

*Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction*

# SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

FALL 2019

*Beware:  
The Frightening Fall*

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We write this letter with a very heavy heart. Author Mark Sadler, a *Suspense Magazine* family member, suddenly passed away on August 24, 2019. Mark was the author of "Blood on His Hands" and "Kettle of Vultures."

We all go through our days hoping to meet people who have a positive impact

on our lives. When we find them, we cherish those relationships and feel blessed to experience them. Mark Sadler was a man who, when you needed a smile, you called him. Mark was a very talented man. Not just an author, many things you've enjoyed in this magazine over the years came from Mark's brain. When we began the magazine over ten years ago, we were lucky enough to run into Mark very early on. He was one of the first authors we published; he intrigued us with his passion for writing, and his incredibly positive attitude. Mark will be missed by many. His impact on the writing community will be felt for many years to come.

We were and are truly *very* lucky to call Mark Sadler our friend.

As we continue the magazine this month, we keep Mark and his family in our thoughts and prayers. As you navigate through the suspense 'doors' and 'windows' where we offer up both entertaining and interesting information, we ask you to take just a moment to remember *all* the authors in this issue, and embrace their work.

The "cozy" mystery community also lost a great writer with the passing of Lea Wait. Lea was the author of the *Mainely Needlepoint Mystery* series, and her next book, "Thread and Buried," will be released November 26, 2019.

As this magazine takes you through Halloween and Thanksgiving, it's never too early to give thanks to everything and everyone in your life. So please know, we at *Suspense Magazine* thank all of you from the bottom of our hearts for taking the time to read what we put together. Without you, there would be no magazine. Keep an eye out for the big year end issue, where we will release our *Crimson Scribe* award winner, along with all the winners in individual categories.

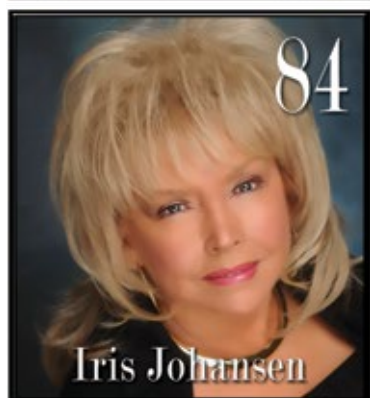
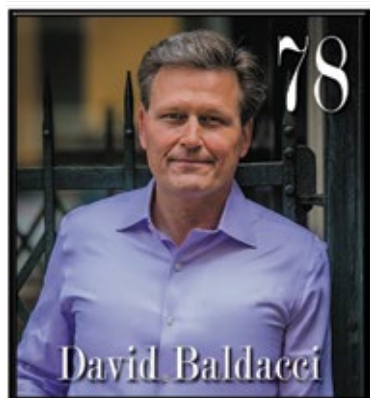
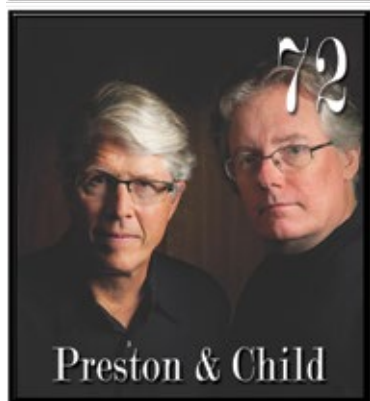
Until next time, stay safe and be happy.

John and Shannon Raab  
*Suspense Magazine* ■

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# IF ONLY A HEART



By Caleb Stephens

**THE FROST HIT HIM FIRST—A COLD ETHER THAT WOKE HIM STIFF, HEAD TO TOE.** Paul cracked his eyes open to the weak, pre-dawn light of the tent and rolled toward his daughter, toward the bloom of cinnamon hair so like Catherine's. Coffee and milk. His hand drifted for her shoulder. "Morning. How'd you—"

The word died on his tongue. Her sleeping bag was empty, the red nylon wrinkled and overturned. He sat up, his gaze now falling on the open tent flap and the gray wash of sky beyond. A sliver of purple bruised mountain in the distance. She must be up already, he thought, unzipping himself and standing to stretch.

