almost pityingly. "It was time I found a new mate." She glanced over at the timepiece. "Thanks to that hourglass, I have finally achieved my purpose. It made you compatible with me."

"And what do you mean by that?" Jason asked her, beginning to feel extremely frightened.

"When my children are born, I will tell them stories about you."

Forcing himself out of the bed, he walked stark naked over to her. "What in God's name are you saying?"

With inhuman grace, she slipped to the ground on her hands and knees. He watched in horror as her arms and legs turned into hairy appendages, while new limbs flowed forth from her ribcage. Her face flattened at the nose, and her eyes bulged forward. Cynthia's mouth disappeared into a set of needle-like fangs. Her black body glimmered in the dimly lit room. Jason realized he was looking at the largest black widow spider he had ever seen.

Jason backed to a corner of the room. The spider pursued him, with what looked to Jason like a ghastly smile on her face. Suddenly, his ribs exploded as limbs emerged from them. He felt his body rearrange itself into a new and horrible form, while his senses were enhanced with crystal clarity. As he stared at the spider in front of him through his eight new eyes she leapt toward him. He knew what black widow spiders did to their mates, so he tried to run. Tried.

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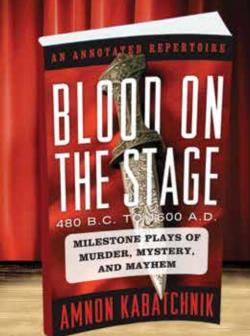
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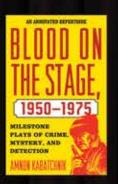
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REED FARREL COLEMAN

Thinks Everyone Should Have a "Pebt to Pay"

Interview by Suspense Magazine Press Photo Credit: Adam Martin



Reed Farrel Coleman's love of storytelling originated on the streets of Brooklyn and was nurtured by his teachers, friends, and family. Reed is a three-time Edgar Award nominee in three different categories—Best Novel, Best Paperback Original, Best Short Story—and a three-time recipient of the Shamus Award for Best PI Novel of the Year. He has also won the Audie, Macavity, Barry, and Anthony Awards. A former executive vice president of Mystery Writers of America, Reed is an adjunct instructor of English at Hofstra University and a founding member of MWA University. Brooklyn born and raised, he now lives with his family—including cats, Cleo and Knish—in Suffolk County on Long Island.

Now you might have heard him on Suspense Radio, but we have another exclusive interview with Reed below. First, we would like to take a quick look inside "Debt to Pay."

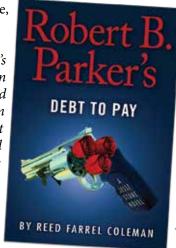
All is quiet in Paradise, except for a spate of innocuous vandalism. Good thing, too, because Jesse Stone is preoccupied with the women in his life, both past and present. As his ex-wife, Jenn, is about to marry a Dallas real-estate tycoon, Jesse isn't too sure his relationship with former FBI agent Diana Evans is built to last. But those concerns get put on the back burner when a major Boston crime boss is brutally murdered. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Jesse suspects it's the work of Mr. Peepers, a psychotic assassin who has caused trouble for Jesse in the past.

Peepers has long promised revenge against the Mob, Jesse, and Suit for their roles in foiling one of his hits—and against Jenn as well. And though Jesse and Jenn have long parted ways, Jesse still feels responsible for her safety. Jesse and Diana head to Dallas for the wedding and, along with the tycoon's security team, try to stop Peepers before the bill comes due. With Peepers toying with the authorities as to when and where he'll strike, Jesse is up against the wall. Still, there's a debt to pay and blood to be spilled to satisfy it. But whose blood, and just how much?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): "Debt to Pay" is the latest Robert B. Parker book you just wrote, can you give us the details about it?

R.F.C.: Robert B. Parker's "Debt to Pay" is something new for me and for the series because it's not so much a traditional police procedural as a thriller. Yes, there's a "murder" of a major Boston crime figure to get the book going, but that is only the initial volley in what will be a dangerous and bloody cat and mouse contest between Mr. Peepers, a deranged assassin/serial killer I introduced in Robert B. Parker's "Blind Spot," and Jesse Stone. Mr. Peepers has given notice he intends to collect a debt of blood from Jesse and those close to him for an incident in the past. Jesse is convinced Peepers intends to kill his ex-wife Jenn in Dallas during her marriage to a real estate tycoon. Jesse and his new love, Diana, race to prevent that from happening.

S. MAG.: Please let us know how you got involved in writing new Robert B. Parker stories?



R.F.C.: I thought it came about because I had written an essay Go East Young Man: Robert B. Parker, Jesse Stone and Spenser for "In Pursuit of Spenser," a collection of essays commissioned by Otto Penzler and Joan Parker in honor of Mr. Parker. But when I mentioned this to my editor, Christine Pepe, who had been Mr. Parker's editor for many years, she said she'd never read it. I believe Chris had always been a fan of my work and when the estate and Putnam decided to go in a different direction, they were willing to give me a try. But I've never really pressed anyone to explain. What's that expression about looking a gift horse in the mouth? I'm just happy I got the gig however I got it.

S. MAG.: Jesse Stone is a very complex character, what challenges did you have when you started writing him?

R.F.C.: Unlike a character of my own creation, I had to find a door into Jesse Stone through which I could understand him. That door, as it turns out, was Jesse's failed baseball career. Though I still play basketball five days a week, baseball is my favorite sport. So I loved putting myself into Jesse's head as an ex-athlete who's been forced by circumstance—a ruined shoulder sustained during a meaningless exhibition game—to move on. We all have "What if" questions that haunt us. And it was through Jesse's "What if" that I found my way into him.

S. MAG.: In "Debt to Pay" Jesse is faced with not only the crime, but some emotional problems. How are you able to balance out the two?

R.F.C.: Ah, that's the trick, isn't it? If readers only wanted pure action and police procedure, they wouldn't read novels. I've always held that readers, even the most avid thriller readers, want more than just action. I think it's crucial to set up emotional conflicts beyond the crime itself to suck the reader into the story. Two weeks after a reader is done with a book, they'd have trouble remembering the plot points, but if they care about the characters, they're in, they're invested. The best novels are the ones that can dovetail the emotional conflicts with the criminal conflicts and I think I've done that successfully here with Robert B. Parker's "Debt to Pay."

S. MAG.: The first Robert B. Parker book you wrote was "Blind Spot." How have you progressed as a writer with the series?

R.F.C.: Initially I was uncomfortable with Mr. Parker's short chapters, which average 750-1000 words. But as I've become more familiar with Jesse, Paradise and the supporting cast of characters, I've become more comfortable with the physical structure of Mr. Parker's work. I have now sipped the Kool Aid and my Jesse books look like his. Each chapter now becomes its own mini-story. This propels the action and forces the reader to push on. While I purposely try not to imitate Mr. Parker's voice, I have adopted his look.

S. MAG.: For fans that are hearing about you for the first time, how would you describe your writing?

R.F.C.: That's a difficult question for a writer to answer. It's especially difficult for me because I am more than one writer. When I write the Jesse Stone books my focus is on keeping the chapters short, keeping the dialogue smart and snappy, and not overcomplicating the plot. When I write Gus Murphy or when I wrote Moe Prager or when I write a stand-alone novel, I adapt my style to the requirements of the book or the series and the protagonist. Generally, I would describe my writing as emotionally intimate, lyrical, and philosophically provocative. God, that sounds completely pretentious. Better just to read the reviews of my work.

S. MAG.: Do you have any superstitions when you write?

R.F.C.: Superstitions? No. But rituals, yes. Routine is a writer's life preserver and I follow mine very strictly. Coffee, newspaper, crossword puzzle, email, Facebook, writing, basketball, shower, editing. Even when I'm on the road, I try to stick to this routine, though it's obviously not always possible, especially the basketball part. Routine is what gets me through those days when I've got nothing to say and no idea how to say it.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word and your least favorite word and why?

R.F.C.: Nishnakeefavoushanamakinalariatzatzkin-Boom-Boom. It's a word my brother David made up when we were kids and it always makes me smile when I think of it. My least favorite word is Alzheimer. Scares the shit out of me.

S. MAG.: When will we see a non-Robert B. Parker book from you?

R.F.C.: My next Gus Murphy novel, "What You Break," will be out in February of 2017. This time Gus is faced with heinous crimes from the past and a Russian mercenary who is willing to get what he wants from Gus at any cost.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in the future?

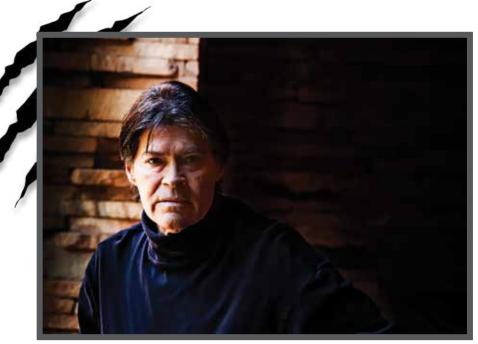
R.F.C.: Good question. I'm developing a new series with my agent but I can't say too much about that right now. Like I've always said, I couldn't live long enough to write the books I get ideas for every day.

We would like to thank Reed for taking the time to talk with us. Of course, outside of the Robert B. Parker books, Reed has quite an extensive library. You can check out everything he has written and more by visiting his website at www.reedcolman.com.

IACK KETCHUN

Master of Mayhem

Interview by Weldon Burge for *Suspense Magazine*Press Photo Credit: Steve Thornton



IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JACK Ketchum's debut novel, "Off Season," was released back in 1980. The controversial book, involving grotesque acts of cannibalism, immediately garnered fans in the horror world, even though the original publisher abandoned support for the novel. Today, the book is a classic in horror literature, and Jack has written more than 20 novels and novellas since then. He has won several Bram Stoker Awards, and five of his books have been produced as films—"The Girl Next Door," "Red," "The Lost," "Offspring," and "The Woman."

Not surprising, Jack always has projects in the works, and has recently collaborated a good deal with director, writer, and actor Lucky McKee. I was thrilled that he was willing to take some time to answer a few questions for *Suspense Magazine*.

Weldon Burge (W.B.): You've had a fruitful relationship with Lucky McKee, including the recent collaboration, "The Secret Life of Souls." How did you two hook up; how did it come about?

Jack Ketchum (J.K.): Lucky knew about my stuff and wanted to option "Red" for himself to direct and "The Lost" for his buddy Chris Sivertson, and by way of introduction he sent me a copy of May. I'd just returned from some Con or other with a stack of what turned out to be amateurish, bad DVDs from various people, and waiting on my desk was a DVD by this guy named Lucky, so I figure, after watching half a dozen of these things, this has gotta be more of the same. I mean, the guy's name is Lucky. So after a week or so I get to feeling guilty and watch the rest of this drek, and the last one I watch is May. Good grief! This is the real deal! Brilliant movie! So I get hold of my agent and tell her let's get back to him right away, he wants to option "Red" and "The Lost," if the price is anywhere near right, he's got 'em. Turned out Luck and I are simpatico as all hell, very much on the same page as to what we want from our stories, our people, our themes. We decided to work together on some original pieces. Which turned out to be "The Woman," "I'm Not Sam," and "The Secret Life of Souls," with a couple of short pieces in the bargain.

W.B.: You've used a number of pseudonyms, particularly when you were writing for men's magazines early on. For new writers, what are the pros and cons of using pseudonyms, from your experience?

J.K.: I don't see any cons, really. After a short while you get used to answering to Joe or Agnes just as you would your own name. The pros, of course, are usually a matter of hiding—for whatever reason. With the men's mags way back when I'd have three or even four stories in the same issue sometimes, so rather than have it look like I wrote the whole damn magazine, I'd use my real name and pseudonyms. Some folks, when they're writing in various genres, like to hide their Evan Hunters from their Ed McBains, for instance. I hid behind Jack Ketchum for "Off Season" because I was worried my parents would freak at the extreme subject matter, which actually didn't turn out to be a problem, and so I could sell it more easily masked as the ex-agent Dallas was known to be. But then the thing sold so well I figured, nobody's going to be looking for a new book by me, but Jack's another story.

W.B.: When asked who the scariest man in America was, Stephen King answered "probably Jack Ketchum." Who do you think is the scariest writer in America today?

J.K.: Well, let's see, Donald Trump really didn't write "The Art of the Deal," did he. I'll have to think about that one...hmmmm...

W.B.: Apparently you did a good deal of research on cannibalism before writing "Off Season." How much does research play in your writing these days?

J.K.: It completely depends on the piece. Some demand a lot, some not much at all. I spent a year researching "Cover" before I even sat down to start, and "The Girl Next Door" was almost like taking dictation, it just flew right out of me. Same now as ever. Lucky and I did a good deal for "Souls," but almost none for "I'm Not Sam." My solo stories too. It varies greatly.

W.B.: How has your previous experience in acting informed your writing, especially your work with movie adaptations of your books?

J.K.: I'm of the opinion that pretty much anything you do in the arts informs everything else you do in the arts, feeds into it. Acting, saying the same lines over and over to yourself until they're memorized, you learn a lot about rhythms, about emphasis. I did Harold Pinter's "The Homecoming," for instance, where he insists right in the text where the pauses in your dialogue should be, which tells you what he wants emphasized. You learn a lot about the interplay of characters' voices. My dialogue's much the better for having done that I think.

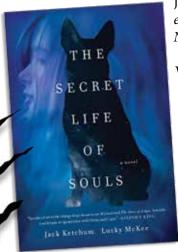
W.B.: What's your worst nightmare today?

I.K.: Alzheimer's.

W.B.: What's your definition of success?

J.K.: Doing what you love doing, and getting paid for it sufficiently to get by.

W.B.: When writing, do you listen to music or have something in the background to spur your senses?



J.K.: I need complete silence in order to hear what the words sound like—that rhythm and emphasis again. And I can't be looking at anything either. I'm too easily distracted. In the hills of New Hampshire I tried working in front of a window—and became quite the bird-watcher.

W.B.: What's at the top of your bucket list?

J.K.: Damn! what was her name again?

W.B.: One last question, just for fun. If you could rewrite/remake any horror movie, which one would it be?

J.K.: Maybe Karloff and Freund's The Mummy. That opening is terrifying. But then it settles for the occasional eerie sequence and dramatic lighting. And Karloff's undeniable presence.

For more on Jack Ketchum, visit his website at www.jackketchum.net.

THE WATHERSTON MURDER WASHES WAS SELLES

Georgia writer Betty Jean Craige sets her three tales of murder in the southern Appalachian town of Witherston, twenty miles north of Dahlonega, where Cherokees lived peacefully for a thousand years before the Georgia Gold Rush of 1828. There, Detective Mev Arrollo solves a series of mysteries with the aid of her teenage sons Jaime and Jorge, her husband Paco, and her Aunt Lottie, an eccentric historian who writes a column in the local online newspaper.



DOWNSTREAM

(2014)

Wealthy centenarian Francis Hearty Withers promises the 4,000 Witherston residents \$1 billion if they support his drug factory. Environmentalists protest the pharmaceutical pollution of the town's water. Withers vows to disinherit them. Before he changes his will, he dies.

FAIRFIELD'S AUCTION

(2016)

An antiques dealer auctions off Cherokee artifacts, plus a talkative African Grey parrot.
In a blizzard, the parrot disappears and two people die. The town is snowbound.



DAM WITHERSTON

(coming 2017)

The mayor's proposal to create a recreational lake motivates the discovery of two interracial murders: one in the twenty-first century of an individual with Cherokee heritage and another one in the nineteenth century. DNA analysis investigates both crimes.

the WITHERSTON MURDER MYSTERIES from Betty Jean Craige



How to Engage With Influencers on Twitter

By Lynne Constantine



witter is an amazing universe that makes it possible to interact with just about anyone. While it's true that tweeting to Stephen King might not get you a response, there is a chance it could. Perhaps it's not a best-selling author you're looking to engage with. Is there a literary agent or publisher that you'd love to connect with? Maybe it's a reviewer or well-known blogger that you're interested in engaging. The sky's the limit with Twitter, but there is some etiquette involved.

Don't tweet to a well-known author asking him or her to read your book

 $\mathcal{V}_{\mathbf{0}}$ read his or her book, post a review, then tweet it and @ tag the author in your tweet

Pow't tweet to agents or publishers asking them to read your manuscript

 $\mathcal{V}\mathbf{0}$ retweet one of their blog posts with an interesting comment and @ tag them in the tweet.

Pow't tweet to reviewers or bloggers requesting they review your book

 ${\cal V}{f 0}$ read their reviews and post them with a comment and @tag them

Do you see the pattern? Everyone likes to be valued. Everyone appreciates when his or her own work is read and shared. If you do it sincerely, over time, you may build a relationship with some of these "influencers" who are just people after all. Read their tweets, become familiar with their passions. If their interests converge with your own, engage in conversation about them. But give it time. Building relationships doesn't happen overnight.

Will it always work? Of course not. Just like life, some folks will want to be your friend, and others won't. It's also important to distinguish between those who are personally engaged on Twitter—not everyone is. But there are many best-selling authors, literary agents, publishers, and reviewers, who do manage their Twitter following. One of my favorite authors and friend, David Morrell, responds personally to all his tweets.

The important thing is to be authentic: no false flattery, but genuine interest in what others have to say. Treat others as you'd like to be treated, and you'll be surprised at how gracious and helpful many of these Twitter "stars" can be.

For more advice on how to use Twitter more effectively, click http://lynneconstantine.com/category/social-media/

For more articles on social media and writing visit: http://lynneconstantine.com/category/blog and if you'd like some social media support, check out Lynne's Twitter Package for authors: http://bit.ly/authorpackage.

Lynne is a coffee drinking, Twitter addicted, fiction writer always working on her next book. She is the co-author of "Circle Dance," a family saga written with her sister, as well as two other novels to be released soon. She is the managing partner of a social media consulting firm and gives talks on the role of social media in publishing and how to establish a solid author platform. Lynne is a contributing editor to International Thriller Writer's online magazine, The Big Thrill.

PRESTON & CHILD

Trap Readers Inside "The Obsidian Chamber"

Interview by Suspense Magazine
Press Photo Credit: Deborah Feingold

Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child have been delighting fans for years with their *Agent Pendergast* series. Coming off what some reviewers called the best book in the series "Crimson Shore," their latest release, "The Obsidian Chamber" might change those reviewers' minds.

Starting back in 1995 with "Relic," Preston and Child have taken their series to a whole new level. Agent Pendergast has become a staple for suspense/thriller fans. "The Obsidian Chamber" is the sixteenth book in the series. The series

also contains two trilogies called *The Diogenes Trilogy* and the *Helen Trilogy*.

Douglas Preston was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and grew up in the deadly boring suburb of Wellesley. Preston began his career at the American Museum of Natural History in New York as an editor, writer, and manager of publications. Preston also taught nonfiction writing at Princeton University. During this period, Preston gave Child a midnight tour of the museum, and in the darkened Hall of Late Dinosaurs, under a looming T. Rex, Child turned to Preston, and said: "This would make the perfect setting for a thriller!" That thriller would, of course, be "Relic."

Lincoln Child was born in Westport, Connecticut, which he still calls his hometown (despite the fact that he left the place before he reached his first

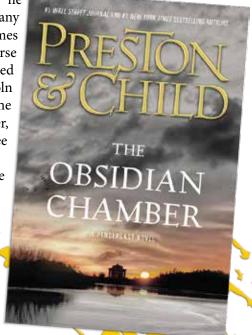
birthday and now only goes back for weekends). While at St. Martin's, he was associated with the work of many authors, including that of James

Herriot and M. M. Kaye. He edited well over a hundred books—with titles as diverse as "The Notation of Western Music" and "Hitler's Rocket Sites"—but focused primarily on American and English popular fiction. While at St. Martin's, Lincoln assembled several collections of ghost and horror stories, beginning with the hardcover collections "Dark Company" (1984) and "Dark Banquet" (1985). Later, when he founded the company's mass-market horror division, he edited three more collections of ghost stories, "Tales of the Dark 1-3."

We're grateful to have been able to sit down with them and bring to you the following interview.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What sparked the idea for "The Obsidian Chamber"?

Lincoln Child (L.C.): It's difficult to answer that without giving away a lot of the story, but let's say it grew out of two things—first, it was a natural development from where the previous book, "Crimson Shore," left off, and second, it gave us a chance to bring back one of our most interesting and polarizing characters.



Douglas Preston (D.P.): We wanted to see what would happen if Pendergast took on a trivial little case, as a form of amusement, and then suddenly found it leading to something big and dark and horrifying.

S. MAG.: You talk about how you write together, but what are your individual writing routines?

L.C.: For me, writing is a very draining process. I couldn't do it 9 to 5—at least, not for any extended length of time. I tend to do other related things in the morning—research, etc.—while thinking about the next chapter I have to write. I tend to do most of the actual writing in the afternoons. That leaves the evening for mapping out what has to be written the following day.

D.P.: I find my best writing time is in the morning, and then again in early afternoon. The rest of the time I'm doing the other things writers are supposed to do these days—answering emails, posting on Facebook, and thinking. In fact, a very large part of my "writing" occurs when I'm not in my office, just mulling over the book, the characters, and what terrible events might happen next.

S. MAG.: What has fan reaction been regarding the latest developments with Constance and her relationship with Pendergast?

L.C.: For the most part, very positive. Doug and I have a pretty clear sense of the arc of that relationship, even though it may not be fully articulated for at least another book or two.

D.P.: Well, some readers are unsettled by Constance's unpredictable behavior and strong appetites.

S. MAG.: In writing the *Pendergast* novels now, does his strong character steer the plot, or do you have the plot and figure out how to place Pendergast in that particular situation?

L.C.: Pendergast leads us on like a runaway horse leads a carriage. We furnish the room, so to speak, but once we place him in it he takes over and we simply transcribe.

D.P.: Linc is right. Pendergast runs the show. He will upset even the most carefully crafted plot sequence with some unpredictable and outrageous action.

S. MAG.: Besides Pendergast, who is your favorite character to write?

L.C.: I would have to say Constance.

D.P.: Sad to say, my favorite was Smithback. I really mourn him. I have a lot of fun writing Corrie, but she also drives me nuts with her bad judgment.

S. MAG.: Do you have any plans to mix your other series (*Gideon Crew*) with Pendergast?

L.C.: No. Although there is at least one "crossover" character— Eli Glinn—who has appeared in both series, we are making a point of keeping Pendergast and Gideon Crew at arm's length from each other.

D.P.: If they ever got together, they would not like each other at all, and disaster might ensue.

S. MAG.: What book would you recommend a novice to your works pick up first?

L.C. & D.P.: We recommend three possibilities: "Relic," "The Cabinet of Curiosities," and "Still Life with Crows." All are stand alone novels and all do a good job of introducing Pendergast to the reader.

S. MAG.: How do you maintain two books a year plus your individual books as well? Do you help each other on the solo books?

L.C. & D.P.: We do help each other on the solo books, reading the manuscripts and making suggestions. Linc gave me the idea for the first chapter of "Tyrannosaur Canyon" and I gave Linc the idea for the last chapter of "Death Match."

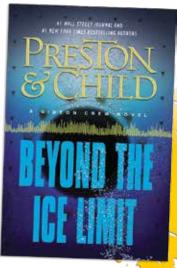
S. MAG.: Is there a scene or story that you both were eager to write, but ultimately did not include? Why?

L.C. & D.P.: Ah, there are many scenes and stories that get discarded or fall by the wayside as various characters hijack the story in diverse directions.

S. MAG.: What's next for both Pendergast and Gideon Crew?

L.C. & D.P.: This is a question we prefer not to answer...

We would like to thank Doug and Lincoln for taking the time to talk with us and share some of their thoughts. For more information on their work, check out their website www.prestonchild.com.



LAURELL K. HAMILTON

Anita Blake Turns 25 in "Crimson Death"



Interview by *Suspense Magazine* Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist

Creating an iconic character is something that many authors can only dream of doing. Of course, there are several that come to mind, and one of those characters is named Anita Blake. She came from the mind of master author Laurell K. Hamilton in her debut book "Guilty Pleasures." Now we have reached the twenty-fifth book in the series with "Crimson Death." About six years ago, we interviewed Laurell on the radio show, and got a great look inside her writing process and how Anita came to life (and that interview can still be heard online). Now, we've come back to Laurell to catch up on what is going on in the Anita Blake world.

Best known for two series, Hamilton's New York Times-bestselling Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter series centers on Anita, a professional zombie raiser, vampire executioner and supernatural consultant—

which includes novels, short story collections, and comic books. Six million copies of *Anita Blake* novels are in print. Her *Merry Gentry* series centers on Meredith Gentry, Princess of the Unseelie Court of Faerie, a private detective facing repeated assassination attempts.

Both fantasy series follow their protagonists as they gain in power and deal with the dangerous "realities" of worlds in which creatures of legend live.

Laurell Kaye Hamilton was born Laurell Kaye Klein in Heber Springs, Arkansas but grew up in Sims, Indiana with her grandmother, Laura Gentry. Her education includes degrees in English and Biology from Marion College (now called Indiana Wesleyan University), a private Evangelical Christian liberal arts college in Marion, Indiana that is affiliated with the Wesleyan Church denomination.

We're excited to have her back. Let's take a quick look inside the latest book "Crimson Death" and then you can check out our exclusive interview.

Anita has never seen Damian, her vampire servant, in such a state. The rising sun doesn't usher in the peaceful death that he desperately needs. Instead, he's being bombarded with violent nightmares and blood sweats.

And now, with Damian at his most vulnerable, Anita needs him the most. The vampire who created him, who subjected him to centuries of torture, might be losing control, allowing rogue vampires to run wild and break one of their kind's few strict taboos.

Some say love is a great motivator, but hatred gets the job done, too. And when Anita joins forces with her friend Edward

to stop the carnage, Damian will be at their side, even if it means traveling back to the land where all his nightmares spring from...a place that couldn't be less welcoming to a vampire, an assassin, and a necromancer.

Ireland.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What are your favorite highlights from your newest book, "Crimson Death"?

Laurell K. Hamilton (L.K.H.): I can't say some of my favorites, because they would be spoilers, but if I'm careful, Nathaniel and Damian's character growth, getting more clues to Edward's past, Anita's continued growth as a necromancer, the scene in the hallway with Magda, Mephistopheles surprising me, and hunting bad guys with Edward and Anita.

S. MAG.: This is the first time Anita has had a story set in Ireland. What inspired that?

L.K.H.: Damian told me that his story as a vampire started in Ireland. I'm not sure he inspired me to set it in Ireland, more stubbornly protested that was where his story took place. He was absolutely right, by the way. It had to be Ireland and it had to be the part of Ireland that I'd never even read about. When a writer's characters are that alive it's a type of magic, and an artist should always respect their own magic. The research trip to Ireland was amazing.

S. MAG.: "Crimson Death" is book 25 in the series. How do you keep it fresh with each book?

L.K.H.: I'm a long-term thinker in almost everything I do, so I tried to create a world and main character that would be interesting enough to keep me entertained for as many books as I wanted to write. I think I succeeded since I'm still learning new things about both my characters and my world. I allow Anita and all the characters to grow and change just like real people, which keeps it interesting and sometimes challenging for me as a writer. I believe if I'd made it a series where everything stayed static and hardly ever changed I'd have grown bored. Instead, when I go too long without writing Anita and the gang I miss them. I settle down to write and it's like talking to a best friend you haven't seen in too long.

S. MAG.: With so many books sold and so much experience, how do you challenge yourself as an author with each new book?

L.K.H.: See my answer to #3. The world and the characters change and grow. It keeps me on my literary toes. I also have a tendency to force myself to explore any research or topic that disturbs me, which pushes me into areas that aren't always comfortable for me. I also constantly look at my writing and try to figure out what I haven't done, or haven't done as well as I'd like, and then I'll purposefully force myself to write that. I'm all about pushing my boundaries as a writer and as a person.

S. MAG.: Now if someone hasn't heard of Anita Blake (they've probably been in a coma), how has she evolved throughout the series?

L.K.H.: She started out believing that vampires were soulless monsters and that executing ones that had broken the law was saving lives. Now she understands that they are still people and executing them carries much the same soul searching that the death penalty has in our own world. In the first book, "Guilty Pleasures," she says, "I don't date vampires, I kill them." Now we're planning a wedding with one. She began as someone who wanted a monogamous, traditional marriage. She didn't believe in casual sex. Now she's polyamorous, and though she can only legally marry one of the men she's in love with, she'd marry three if it were legal. Her main job when the series begins is as an animator, someone who raises zombies to answer questions for the police, lawyers, insurance companies, historians, therapists, and other reasons. She was a legal vampire executioner and consults

with the local police on supernatural related crime. Now she's a U. S. Marshal with the Preternatural branch which includes executing rogue preternatural citizens, and she raises zombies between crime fighting.

S. MAG.: Did you ever expect to write a series of this length about Anita?

L.K.H.: No, I dreamed of someday writing

98

CE LICTION

a series that went over twenty books like some of my idols, but didn't know if I'd ever get the chance to make that a reality. I still get seriously jazzed when I look at that long list of book titles and think that's mine, I did that.

S. MAG.: Anita's relationships, this time, seem far less about physical sex and much more about maintaining the emotional balance of her core group. Is that how the book naturally evolved or was that a conscious decision to more deeply explore the emotional intricacies of those relationships?

L.K.H.: Relationships can start with hot and heavy sex, but if you actually want them to be long lasting romances eventually you have to find a balance between the physical, the emotional, and the mental interaction of everyone involved. I wanted to show that true love takes work if you want your happily-ever-after to last.

S. MAG.: If the men in Anita's life were real, who, if any of them, would make your toes curl? We've asked around the office and it's a heavy tie between Jean-Claude and Nathaniel.

L.K.H.: I've never been able to have sex with someone that I'm not wildly attracted to, so the same is true on paper. Sexually they all float my boat. You didn't ask which one might have my heart more than just my libido, which would be a different answer.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see next?

L.K.H.: I'm actually still trying to figure that out. I have so many ideas that I'm having trouble deciding which one to choose.

We would like to thank Laurell for taking the time to talk with us. For more information on Anita Blake and all her works check out her website at www.laurellkhamilton.com.

SPECIAL PREVIEW FROM LAURELL K. HAMILTON

Crimson Death

By Laurell K. Hamilton

was just starting to drift back to sleep to the sounds of their even breathing when my phone rang again, but this time it played a different song, George Thorogood's "Bad to the Bone." It was the personalized ringtone for one of my best friends, Edward, assassin to the undead and fellow U.S. marshal Ted Forrester. Interestingly, Edward and Ted were the same person; think Clark Kent and Superman.

I flung the covers off all of us and scrambled, falling to the floor and fumbling for the phone that was glowing in the pile of clothes beside the bed. I hit the button and said, "Here, I'm here!"

"Anita, are you all right?" Edward's voice was too cheerful, which was all the clue I needed that he was with other police officers, who would be overhearing everything.

"Yeah, I'm good. You sound awfully chipper for four a.m.," I said, trying not to sound like I was already getting cold outside the body heat of the bed. I started to fumble in the clothes pile for something that was mine but kept coming up with just the guys' clothes.

"It's eleven a.m. here," he said.

He wasn't home in New Mexico then, so I asked, "Where are you?"

"Dublin."

"Dublin what?"

AN ANITA/BLAKE

"Ireland," he said.

I sat naked and shivering on the floor, scooping through the pile of clothes around me like a bird trying to make a nest, and tried to think. I failed, so I asked, "Why are you in Dublin, Ireland?"

"For the same reason I'm calling you, Anita."

"Which is?" I tried not to get irritated at him, because it usually amused him, and Ted usually took longer to tell anything. Edward was far more abrupt. Yes, they were the same person, but Edward was more of a method actor, and trying to get

him to break character wasn't a good idea.

"Vampires."

"There aren't any vampires in Ireland. It's the only country in the world that doesn't have them."

"That's what we all thought until about six weeks ago."

"What happened six weeks ago?" I asked, trying to burrow myself into the clothes on the floor for warmth.

Someone from the bed above me threw my robe on top of me. I told whichever of my panthers had done it, "Thanks."

"They had their first vampire victim," Edward said.

I slipped into the robe, using my chin to hold the phone against my shoulder. The black silk robe was better than being naked, but silk isn't really very warm. I kept meaning to buy something with a little more heat retention, but it was hard to find sexy and warm at the same time. "Vampire victim, so dead?"

"No, just a little drained."

"Okay, if it was nonconsensual blood donation here in the States the vampire would be up on charges, but if it was consensual it's not even a crime."

"Vampire gaze wiped her memory of it," he said.

"If the vampire and blood donor had agreed that the vamp could use their gaze so the donor could get the whole vampire experience, then it's treated like you let someone drink too much at a party and then let them walk home drunk. It's not even a crime here, just bad judgment."

"Vic can't remember, so we'll never know if consent was given or not."

"If they took a swab of the bite for genetics and he, or she, is in the system, they can find the vampire in question."

"Nobody believed it was a vampire bite, so they didn't treat it like an attack. They thought she'd been slipped a daterape drug."

"The fang marks weren't a clue?" I asked.

"You said it yourself, Anita, there are no vampires in Ireland. In thousands of years of history, there's never been a vampire here. They noted the fang marks as possible needle marks for the drug they thought had been used on the vic; if they hadn't been hunting for needle marks and other signs of drug use, they wouldn't have even found them. They are some of the tiniest, neatest marks I've ever seen."

I sat up a little straighter, both to tie my robe tighter and because that meant something. "You've seen almost as many vampire bites as I have."

"Yep," he said in his best Ted Forrester drawl. He was probably playing the full American cowboy accent and all for the Irish police. He could be the ultimate undercover person and blend in damn near anywhere, but when he was Ted, it was like he enjoyed just how thick he could play the part I wondered if he'd packed Ted's cowboy hat on the airplane. The thought of him wearing it in Ireland was either fun or cringeworthy, I wasn't sure which yet.

"How tiny? Do you think it's a child vampire?"

"I've seen female vamps that had a bite this small, but that one could be a child."

"What do you mean, that one?"

"We have at least three different bite radiuses."

"So three different vamps," I said.

"At the very least, maybe more."

"What do you mean, maybe more?"

"I've got permission to share photos with you if you can get to a computer."

"My phone is a computer, can't you just text me?"

"I could, but you'll want a bigger screen to look at some of these."

"Okay, I . . . I can get to a computer. I just need someone to help me log on, or something."

"You have a secure email account, because I've sent you things to it before," he said.

"I know, I know, I just don't use the computers here much."

"Where are you?"

"Circus of the Damned."

"Tell Jean-Claude howdy for me?"

"Howdy? Even Ted doesn't say Howdy."

"I'm American, Anita, we're all cowboys, didn't you know that, darling?" he said in a drawl so thick it sounded like you should be able to do a Texas two-step on it.

"Yeah, like all the Irish are leprechauns and go around saying *Top of the morning to you.*"

"If I had my way, you'd be here seeing all the leprechauns."

"What do you mean, if you had your way?"

"Go to the computer so you can see the pictures, Anita," and the out-West accent lost some of its thickness, fading into what was Edward's normal "middle of nowhere," maybe Midwestern accent. I'd known him for over six years before I'd learned that Theodore (Ted) Forrester was his actual birth name and the one that both the military and the Marshals Service knew him by. He'd just been Edward to me.

"Okay, but what did you mean if you had your way?" I got to my feet and my lower body was instantly colder in just the silk robe without the nest of other clothes around me. I looked down at the bed, because both Micah and Nathaniel were better with the computers down the hallway than I was; hell, Nathaniel was still occasionally sneaking new ringtones for people into my phone. Some of them had been embarrassing when they sounded at work with the other marshals, but "Bad to the Bone" for Edward had worked so well, I kept it.

"When you're at the computer, call me back," he said, and hung up. That was more like Edward. ■

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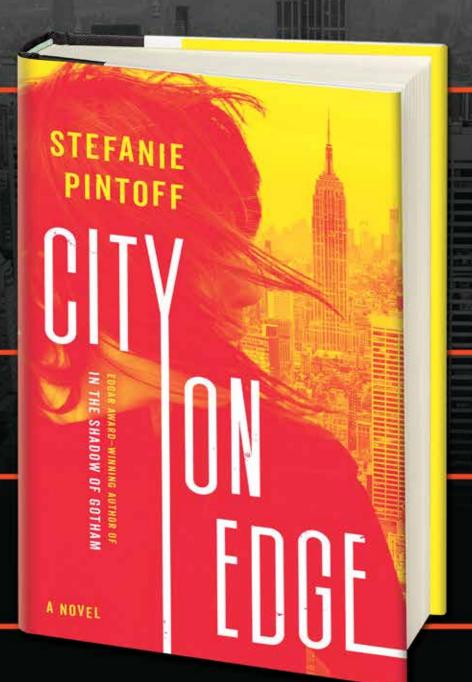
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PRODIGAL SOLVEN

By Mark Mellon

PARGREW DROVE SLOWLY DOWN MARIPOSA. He had an address, but the one-story houses and mobile homes that lined the road were unnumbered and GPS was erratic in this part of San Antonio.

The drag went through poor Hispanic neighborhoods, vacant lots filled with playing children, with most everyone else outside as well. Old men sat and fanned themselves with newspapers, while slick-haired cholos in immaculate white wifebeaters huddled at street corners peddling drugs. They eyed him suspiciously as he passed, instinctively wary he was 5-O.

He U-turned, slowly retraced his route, and spotted a narrow dirt road between battered cinderblock walls. Loose gravel rattled against truck tires as he drove down the road. Walls gave way to woods and scrub, live oaks and dwarf pines that screened a two-story Spanish Mission-style mansion on a low hill—several acres of open land improbably tucked amid tightly packed, working class homes.

The circular driveway was overgrown with weeds. He parked and got out. The late August sun was killing hot. Built in the '20's by some cowboy turned newly minted millionaire, flush from the oil boom, the mansion was badly gone to seed. Walls once whitewashed ivory were now carious yellow. Red roof tiles were broken or missing. The door was ornate, carved mahogany with a stained glass window pane and a heavy brass knocker, dark green with tarnish.

Pargrew knocked on the door. He was about to knock again when heavy feet tromped down a flight of stairs. A young man opened the door; long haired, big. He smirked.

"Guess you got the wrong place, cowboy. This sure ain't no ranch."

"Isn't this 249 Dolorosa? Does a lady named Viola Coke live here? My name's Alec Pargrew. She wanted to see me."

"Frankly, Mister, I don't see why I need to tell you a damn thing. Now if you'll just excuse me—"

"Lyle?"

A tremulous female voice cried down from the staircase.

"Yes, Mother."

"Is that the man I said was coming, Lyle?"

Lyle turned to speak, but Pargrew interjected.

"Mrs. Coke? Viola Coke? You wanted to see me? Alec Pargrew."

"Yes," the woman cried. "I sure enough do. Get on in here and never-you-mind what that stupid old Lyle has to say about anything."

Pargrew sneered at Lyle in turn. Lyle drew out of his way. Pargrew took his hat off and went up the stairs. '70's orange shag carpeted steps were worn almost to non-existence. The spacious, light filled living room had a high ceiling and tall windows. A middle-aged woman sat on a cracked, brown leather couch, blonde hair piled high, wine glass in one hand, miniature poodle in the other. The dog growled and barked. Pargrew bent low, right hand out, palm up. The poodle tentatively sniffed, then enthusiastically licked his hand.

"Oh. Sweetiepie likes you. She's always the best judge of character. I like you too already, Mr. Pargrew. Won't you please

sit down?"

Pargrew sat on a chair with a missing arm. She drank wine and broadly smiled, teeth white and strong.

"Can I call you Alec? I don't like being all formal. You can call me Vi."

"All right, Vi. That suits me fine. I'm pleased to meet you. I understand you maybe have some work for me."

"You get to the point, don't you? I like that too. Would you like some wine? It's only Gallo, but not bad on ice."

"Thanks, Vi, but I have to drive. Why don't you just tell me what you need done?"

"She wants you to go to Q-town to fetch her precious little baby, my piece of shit brother Duane."

Lyle stood in the living room, a bowl of cereal and milk in his hands.

"You again, huh, Lyle? Well, at least I got a name now. Duane Coke. And that's your younger son, Vi?"

Vi nodded, face wrought with grief and sadness.

"Duane's my baby. I know he's not the best boy, but I can't really blame him, me not being a good mother."

"Amen to that."

"Lyle, I've had about enough of you. Keep quiet while I speak with your mother."

Pargrew's icy stare cautioned Lyle to silence. He instead spooned soggy cereal into his mouth with a dumb animal's fervor

"Let's stick to what's relevant, Vi. Where do you think Duane is and why are you worried about him? What kind of trouble is he in? With the law or someone else?"

"He hangs out with a very bad crowd. I mean, I don't want to sound prejudiced, but his Mexican friends just seem like criminals to me."

"That's because they *are* criminals, Mother. Who else is Duane going to get his drugs from except Mexican degenerates?"

"Shut up, Lyle. Is that true, Vi? Duane takes drugs? What kind? Is he addicted?"

"I guess you could say that. It's not his fault, the poor baby, his daddy dying when he was only nine."

"Yes, but what kind, Vi?"

"Cocaine. That I'm pretty sure of."

"And heroin, Mother. You have to admit it. We've both seen him."

"Lyle, would you hush? It breaks my heart, but it's true. Duane kept running away and a doctor prescribed him some Librium; things just got worse from there. The boy just seems to really need to get high all the dern time. He took off three days ago when Lyle flushed his marijuana down the toilet."

Lyle sniggered.

"Quiet, Lyle. Duane threw a pretty typical fit before he went, said I'd never see him again, the usual stuff. Only this time he said he'd go live with new friends in Q-town who'd give him all the drugs he needed. And then he drove off. I

didn't think anything about it at first, on account of Duane doing that so regular, only to limp back after two or three days, all hungry and dirty from living in the street, but last night I got a call from a real bad man."

"Did he give a name?"

"He did, Alec. Called himself Draco Suarez, said he was Prez of the Q-town Brujos."

Pargrew arched an eyebrow. "Q-town Brujos? They're about the meanest gang north of the Rio Grande. Did he say he's got Duane?"

"Yep. Kept calling him his chavito. Do you have any idea what that means, Alec?"

"His kid or little goat. It's not nice. And he wants money?"

"You're sure quick, Alec. Fifty thousand dollars. Claimed that's what Duane owes for all the drugs he did. I don't have anything like that, Alec."

She drank more wine and began to sob softly.

Pargrew patted her knee. "Bear up, Vi. This does sound sure enough serious. Have you contacted the police?"

"No. I wouldn't dare. Suarez didn't make threats, just kept saying if he got his money, he'd send Duane back. I can't bear the thought of any harm coming to my child. Rose Troutman, a lady I respect, told me you've helped a lot of folks in a bad way, that you get things done other men can't do."

She set down her wine glass, put the dog on the floor, and took Pargrew's hands in hers.

"Alec, I need you to go down to Q-town and bring Duane home. I'll pay five thousand, all I have."

Lyle slammed the bowl down on a coffee table. Milk spattered everywhere.

"You're not going to throw our money away on some socalled private eye just to get Duane. Who cares if he comes back? You really do want to leave me nothing, don't you, Mother?"

Pargrew rose, went over, grabbed Lyle with one hand by the scruff of the neck—by the crotch with the other—and frog-marched him to the stairs.

"Time to go, Lyle."

He pitched him down. Lyle caught the banister at the bottom, righted himself, and confronted Pargrew.

"You can't treat me like this in my own house."

"I just did, Lyle. I plain don't like you. Now get."

There was a momentary staring contest that Lyle lost. He slunk away.

"I need to sleep before work anyway. Just remember, Mother, I'm the one who pays the bills here. Just me, Mom. Not you or Duane."

"Get, Lyle."

Pargrew resumed his chair.

"You'd think he's some sort of big shot someplace, the way Lyle carries on. All he does is work as a night clerk at a no-tell motel off the 410 Loop."

"Vi, I'll be honest. I don't much like taking what money

you have. I can't guarantee I can bring Duane back. Like I said, Q-town B's aren't anybody to take on lightly."

Vi dismissively waved a hand. "Who said that's *all* my money? That's just Lyle being melodramatic again. That's what I have right now. Please, Alec. Go to Q-town and bring Duane back. I know you're the man I can trust. Please, Alec. I'm begging you."

Pargrew considered, but finally nodded. "Pay me five thousand. I may need to bribe folks in Q-town. I'll return what's left if I don't bring him back."

Vi emphatically shook her head. "No, Alec. You'll bring him back. You're sure to."

"I need a picture of Duane; the most recent you got."

Vi held up her iPhone. A young man sat at a restaurant table in a black t-shirt and jeans, a slack leer beneath his faint mustachios. He somewhat resembled Duane, but with a hazy, glazed look—a heavy drug user's mark.

Pargrew downloaded the picture to his iPhone, as Vi went to a cabinet, reached into a drawer, removed a manila envelope, and handed it to him. It was filled with hundred dollar bills.

"I figured you'd want to be paid. It's there. Count if you like."

"That's OK, Vi. I feel I know you well enough to trust you."

Pargrew folded the envelope, slipped it into the crown of his canvas cowboy hat, and put the hat on his head.

"It's a mite after two now. I should reach Q-town in three hours, depending on traffic on the I-37. The Bs generally don't come out until the sun sets. I'll try to get a line on Draco Suarez. If he's really head shot caller like he claims, every cholo in Q-town will know him. Maybe one will tell me where he can be found."

Vi embraced him, crying yet again. Pargrew hugged her back, then gently held Vi at arms' length, a kind smile on his face.

"I'd best get started."

TRAFFIC GREW SPARSE ABOUT FIFTY MILES

outside San Antonio. Pargrew set the cruise control at ninety. The truck rocketed down the freeway, past vast cotton fields laid idle by drought; long, serried rows of dead, dust covered plants. The sun continued on its path without a hint of cloud to shadow it, another rainless day like every one before for months now. He set the AC to max cool and hit an icon on his iPhone. The device rang once; twice.

"Sgt. Craddock."

"Butch. Alec."

"Yeah, I figured. What you got to say for yourself, hoss? I guess you want something since I ain't heard from you in a dog's age."

"I been busy and I guess so have you. First of all, I'm coming your way and wanted to let you know, as a courtesy."

"OK, Alec, so noted. Now what do you want to know?"

"You heard of a Q-town B name of Draco Suarez who claims to be Prez?"

Craddock laughed. "Sure. Every cop in the four cities knows Draco. He's a B all right. There's even a few other B's who'd agree and call him Prez, too. Others not."

"There some bad blood in the Brujos?"

"A little more than usual. Another shot caller, El Moco, doesn't like Draco and vice versa. All the more reason to stay away from Q-town, son. I don't know what you've got in mind, but leave the B's alone."

"I don't plan to bother anyone, Butch. Where am I likely to find Draco?"

"Listen to you contradict yourself. You just can't keep out of trouble, can you, Alec? I'll tell you since you're the one that pulled me from the Hummer in Ramadi. He hangs with a woman named Semprona Villareal. They got a kid, a boy named Ramon. He bought her a bungalow at 204 Tunlaw Street in the Vecino Crepolo, in Triste. That's Bs' turf, by the way. Gringos only allowed by special invitation."

"I'll make myself welcome. Thanks for the intel, Butch. As always, a pleasure doing business with you."

"That's what you said after the IED went off. Turn around now if you got any sense. And if anything does happen, this conversation didn't."

"Don't worry, Butch. I'll be in and out so fast no one'll even notice."

Craddock laughed again. "Yeah, you being so dern discreet, Pargrew. Sometime soon, call me when you just want to drink beer, you hear now, Alec, you old thing, you?"

Pargrew laughed in turn. "Now *that* I'll do for sure, Butch. We'll talk soon."

The exit sign for Q-town loomed ahead. He flicked on his right turn signal and slowed for the exit. Q-town was originally four hamlets located in an ox bow of the Rio Grande not far from its mouth: Triste, Destino, Simpkins, and Rio Seco. Founded before Texas became a republic, the towns' primarily Mexican populace subsisted off ranching until international borders intervened and smuggling became the primary economic activity. Over time, with urban sprawl and increased development, the towns grew, merged together, and became generally referred to as Q-town. Things took off when NAFTA was enacted. Tractor trailers rumbled down I-37 as finished goods were hauled from maguiladoras along the border; TVs, refrigerators, dollhouses, an endless variety for Walmarts and Costcos nationwide. Drugs went along in massive quantities and local gangs took their cut. After a long, vicious struggle for dominance that raged through the '90's, the Q-town Brujos came out on top, more from sheer viciousness than criminal savvy.

281 emptied directly into Simkins. Pargrew pulled over. He removed his cowboy hat, put a ball cap on backward, and perched mirrored sunglasses on top. Pargrew added a pull

-on tattoo sleeve to his right arm. Triste was to the left on 83. The GPS directed him to the Vecino Crepolo; low slung, one-story houses of brick, or converted mobile homes with an occasional drug dealer's garish McMansion among plots of dead grass, hardy cacti and lechuguilla plants. Near twilight, the setting sun's slanted rays lost power. Gangbangers came out as temperatures cooled and shadows lengthened.

When he hit Tunlaw, Pargrew turned on the radio, tuned in the local classic rock station, and cranked the volume. *Hot For Teacher* blared from his speakers as he cruised down the street with his window down. He thrashed his head to the music, face blank and clueless. Looks from muscular, shaven-headed, tattoo-covered cholos were contemptuous but not threatening. Stoner gringos looking to score were nothing new in the barrio. The pose provided no guarantee of safety, just a little time.

204 Tunlaw was a small bungalow set well back from the road, fronted by two large palms, withered and brown from lack of rain. Pargrew parked on the opposite side. Someone lay as if dead on a ragged couch on the front porch—thin, young, clad in black, thinly bearded. Pargrew didn't even have to check the iPhone. He'd already found his man.

Pargrew got out of the car, crossed the street, and stepped onto the sidewalk. Three beefy cholos braced him, in black t-shirts and jeans, massive arms covered with crude prison tattoos, eyes impenetrable behind wraparound sunglasses.

"Oye, chiva. You got any business here? You lost or something, gringo?" the middle one said, jet black hair done up in a thick pomp.

"Whyn't you fuck off out of here, gringo?" the one on the right said. "*Vayate*."

Pargrew held his hands out in supplication.

"Tranquilo, hombres, tranquilo. This is just old Scott Walker here come down from La Oreja looking to just find a little chiva, you know, take home some soda."

"Mira a ese gringo tonto. El piense el es un buey," the one on the right said.

"Eh, *pues*, carnal, can't you see this one speaks Spanish," the middle one said. He looked Pargrew dead in the eyes. *He must be Suarez, plainly the leader and most intelligent*.

"So you came to buy some shit, huh? You came to the right spot, my friend. I'm the biggest man in Q-town, Prez of the fama, you know?"

"Yeah, sure, that's just who I want to deal with; the top man. You know, El Patron."

"You got any money on you, amigo?"

"I got money, plenty, but not on me now. What are we talking about? Show me some color, huh?"

"Draco, you shouldn't believe this guy. Even I can see he's some kind of cop. He looks like that guy from the sniper movie."

Duane stood behind the cholos, aroused from his stupor by loud, angry voices, searching gaze focused on Pargrew,

curious and accusatory.

"Why take any chances?" the one on the right said. "It's not like the world needs more gringos."

The cholos laughed at this. The man on the right reached under his shirt as if going for his piece. Pargrew tensed to react.

SSSSSSQQQQQQUUUUUUEEEEEE

A sudden squeal of tires in protest against a high speed turn distracted him and everyone else. A BMW M-3 screamed down the road, windows open.

"Chinga tus madres, chantaros."

A small but familiar black cylinder hurled through the air as the spoon flew away; a U.S. Army antipersonnel hand grenade.

Pargrew threw himself atop Duane. Both men crashed to the ground.

"What the --?"

There was a dull but deafening *crump*. White-hot shrapnel flew past scant millimeters overhead. Gunshots rang out, the rattle of full automatic fire as an AK-47 sprayed .30 caliber rounds.

The M-3 roared off while the cholos inside joyfully whooped and hollered. Pargrew dragged Duane to his feet. Both were unharmed. Suarez and the others were another story, faces and torsos unrecognizable, bloody, shredded remains.

"What happened?" Duane said, groggy from the blast.

"Never mind. Come on."

Pargrew hustled Duane over to the truck. He had the passenger door open and was about to wrangle Duane inside when the kid came to and tried to wriggle from his grasp.

"Hey. Where the fuck you think you taking me, cracker? I don't want to go anywhere with you. Those are my homies cut down over there; my *vatos*. You expect me to just leave them like that?"

Pargrew deftly twisted Duane's left arm behind his back. The kid winced from the pain. He took a plastic zipcuff, pulled his right arm until his hands crossed, and bound him tight.

"Ow, what the—? You're arresting me? You are a cop, after all."

"Shut up."

Pargrew shoved him inside the cab and got in himself. Police sirens wailed in the distance, steadily, insistently louder. Neighbors walked from their homes to stare at the murdered bodies. Pargrew drove from the barrio as fast as he could. A few swift maneuvers had him out on I-37, headed back to San Antonio.

Night had fully settled, the last hint of day a faint hue of red phosphorescence at the horizon's western edge, the Gulf's broad waters indigo shaded at last to black.

"Right pretty evening, ain't she, Duane?" •

ANNE RICE

Lestat Returns With More Vampire Chronicles



Interview by Suspense Magazine Press Photo Credit: Michael Lionstar

Vampires have been characters in books for years. It began with Bram Stoker and "Dracula" and then along came an author who changed the way we look at vampires with her groundbreaking book, "Interview with the Vampire." That author, of course, is Anne Rice. She set the stage for the modern-day resurgence and, just like Dracula, Anne created a character who now has become a standard for the modern fan with Lestat. Now, Anne's back with her latest book in the series called "Prince Lestat and the Realms of Atlantis."

Anne Rice was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. At this point, Anne has spent more of her life in California than in New Orleans, but New Orleans is her true home and provides

the backdrop for many of her famous novels. The French Quarter provided the setting for her first novel, "Interview with the Vampire." And her antebellum house in the Garden District was the fictional home of her imaginary *Mayfair Witches*. She is the author of over thirty novels. Her first novel was published in 1976 and has gone on to become one of the best-selling novels of all time. She continued her saga of the Vampire Lestat in a series of books, collectively known as *The Vampire Chronicles*, which have had both great mainstream and cult followings.

Her latest novel, "Prince Lestat," is the continuation of the *Vampire Chronicles*. With the old queen of the vampires, Akasha, long dead, the Undead are in chaos all over the world. Rice's fabled Brat Prince, Lestat, is the only immortal known by name to vampires young and old and many appeal to him to come out of his long exile and bring order as wanton destruction plagues revenants in city after city around the globe. With a return of some of Rice's most memorable characters, such as the melancholic Louis, the childlike Armand, the twins Maharet and Mekare, the former Talamasca scholar David Talbot, the ancient Romans' Pandora and the noble Marius, and even Lestat's distant mother Gabrielle, the reader will meet many new vampires, all of whom must cooperate in guiding the vampire kinship with technology and ritual toward the path of unity, building a new vampire kingdom in the modern world.

Let's take a look inside her latest book "Prince Lestat and the Realms of Atlantis," before we jump into our exclusive interview.

"In my dreams, I saw a city fall into the sea. I heard the cries of thousands. I saw flames that outshone the lamps of heaven. And all the world was shaken . . ."

—Anne Rice, "Prince Lestat and the Realms of Atlantis"

At the novel's center: the vampire Lestat de Lioncourt, hero, leader, inspirer, irresistible force, irrepressible spirit, battling (and ultimately reconciling with) a strange otherworldly form that has somehow taken possession of Lestat's undead body and soul. This ancient and mysterious power and unearthly spirit of vampire lore has all the force, history, and insidious reach of the unknowable Universe.

It is through this spirit, previously considered benign for thousands of vampire years and throughout the Vampire Chronicles, that we come to be told the hypnotic tale of a great sea power of ancient times; a mysterious heaven on earth situated on a boundless continent—and of how and why, and in what manner and with what far-reaching purpose, this force came to build and rule the great legendary empire of centuries ago that thrived in the Atlantic Ocean.

And as we learn of the mighty, far-reaching powers and perfections of this lost kingdom of Atalantaya, the lost realms of Atlantis, we come to understand its secrets, and how and why the vampire Lestat, indeed all the vampires, must reckon so many millennia later with the terrifying force of this ageless, all-powerful Atalantaya spirit.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): The vampire Lestat is back in your latest book, "Prince Lestat and the Realms of Atlantis." Can you tell us a little about it?

Anne Rice (A.R.): Basically, the Vampire Chronicles went into a new phase with "Prince Lestat." The Brat Prince, who had always been a notorious rebel and spiritual warrior, resigned himself to the fact that the tribe of the Undead needed him, and he became their monarch. He established a Court in his chateau in France, and a council of elders, including Marius and Gregory and Armand and others who could help make laws for the tribe. This new book flows right out of "Prince Lestat." The Court is attracting the Undead from all over the world to its balls, its theatrical performances, its glittering and exciting gatherings in Lestat's chateau. But Lestat must deal now with his old enemy Rhoshamandes, and also with the fact that the Talamasca, the old order of psychic detectives, has secret supernatural founders and these founders, including a powerful spirit, and a ghost, and a vampire, want to meet with Lestat, and want to be part of his world. This would have been enough on its own to keep Lestat busy for some time but along comes a new and potentially catastrophic challenge, ultimately connected with the legend of the lost kingdom of Atlantis. How Lestat and the vampires meet this challenge is the story in this new novel.

S. MAG.: Two years ago you brought Lestat back with "Prince Lestat," why did you feel that was the right time?

A.R.: It has been years since I wrote "Blood Canticle." I missed Lestat. I missed his voice, his perspective on life and on the deep questions of good and evil. New stories and new questions came to me. I sat down and put this to the test. Would Lestat come alive for me again on the page? Would he start talking? Would he be the vital and uncompromising hero again that he had been in the past? Well, the answer to all those questions was yes. He was back,

more palpable to me than ever. And I plunged right

"I missed Lestat.

I missed his voice,
his perspective
on life and on the
deep questions
of good and evil."



into this time and the immense impact that the internet and computer advances have had on our entire world, including the realms of supernatural beings. A young vampire, Benji Mahmoud, began inevitably to use the internet to communicate with vampires all over the planet, to provide a way for them to come together online and talk about the mundane challenges they faced in the need for passports, photo ids, DNA identification and the like, and about their conflicts with other vampires over rules, and territory. Benji shamed the older vampires for not helping the younger vampires. He shamed the elders for refusing to be good parents. Out of all this, the Vampire Chronicles was relaunched as the adventures of Prince Lestat.

S. MAG.: For people that are just getting involved in the Vampire Chronicles, where would you suggest they jump in?

A.R.: Well, the new "Prince Lestat" books flow directly from the original three books: "Interview with the Vampire," "The Vampire Lestat," and "Queen of the Damned." If a person wants to read only one book to prepare for this new book, I suggest "The Queen of the Damned." But I do try to make each and every book stand alone. Will this new novel be more enjoyable to those who have some knowledge of earlier books? Yes, probably so.

S. MAG.: Besides Dracula, I would have to say that Lestat is the most famous vampire written. When you first created him, did you imagine you would still be writing him years later?

A.R.: Lestat was born in the corner of my eye in a book called "Interview with the Vampire." I had no idea whatsoever that he would become the enduring hero of a series of books. None. I was entirely focused then on Louis, the narrator of that first novel and Louis' quest for meaning. When I went back eight years later and wrote a sequel, Lestat was born as my hero. I surrendered entirely to the seeming magic of Lestat, to the way my writing seemed to blaze when I looked at the world through Lestat's eyes. Lestat became a much stronger and more complex hero than Louis. I love them both, but Lestat is the character that made the series possible.

S. MAG.: Will fans notice a little difference in your writing from the last book to this one?

A.R.: I would hope they would see differences in writing. Writers, I hope, grow and get better over time; and of course they change as to what fascinates them; they experiment; they try different styles. At least I do. But really I can't answer your question. Some readers obviously see a great commonality in all my books. They see the same attention to historic accuracy, the same great attention to physical description, the emphasis on sensuality, and on personal emotion. They embrace the passion of the characters and the love of the characters for one another. Other readers do see differences; some say that the style of this or that book is markedly different from others. Myself, how can I really know? I am deep into the adventure as I write; I am surrendering. And I go where the book leads me. I do enjoy certainly a whole range of ways of writing: first person narrative; long descriptions of events that have a non-fiction historical feel to them; sometimes experimental dips into a stream of conscious. I let it all go. I let it all play out. Also readers tend to love certain characters more than others. I love all the characters, but some more than others.

S. MAG.: From 2003 - 2014 there were no *Vampire Chronicles*, did you just need a break? Or did you expect the series to stop?

A.R.: Yes, I did need a break. I had come to a breaking point with Lestat and the vampires. I associated them very much with sadness, despair, anxiety. I wasn't sure I had any more to say about them or about their world. I felt I'd done all I could for the moment. But that changed. I changed. Lestat returned to me, and I saw wholly new stories unfolding with him.

S. MAG.: Can you pick out one sentence or one scene in "Prince Lestat and the Realms of Atlantis" that you feel captures the essence of the book?

A.R.: I can't isolate one sentence. I would say that the Proem gives the feel of the whole book. In the Proem we see Lestat describing a dream he is having, and how this dream portends something immense and may change everything for the Undead.

S. MAG.: With the publishing world changing every day, how have you been able to navigate through everything?

A.R.: From the beginning of my career, I've been published by major houses in New York, and most of the time by Knopf,

which is part of Penguin-Random House. I've been very well treated by my publisher and I think of them as my home. My editor, Vicky Wilson, and I have one of the longest enduring relationships between an author and editor in publishing today. We've worked together for over 40 years. So my world is very stable. But I do acknowledge that publishing has changed dramatically. And all authors today are influenced by the internet, websites, blogs, and so forth when it comes to getting the word out about a book, and also in receiving feedback from readers. The internet and sites like Amazon, and blogs, have enabled a lot more visceral feedback from readers to circulate and make a difference. This has been a wonderful thing in many respects. But it offers new challenges. But all in all, I would say my world has been fairly stable. I enjoy social media and have used FB to communicate with my readers, and I love this. But then I always loved my readers and loved seeing them at signings, at vampire balls, and the like.

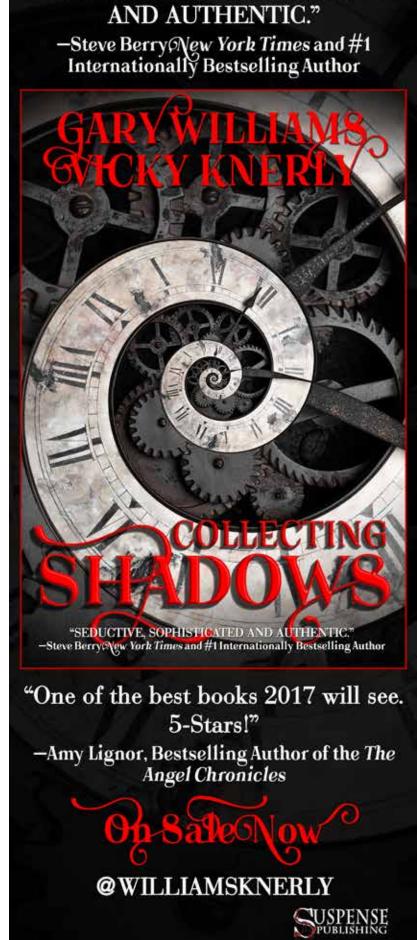
S. MAG.: I have to ask or my wife will kill me, have we seen the last of the *Mayfair Witches*?

A.R.: Right now, I am focused on seeing the Mayfair Witch books adapted for television, where I think they could have a huge life as an ongoing series. We have a lot of interest. But I don't envision writing new stories for the Mayfairs. However, I wouldn't say no to the idea altogether. The Mayfairs are associated for me with New Orleans, with the great house I once owned there. I'm not sure how I could go back to them now, living as I do in California, and with that great house having passed on to other owners. But who knows?

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in the future?

A.R.: Right now, I'm focused on yet another Prince Lestat book, one that would flow right out of "Realms of Atlantis." I see much happening with many of the same characters, new and old, featured in the Atlantis novel. I see new challenges, striking new possibilities. And I see new enemies for Lestat lurking in the wings, young vampires perhaps who want to challenge his power. Who knows? Maybe another ancient one rising, like Rhoshamandes, to try to destroy him. I'm actively at work on the next novel. And once again, I'm surrendering to what happens on the page. I just don't know... Some possibilities will take on life and vigor; others will be crowded out. Mainly, what I see is my smiling hero, winking his eye... assuring me that there are more realms to be explored both spiritual and physical.

We would like to thank Anne for taking the time to talk with us again. It's been several years since our last interview, so it was nice to catch up. For more information on Anne, please visit her website www.annerice.com and follow her on Facebook, where she is very active.



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DEAN KOONTZ SPEAKS HIS MIND





Dean Koontz is synonymous with masterful writing. A master of horror, a master of the supernatural, a master at humor (read not only his newsletter but also catch those twists of irony and sarcasm that pop up in all his novels), and even a master when it comes to delving into the minds and hearts of his unforgettable characters.

Interview by Paula Correira for Suspense Magazine

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

For Koontz fans, sadness was felt when the great, Odd Thomas, was put to rest after enjoying eight books in a truly brilliant series. With 2017, however, comes a new novel called "The Silent Corner," starring a new character by the name of Jane Hawk-FBI agent gone rogue. It is thrilling to know that Koontz has created yet another character so intriguing and inspiring that he will, in his own words, "stay with Jane Hawk for quite a while." Translation:

a new Koontz series that will keep readers engrossed for a long time to come.

Dean took time out of his busy schedule to talk with us about this brand new path. Not only does he discuss this new novel and a sequel scheduled to appear just six months after Jane Hawk has first been introduced to the world, but also offers readers a view of a true "master" of the written word.

Paula Correira (P.C.): When is "The Silent Corner" due out? What do you find engaging about your lead character, Jane Hawk?

Dean Koontz (D.K.): I'm finishing the sequel now, and I think I will stay with Jane Hawk for quite a while. Sometimes a character comes so alive, so quickly, with such depth and potential, that I can't let go. I want to know more about her. Cooking up a delicious plot, finding ways to use the language that are vivid and fresh—those things inspire and motivate me, but what most makes writing a joy is getting hold of characters who have so many layers they keep surprising and intriguing me. In life, we may have friends and family we think we know, but the truth is that we can never know the fullness of anyone in life the way that we can in fiction, where we go internal. Which is a good thing. In life, knowing the unspoken thoughts and unindulged desires of anyone would be a terrible burden.

Anyway, Jane Hawk, an FBI agent gone rogue, is investigating the suicide of her husband, which she knows to have been

murder. She is on the run and of desperate necessity living off the grid. Now a lot of people think they're off the grid, but almost no one is. Jane understands that every smartphone, every car with a GPS, every laptop is a potential tracking device to locate in real time the person using them. But she knows how to be a ghost in the machine, and she has a kick-ass attitude, as hard as a tire iron but at the same time profoundly tender. As I was working on the book, how she does this was interesting to me, but what about her psychology made her so darn good at it quickly fascinated me more and began to open depths in her character that made sitting down at the keyboard every morning a joy. "The Silent Corner" will be published in June 2017, and the sequel, "The Whispering Room" six months later.

P.C.: For you as a writer and reader, what makes a good story?

D.K.: Aside from fascinating characters and a solid story, I am won over by lyrical writing. There's very little of it anymore, but the style with which a story is told can be the musical score of a novel that shapes the mood and supports the theme.

P.C.: How has your writing changed focus over the years? Is your writing heading in a particular direction?

D.K.: The longer you work as a writer and the more you produce, the more your writing changes (or should), because you refine your technique and you experiment, and in so doing, you're moving outward from your starting point. If by "particular direction" you mean where am I going—I don't know! I'm continually surprised by the stories that occur to me. When I think, Uh-oh, I'm not sure I have the skill to handle that theme or that story, then I know it must be the best thing that I can write next, because the potential for falling flat on my face makes it more challenging—and more fun. And once it's written, I've moved in one direction or another just by virtue of that novel's difference. I don't necessarily keep moving in the same direction. My career is an example of Brownian movement, progress by random motion.

P.C.: What is the hardest thing about writing?

D.K.: Working at home. On the one hand, there's no commute, and you save hours a day. On the other hand, the work is always there, and if you enjoy the work, you're always at it.

P.C.: For which book have you received the most fan mail?

D.K.: Over time, probably "Watchers" closely followed by "From the Corner of His Eye." The most for a single title in one year

would be "Odd Thomas," which so overwhelmed us that I spent enough time on mail that year to have written another novel. But, oh, how fun it is when even Marines and cops write to tell you that you made them cry like a baby! Cry and laugh. Laughter is an important part of that book.

P.C.: Describe for us how you write.

D.K.: Most writers find this crazy, and it is, but it's also the only way I can do it. I always start with a mountain of self-doubt. So I revise and revise and revise page one until I've got the pace and language and mood and everything else where I want it . . . and then I go to page 2, where all the doubt comes right back. And by that means, I creep through the novel—and never really write a first draft that later is revised. It's been revised twenty, thirty times as I've progressed through it. I've said before that I build a novel the way a coral reef is formed from the millions of calcareous skeletons of tiny sea creatures. I once described this process in a public appearance, and another writer there said quite seriously, "I prefer to get it right the first time through a page." Wow. How I envy that certitude!

Some people think my approach would inhibit story flow and stifle creativity. I don't know. For me, it works. By the time I get to a narrative problem I've seen coming for, say, fifty pages, my subconscious has had time to think of multiple resolutions from which to choose. And moving forward in this fashion means I don't fly off on some plot tangent that at the moment seems cool, but later leads



"I'VE SAID BEFORE THAT I BUILD A NOVEL THE WAY A CORAL REEF IS FORMED FROM THE MILLIONS OF CALCAREOUS SKELETONS OF TINY SEA CREATURES."

nowhere fruitful. In the end, I save time and energy.

P.C.: Were you influenced by certain authors, books, or genres?

D.K.: Through college, 80% of what I read for pleasure was science fiction, 20% mystery. After college, and for half a century now, I have read in every genre—and literary fiction, by the way, is just another genre, regardless of all it claims for itself. When you read a full spectrum of fiction, you find wonderful writers everywhere. And crap. You find crap everywhere, too. There is a universal law, adjunct to the laws of physics, that ensures the equal distribution of crap through all art forms and genres.

P.C.: Just curious, and not that it matters, but were you good at English in school?

D.K.: English was pretty much the only subject that interested me enough to work for a good grade. History came easy to me, so that wasn't work. And math was as alien to me as a language spoken on a planet in a different galaxy from ours. Once I grew up, sometime around 35, science became a major interest, and for decades now I've read heavily in quantum mechanics, molecular biology, chaos theory, etcetera. But except for my wife and my dogs, the English language and storytelling are the great loves of my life.

P.C.: In an interview with Ben Tracy on CBS several years ago, you were very forthright about what can only be described as a sad and, at times, brutal childhood. I was dismayed to learn that you could not think of even one happy childhood memory of your father. He even once pulled a knife on you in a very public place and meant to use it. How did this influence your decision to be the writer you are?

D.K.: My dad held 44 jobs in 34 years because of numerous personality problems. We were poor—didn't live with an indoor bathroom or running water until I was eleven—and that was not just because of his problems with work, but also because he was an alcoholic, a skirt-chaser, and a gambler. Late in life, he was first diagnosed as borderline schizophrenic with a tendency to violence, complicated by alcoholism. Later, after he ended up in a psych ward, a subsequent diagnosis labeled him sociopathic.

But I must stress, I was never an unhappy kid. Scared half to death at times, but not unhappy! I could always find something to do that made me happy—and books were one of the earliest forms of escape for me. Happiness is a choice. And to balance my father, my mother was a great person, though trapped by ill health and economic circumstances.

P.C.: I happen to know you are a modest man and embarrass easily, but you are also a survivor, and that serves as an inspiration to others. So although this is hard for you, do you have words of encouragement for those who have had or are going through tough childhoods or circumstances at home?

D.K.: When I've been approached by readers who know my background and are themselves still struggling with the damage done by violent and/or alcoholic parents, I've found the most effective thing I can say, the thing that causes people to come back years later and tell me it helped, is not a touchy-feely bit of therapy. It's instead as blunt as a lead pipe. I say, "Evil is real, and the people who made your childhood so dark have evil in them. If you never get over what happened, if you let it twist your life and cast a shadow over every moment of happiness, then you're letting the evil bastards win. Do you really want to let the bastards win? I don't." People tend to think of childhood abuse—of whatever kind—as something that happened a long time ago. But if you can't let go of its effect, if you let it shape your life, it is something that's happening right now, and you are a co-conspirator with the person who abused you. That realization can be empowering.

P.C.: It has been said that there is no other fiction better suited than the mystery/suspense genre to get at certain truths,

because its finger is directly on the pulse, on the angst and fear, of a particular generation or society. Is this what draws you to the genres you write?

D.K.: Occasionally I've been asked why I have to write novels with a large measure of suspense, why I don't just write a flat-out comic novel or love story, or whatever. My answer always is that suspense is the primary quality of life and that to write a novel without it is to write an artificial work. We never know what the day will bring, what turn for the better or worse. If we are honest with ourselves, we acknowledge that life is lived in a perpetual state of suspense. The same can be said of mystery. The world is a deeply mysterious place, and a sense of that mystery needs to be in fiction. I don't write who-done-its, so the mystery of the world is conveyed in other ways in my books, but it's there in every one.

P.C.: Your novels defy neat categorization. Do you like writing across the disciplines? Do you start out with a particular genre in mind and stick to it, or does it evolve?

D.K.: I never think genre when I begin. I start with a premise that intrigues me and an unusual character, and I go from there. I like to be surprised by where the character goes. When I started "The Silent Corner" for instance, I knew it would take a current technology and show you the dark side of it, a sort of Crichtonesque element, and that it would have a kick-butt heroine unlike anything I'd read before. What I didn't see was that Jane Hawk would bring me a story that was a curious blend of noir and hope, that she would be almost as dark as she is light, capable of such extremes of action. The novel became what it became entirely because of the character, not because of any genre I was aiming for. I love her as if she were real.

Over the decades, publishers have kvetched about my cross-genre approach. In the early days, I was told I would never be a best seller because: (1) the books didn't stay safely within one genre, (2) I used too large a vocabulary, (3) sometimes there were moments of comedy in the suspense novels, and sometimes a lot of it. Even after I'd had a book at #1, I was pressed to change what I was doing. When "Midnight" became my first #1 bestseller, Phyllis Grann, my publisher at that time, called me with the news, and before I could express my delight, she said, "But don't expect this to happen again, it's a fluke." Phyllis was a canny publisher with much success, but she never seemed to get what I was doing. We had five number ones in a row, and every time she told me it was a fluke. I realized then that I needed to change publishers!

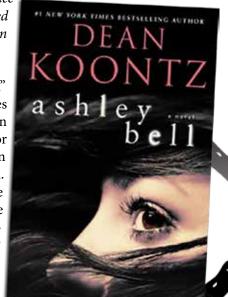
P.C.: Dean Koontz pretty much makes everyone's list of the Top 100 Scariest Books of All Time with at least a few entries, yet I don't remember ever seeing a vampire story of yours. Why not?

D.K.: I don't write vampires or werewolves. They just seem old and tired to me. Many years ago, after "Whispers" sold a million or more in paperback, my publisher would pay me an adequate advance only if I wrote a horror novel because horror was big then. I was not happy about that. "Whispers" was a straight suspense novel, and I didn't want to write flat-out horror. But I had to eat and pay the rent, so I agreed. I wrote "Phantoms," which was essentially a monster story but with a scientific explanation. The very publisher who demanded a horror story decided it was too scary and dumped it with a 5,000-copy hardcover printing. I

tend to feel that human evil is more frightening than that of any supernatural beast. So once I could afford to write strictly what I wanted, which was right after "Phantoms," I tended to write books like "Intensity" and "The Husband," in which the actions of the human antagonists make vampires look like wusses.

P.C.: Some critics claim that the similarities between Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" and your Frankenstein series are mainly superficial, but I would argue your series takes man's hubris to a whole new level. Shelley's vision was of an experiment resulting in one monster unleashed on the world with the potential for containment if only Victor Frankenstein could be motivated to act. In your series, man's hubris has resulted in the genesis of a new race of creatures and the possibility of mankind's extinction. Did you have the complete vision in mind when you wrote the series? Did you have Shelley's idea of Dystopia in mind when you wrote the series? (For those of you who are unaware, Shelley was the rather jaded daughter of British odd-duck radical Calvinist-atheist-anarchist philosopher and writer William Godwin and feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft. Who wouldn't be dystopia-minded with such parents?)

D.K.: First, I need to say that the series was meant to be written in collaboration with



other writers. My dear, good friend Ed Gorman and the SF writer Kevin Anderson did a good job with first drafts based on my bible, for the first two of the five volumes in the series, but I discovered that I could not collaborate. I'd look at a perfectly fine first draft and decide it needed a new opening scene—after which I found myself writing an entirely different story. As a consequence, I took twice the time to write one of those than I otherwise would have. I don't know where this inability to collaborate comes from—because I always got "plays well with others" on my grade-school report cards.

In Shelley's novel, Victor is a tragic figure, but he evokes no sympathy because he shares with Hamlet an inability to act, a tendency to dither and overthink and justify his actions by the concoction of a self-serving ideology. Like Hamlet, he is both tragic and despicable, and his character flaws lead to deaths that need not have occurred. Shelley clearly had much experience of self-proclaimed intellectuals (of course all of them are self-proclaimed) and found them dubious or worse. Victor's essential smarmy self-rationalization, in the book, has never survived translation to the screen, where he is most often just a tragic figure or a mad scientist.

My intent was to make Victor more explicitly the villain of the piece, whereas his villainy in the original is everywhere implied. If you're going to propose that both he and the monster have survived two hundred years and are alive in our time, you are obliged to imagine just how self-righteous and evil he would have become during all that time. In the service of emphasizing this approach to Victor, I made the monster one of the heroes of the tale. As Victor has corrupted his soul, the monster, through his suffering, has learned compassion and may have a soul of his own that is not corrupt.

I made the decision to include a considerable comic element and ironic tone to the series because otherwise it would have been too gruesome and dark beyond the point of being entertaining. And in truth, most intellectuals with Big Ideas are as unintentionally funny as they are destructive. By the way, a fabulous book about this very thing is "Intellectuals" by the great British writer and historian, Paul Johnson. His portraits of everyone from Rousseau to Hemingway to Edmund Wilson are revealing, highly entertaining, and disturbing. At the end of that book, Johnson writes: "We must at all times remember what intellectuals habitually forget: that people matter more than concepts and must come first. The worst of all despotisms is the heartless tyranny of ideas." That is the central theme of my five Frankenstein novels.

P.C.: Do you have any hobbies and interests you care to share? Do you even have any time for hobbies and interests?

D.K.: Gerda and I have long collected Art Deco sculpture and Meiji-period Japanese sculpture that in some ways predicted Art Deco. The bookshelves in my office contain books but also a couple of dozen beautiful Bakelite radios from the Art Deco period, because even everyday objects then were highly designed, whereas now they're just functional. And dogs, of course. Much time with the current dog, Elsa, who has captured our hearts. We recently watched the new Jungle Book—a fabulous film—on the big screen in our home theater, and she sat up in a chair throughout, riveted to the screen, especially captivated by the family of wolves. And toward the end, when the villainous tiger is after Mowgli, Elsa whimpered and put her head on my shoulder! When I talk about the mysterious nature of this world, I always have in mind, among other things, the nature of dogs.

P.C.: Is there anyone alive or dead that you and Gerda would like to meet?

D.K.: John D. MacDonald. I had some light correspondence with him back when but never met him. I learned the value of characterization by reading his books. When I first discovered him, I read 34 of his novels in 30 days! And Flannery O'Connor. Her stuff knocks me out.

P.C.: I'm hoping you will allow one quirky question, but I am willing to bet others would love to know this as well, Dean. If you could have a super-power or supernatural power, what would it be?

D.K.: I wouldn't want a super power. If the movies are giving us an accurate portrait of superheroes, super powers tend to bring out the inner fascist in even the most well-meaning people. I'd settle for the ability to play the piano half as well as my friend David Benoit. I've always fantasized about being a piano man.

We would like to thank Dean for taking the time out to speak with us. You can learn more about his work at: www. deankoontz.com. ■

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The American Dream

By Laura Stewart Schmidt

UNKNOWN CALLER, read the ID.

Toby swore. Of course it was a creditor. No one else would call at eleven-thirty at night.

But those calls usually came between seven a.m. and nine p.m. She'd always thought there was some law against bothering people in the middle of the night, even if they did owe you thousands of dollars.

And Toby owed a lot of people a lot of money.

UNKNOWN CALLER gave up. Toby listened for the 'ting' that would let her know she had a voicemail. It didn't come.

It was time for bed. She turned on the porch light for Mom. Her mother's latest hobby, a ceramics class, ran until nine-thirty, then she usually went for coffee with her friends and got home by eleven. Maybe one of the Silver Foxes, as Mom's group called themselves, had some pressing problem she'd needed help with.

As if that bunch of fifty-somethings had problems. They were all stable and steady as the Pentagon—houses paid off, marriages intact, kids grown and out on their own.

Except Mom. That last item for her was a runaway train whose back end was disappearing too fast to catch it. Mom was probably the one bending everyone's ear tonight. I can't get my irresponsible failure of a kid out of my house. Thirty-five years old and might as well be five. Broken marriage, broken career, broken credit. Broken. Why don't I just throw her away like I would anything else that's broken beyond repair?

Because even if she never said it, some part of Mom had to hope Toby could still be repaired.

Bam-bam-bam.

Toby almost jumped out of her skin. Banging on the door at almost midnight?

That couldn't be anything good.

She looked out the peephole. Two county police officers stood at the door.

Oh, my God. I'm going to jail.

There was no point in postponing it. She grasped the doorknob with shaking hands and opened the door.

"Roberta Shelton?" one of the officers said.

That proved it. No one would call her by her given name unless he was about to arrest her. "Yes."

"May we come in?"

It wasn't like she had a choice.

The officers introduced themselves and declined an offer of coffee. It occurred to Toby that Mom might be shocked if she came home and found the police in her house...just as she realized Mom should have been home long ago. It was then the first officer cleared his throat. "Ma'am, there's been an accident."

She had to identify her mother. They offered to let her do it via video, in case the actual body would be too traumatic, but she needed to see. Needed to make it real. Her first thought when she looked down at the still, silent shell was: *I guess this makes me an orphan*.

"Is there anyone we can call for you?" The officer who seemed to have taken charge asked.

Toby gave her head a little shake. "Uhm..." She had no living relatives nearby. She'd been an only child, like her father,

who'd passed away when she was in high school. Mom's only sister married a career military guy and they lived overseas. "My best friend."

"What's her number?"

"His." Toby fished her phone out of her purse and found Mike's number. "Mike Caniff."

The officer peered at the screen. "Where's a 501 area code?"

"Arkansas, just west of the Bootheel. We had a farm near Walnut Ridge when I was a child and that's where I met Mike..." she trailed off. Officer Reynolds wore that 'I'm sympathetic but I wish you would stop babbling' look.

Funeral expenses. The house. Mom's job would have to be called. So would Aunt Presley, whom Toby hadn't seen since she was two.

Maybe Aunt Presley would help with the funeral expenses. Unless Mom had life insurance, she would have the low-end burial.

But Mom did have life insurance, and it would cover the entire cost of the funeral and burial. She also left the house and a generous savings account to Toby.

Mike left his construction business for a week and drove up from Arkansas to stay through the funeral and the reading of the Will. He greeted Toby's discovery that she was no longer broke with much less shock than she had. "Who else would your mom leave her house to?"

"The animal shelter? Sierra Club? St. Jude's? Mike, come on. You know how disappointed she's been with me."

"Disappointed in how things have worked out for you. That's not the same as being disappointed in you."

"It is in this case." Toby leaned against the back of the sofa and closed her eyes. "Stop kidding yourself. She and Dad have been frustrated with me since Day One. They wanted me to be something productive, and an unpublished poet doesn't qualify."

She didn't add her suspicion that they'd sold the farm to punish her. They'd known how much she loved it. That she wanted to move there someday.

"There's nothing wrong with being a poet." Mike's strong hand rested on her shoulder. "And you're good enough to be a Poet Laureate someday."

"Yeah, well, 'someday' ain't now." She leaned into the warmth of his touch. "I had to move that box of my books up to the attic where Mom couldn't see them. Every time she did she'd make this face."

Mike grinned. "She was annoyed with the people who were too stupid to see your genius and buy your book."

Toby snorted. "No, because it's the same look she gave me when Bruce took me for a ride. Believe me, she wasn't angry at Bruce. She was angry at me for falling for his crap."

Toby's ex-husband had taken one look at her mother's colonial home in an upscale St. Louis suburb and fallen in love. He'd done a remarkable job of convincing Toby his love was with her. The reality, that he needed a well-heeled woman to support him, hadn't come out until several years and a dozen maxed-out credit cards later.

And then there was the house.

Toby had made the down payment with her meager savings. Bruce torched it in an attempt to get the insurance money. The investigator figured out his game, so not only did he fail, but he was charged with insurance fraud. (Not arson. Apparently, it was perfectly legal to destroy your own property.) Then Bruce disappeared, and Toby, who had lost everything she owned in the fire, still owed the finance company for a house that wasn't there anymore.

That was two years ago. She was still getting collection letters.

Mike's gentle voice brought Toby out of the nightmarish reverie. "She would've fallen for him too."

"But she didn't," Toby pointed out. "She told me not to marry him. I thought I knew better."

Mike tried to laugh. "I don't have anything to say, since I'm in the middle of a divorce."

Toby nodded. Mike had called her crying the day he received the papers. "How's it going?"

"How does a divorce always go? At least we didn't have kids or property to fight over. She'll quitclaim the house. Dinah goes her way, I go mine."

Toby made a sympathetic noise. "Honestly, I can't get over Mom leaving me her money."

"What kind of money are you talking?"

"About a hundred grand in savings, not counting what this house is worth."

Mike whistled. "You could pay off everybody with that."

"No."

"No? You can't?"

"I won't. Taxes will take enough as it is. I don't want to use all Mom's money to pay off the mortgage on the house I don't have. Or the credit cards, which are full of Bruce's bar bills and stuff he bought for his girlfriends. What about me? He left me holding the bag, and it weighs as much as Alaska. I'm sick of it."

Mike didn't reply.

"I'll pay off the loan for the printing of Desert Snow. That's one I can't blame anybody for but me." She tried not to cringe at the thought of her book. At one time she'd been prouder of the small volume of poetry than anything else in her life. That was before she'd sold seven copies—all to friends. Mike had bought three.

Now the box of unsold books sat in the attic, another in a long list of failures that made up her life.

"What about bankruptcy?"

She shook her head before he'd finished the sentence. "I already talked to a lawyer about that. It won't wipe out everything, and it'll wreck my credit for years." She had to laugh. "My credit. What the hell is that?"

"It might be worth it just to put some of this behind you."

She had to make Mike understand. "This is the first break I've had. I want to go back to Walnut Ridge. I can't get the farm back, but I can buy a house in town, and have something that's mine. No one can come along and garnish it or seize it."

"But they will." Mike didn't look at her. "Unless you get those debts taken care of, as soon as you buy something, they'll come along and snap it up."

She smiled. "Not if it's in your name."

Finding the perfect house was easy. She remembered a block of old Victorian homes in Walnut Ridge, two and three-story houses with wraparound front porches, balconies, awnings and gingerbread. Even the street name fit—Aldersgate. When she was a child, her mother had often driven up Aldersgate on the way back to the Sheltons' farm. Toby would stare at the houses, memorizing the details she could see and imagining the ones she couldn't, and pretend she was going home to drink lemonade on the front porch, arrange her stuffed animals in the window of a third-floor loft bedroom, or plop down in a window seat with a notebook and pencil to write for hours.

She found one for sale. To say it was in disrepair would be massively understating the issue. No one had lived in it or cared for it for almost three years. The front porch railing sagged, the shutters were warped and rotting, and several broken windows had let in mice, rain and leaves. Paint peeled in strips.

Then there was the inside. Boxes and stacks of moldy newspapers filled the corners, and the odor of decay and animal urine hung in the air.

But Toby and Mike went to work. Mike donated the services of his construction company and several crew members. Armed with surgical masks and Vicks VapoRub, they carried out boxes, hauled newspapers to the recycling bin, and vacuumed up nest material and leaves. Mike's guys scrubbed and painted with the soft colors Toby had chosen. By the time she—or rather, Mike—had owned the house for three weeks, the inside walls gleamed lemon and lilac, and the outside matched the sky on the sunniest day. Mike made a face when Toby suggested it, but he'd painted the shutters dusty rose. The rest of the money bought carpeting, furniture and curtains, and delivery trucks jockeyed for space on the shady street.

"What's this room going to be?" Mike asked as he vaulted over the edge of a first-floor French window. The lock didn't work, but Toby didn't care. Who needed locking windows in Walnut Ridge?

Toby smiled. "My writing studio. Watch your feet on the carpet."

"Are you here for good?"

Toby scrunched her cheeks. "Not yet. I'll spend tonight here, then I have to go back to St. Louis and finish moving out of Mom's house."

"Are you going to leave this place sitting?"

"You could stay here. It's your house, after all."

Mike tweaked her cheek. "I'll keep an eye on it. You might want to think about an alarm system. You've put a lot of money into this place, and I'd hate to see anything happen to wreck your dream."

"Me, too." She picked a piece of dirt off her t-shirt. "If you hadn't done this I would have lost everything Mom left me. But

now I need to do a debt consolidation loan or take your advice and file for bankruptcy. If I don't, I'll never be free of Bruce." He hugged her. "Things are looking up for you, Toby. I feel it."

She sold Mom's house to a young couple thrilled to get a place so close to the law office they'd just opened. She packed as much as she could fit into a U-Haul and figured the rest could go to Goodwill. She was doing a final walk-through, checking for anything of monetary or sentimental value, when her cell rang.

PRIVATE NUMBER. Oh, hell. Another creditor. Well, she had a few thousand dollars left over; maybe she'd just pay this one off. "Hello?" Her voice echoed in the almost-empty house.

"Toby? This is Dinah Caniff."

Toby started. She hadn't spoken to Mike's ex-wife in months. "Uhm, hello..."

"I've got some bad news." Dinah's voice was brisk and businesslike. "Mike was in an accident at work. He's dead."

"What?" Toby whispered.

"He fell off a ladder."

"A ladder?"

"Yes. He was working by himself, finishing up a job he had near Pocahontas, and his ladder broke."

"Broke?"

Dinah tsk'd. "Do you understand anything I said?"

"Dead? Mike is dead?"

"Yes."

Toby tried not to breathe, as though that might make the whole conversation imaginary, a dream, a nightmare. *No. Not Mike. I didn't hear this. It didn't happen. None of this is real.*

"There's going to be a memorial service Thursday," Dinah went on. "I'll text you the information if you want to come."

Yes, of course she would go. Because that would show none of this was real.

"You'll want to find a place to stay here. I'd put you up at Mike's, but I'm going through all his things."

"I have a house I'm moving to," Toby murmured, wiping her face with her palm.

"I have to clear out our old place so I can sell it," Dinah said. "I'm going to live in his new house."

Toby froze, hand poised at her nose, tears drying cool and itchy on her cheeks. "What did you say?"

"Mike fixed up one of those big houses on Aldersgate. A blue and pink three-story." *Did Dinah chuckle?* "I didn't even know he was buying it. He didn't list it in his assets."

"You can't live there." Toby forgot her grief in a flash of sick panic. "That's my house. I bought it!"

"Then why is Mike's name on the deed?"

"That's a technicality. It's mine. We put it in Mike's name so I wouldn't lose it to my ex-husband's creditors."

Silence. Then, "You'll have a hard time proving that."

"To who? You? Dinah, you've known me as long as you've known Mike. My mother just died and—"

"Mike told me." 'I'm sorry' might have been nice.

Toby's words gushed. "She left me enough money to buy that house. I've wanted to move to Walnut Ridge since I was a kid and my family had that farm. Mike helped me fix up the house. You can ask anyone who knows him. He lent me his crew to work on it. You know he wouldn't have put pink shutters on his own house!"

"What's your point?"

Toby stared at the phone. "Well, I, I mean, it's my house, Dinah. You can have the one on Roe Street—"

"Don't tell me where I can live." The words hit Toby like a spray of icy hail. "I'll tell you where I'm going to live. That house on Aldersgate. It was in Mike's name, and when he died I inherited it. I suggest you buy yourself another house."

She didn't own a gun.

Sleeping pills didn't even make her drowsy.

If there had been any rope in the garage, it was gone now.

Poison would be too painful. There had been enough pain lately. The farm, the book, Bruce, Mom, Mike...and now, her

beautiful house. Her perfect house.

Her house.

Nowhere to live, nothing to live for, and she couldn't even figure out how to kill herself.

She spent the rest of the evening clutching her box of framed photos, pictures of her and Mike that spanned years—hell, decades now, two and a half of them—and sobbing into a handful of paper towels that scraped her skin raw. She carted her remaining copies of "Desert Snow" to the grade school and dumped them into the recycling bin. Her treasured book, a collection of her best poetry. She'd been so eager to hold her literary child in her hands she'd decided to self-publish after receiving too many rejections and non-responses from publishers and agents. She thought the company she'd chosen would give her a cover worthy of her poems and help her with marketing and distribution.

But they hadn't. The several thousand dollars she hadn't realized the project would cost bought her boxes of volumes she couldn't hope to sell. Chain bookstores were bound by rules laid down by their higher-ups. Independent bookstores refused to touch a self-published book. The county library told her they would be happy to accept a donated copy.

The book was a humiliating failure, allegorical of her entire life. If only she could throw everything, including herself, into the recycling bin. Give herself a chance at a new existence as someone, something...else.

At three-thirty she threw her things in the car and got on the highway for Arkansas. What was the point in staying? Although, really, what was the point in going? There was nothing for her there either. No job, no house, no Mike.

No Mike.

Mike had been doing construction since he was a teenager. He taught his employees ladder safety. What would have made him climb a defective ladder?

His death at this time was too much of a coincidence. Mike hadn't had a chance to do any legal paperwork to ensure the house would go to Toby if anything happened to him. There was only one person who benefitted from his death, and that was Dinah.

Who hardly sounded like a grieving widow.

Toby arrived in Walnut Ridge at seven a.m. She checked into a motel and sat down on the double bed with a rental brochure. Dinah was right about one thing. Toby had to find a place to live.

Then she would find out what really happened to Mike.

At the memorial service she sat in the back of the church with a group of Mike's employees, several of whom had helped her fix up her house. They passed bandanas to her, tangy with the smell of honest sweat, in case she needed something to cry into. She didn't. She'd gone so numb the entire service might as well have been a television program.

The loss of her best friend was almost as bad as the loss of her home. Worse than the loss of her disillusioned mother.

She did have a home, of sorts. With the money she had left over, she'd rented a small furnished apartment, barely big enough for her collection of books and back issues of *Poets & Writers*. The bed had a round indentation, the exact size of an adult's rear end, likely from being used as a chair. The sand-colored stains in the bottom of the bathtub wouldn't come off no matter how much Comet she used. A series of nail holes in the living room still smelled faintly of the Colgate someone had used to patch them.

But it was someplace, and it was in Walnut Ridge, and she was home. Sort of.

She drove around town one day, depositing resumes and filling out applications, in case anyone in a town of 4,000 people might have a use for a writing major. Finn's Market did, and Toby got a job sweeping the floors and taking out the trash.

On her off days, she plotted how she could expose Dinah. If Dinah had rigged the ladder to break, someone might have seen her at the house on Roe Street, Mike's house, where he kept all his work equipment in the shed. But who would have noticed? She was his wife, after all, and probably had every right to be there, even though their divorce was already in the works.

Maybe Dinah had left some clue.

Toby had a key to the Roe Street house. She also had keys to the Aldersgate house, of course, but Dinah had most likely changed the locks.

But, maybe she hadn't done anything about the window.

Toby went to the Roe Street house on her next day off. If anyone asked, she would have told them Mike borrowed a tool from her when they were working on the new house and she needed it back. In keeping with the story she pocketed a long aluminum wrench. But no one asked. The street was nearly empty, with most people at work, and the ones who weren't didn't pay attention to one woman walking around as though she belonged there.

She wasn't sure what she hoped to find. But there was nothing in the garage. The broken ladder had been thrown out after the investigation into Mike's fall, and none of the three remaining ladders seemed damaged.

How could Dinah have known which ladder Mike would use? Or did she figure it was just a matter of time?

Toby's head ached like someone had kicked it. If Dinah had done something to the ladder to make Mike fall, she had gotten away with it, and would probably continue to get away with it.

Unless Toby could surprise her into confessing.

She headed over to Aldersgate and tried her key. It didn't fit.

But the window hadn't been fixed. Opening it, she climbed into the living room. Her shoes dropped bits of mud onto the ivory carpet. Damn, she would have to have it cleaned.

"What are you doing here?"

Toby looked up.

Dinah pointed a gun at her.

Her heart thumped. She hadn't thought about Dinah being home, or about how it would feel to have a gun aimed between her eyes. Her bladder clenched and she hoped she wouldn't wet her pants. "It's my house."

Dinah laughed. "Are you still making that noise? This is not your house. Get the hell out before I shoot you and tell the police you broke in."

"You killed Mike," Toby blurted.

Dinah stared. "What?"

"You did something to the ladder so he would fall. He must have told you I'd bought this house and you decided you wanted it."

Dinah shook her head, her mouth twisted as though Toby were roadkill she was stepping over on the street. "You're crazy. I never touched the ladder."

"This is too much of a coincidence." She hoped Dinah couldn't hear her voice shaking.

"It's not." Dinah's hand holding the gun was steady. "I lied. Mike told me about the house. He showed it to me and told me if I came back to him we could live here."

"Liar!"

Dinah shrugged. "Believe what you want to."

She was making it up. It was a lie. It had to be. Mike wouldn't have betrayed Toby like that. He'd known her since they were ten. He wouldn't have stolen her house from her.

But she would never know.

Some part of her would always wonder. Dinah had not only robbed her of the house, but she'd wrecked Toby's memories of her best friend.

Toby pulled the wrench out of her back pocket and flung it in Dinah's face.

Dinah shrieked and fired. The shot missed Toby by several feet. She rushed Dinah, the element of surprise on her side, and yanked the gun from the other woman's hands.

The second shot didn't miss.

They called it premeditated murder. She had no real defense. The house wasn't hers, and she had no legal reason or right to be in it. Nor to have the stolen wrench, which was also Dinah's property.

No one believed her story.

The prosecution painted her as an enraged former lover. Her leftover money was quickly swallowed by her attorney, who advised her to plead guilty. She refused, hoping the jury would understand.

They didn't. They recommended life in prison.

"All I wanted was a place of my own," she told the bailiff who led her away. "Something no one could take away from me. Isn't that everyone's dream?"

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