He got dressed, fumbled a hoodie from his pack and pushed out to a mix of wet earth and fog. Paul glanced around the campsite for Olivia, saw only the pair of logs they'd dragged next to the fire last night and miles of dense thicket stretched out beneath a gray-dome sky.

Off the beaten path. It's where Olivia had wanted to go. Somewhere she—they—could get away from the pain. Pain that hung on them both like thousand-pound anchors, the two of them casting about on a dead sea in broken ships. No wind. No motion. Just empty black water and despair threatening to pull them down, down, down...

Paul cupped his hands to his mouth and blew, turned to look at the wall of greenery behind him where she must have slipped off to pee. Off the beaten path. And they were. Sidetracked by at least a quarter-mile. Maybe more, diverted last night by a stray deer trail and the fading light. It had nearly grown dark by the time he'd realized his error and brought them to a halt. Too late to turn around. Best to break for camp and find their way back in the morning.

Morning. Silence. Too much of it.

He should have heard something of her by now. A rustling through the brush. Her twelve-year-old feet on the wet leaves. Anything. But there was nothing. No breeze. No birds. Too quiet. Something was wrong.

A jangly flutter of nerves, and he walked to the edge of camp and called for her, brought his hands up and yelled: "Livvie, it's time for breakfast." Nothing. And somehow, he knew there'd be nothing. A chill spread through him, a cool slick of it pooling in his chest. His limbs. That familiar anxious knife of dread at losing her as he'd lost Catherine. He yelled again, louder this time, his voice taking on the tone that always brought her running.

"Livvie!"

His voice echoed back faintly, swallowed by all the brush. He circled the camp, calling out and looking for footprints, for any sign of her, of which there was none. Just the forest floor rich with pine needles and drifts of shed bark. Witch Hazel. Then he spotted it. A carving in the trunk of a sapling maple at the edge of camp. The shavings fresh.



A heart.

But not the ubiquitous curve of love he'd seen etched into the bark of so many neighborhood trees. This heart was an actual...heart, so lifelike he practically expected it to start beating. Two atria. Two ventricles. Veins cutting exquisitely through muscle. How is it so detailed? Paul wondered. He knew no blade could have carved this. It was far too intricate for someone to hack into the tree with a Swiss Army knife. And if they had, it would have taken weeks. No one would spend that amount of time. Not up here. He blinked and looked lower, felt the air rush out of him at what he saw. The print of something large and thin in the earth. Bone-like. Deep. Fresh. Five...no, six toes. Claw marks.

Paul burst into the thicket and ran.

#

"Don't you dare," Catherine said, slapping his hand away from the radio.

Paul laughed, smirked. She rolled her eyes at him before looking back through the rain-spattered windshield toward the canyon of trees beyond. The gunmetal sky. "You really think she'll have fun?"

"I know she will."

"It's just...she's never been away from us this long before."

"I think it'll be harder on you."

"Probably..."

He reached over and took her hand, squeezed. "Livvie's a tough one. Like her mom. She'll be fine." One look at the camp and Paul knew Olivia would forget about them the second they left. The lakes, the woods. The horses and all the activities: archery, soccer, rock climbing. Arts and crafts. The place was a kid's dream on steroids.

"I hope so." Her voice cracked and her hand slid free of his, fluttered at the corner of her eye.

"C'mon, Cat. She'll do great."

"I know. She's just growing up so fast. I'm not ready for it."

"Me either." And he wasn't. She was growing up too fast. It seemed just yesterday he was bouncing her on his knee as a toddler, those huge brown eyes of hers begging him for another bedtime story. And now she was twelve? How had it happened?

"I'm not ready for this," Catherine continued. "She'll be in middle school next year. Middle school. I just feel like"—her mouth suddenly peeled apart, eyebrows ripping up her forehead—"Paul, watch out!"

He snapped back to the road, too late, jerked the wheel right to avoid the oncoming truck as it careened over the yellow line. Then they were slamming down the hill, rocks and

dirt and branches slapping at the glass before an expanse of cold, dead air and the sensation of falling.

#

The bracken thickened around him, became so dense he wondered how he'd ever work through it. Branches tore at his throat, his arms, etched red tracks across his skin. Still, he bowled forward through the undergrowth. The pain didn't matter. Nothing did but following those prints in the muddy earth.

They were so far apart. Impossibly so, like they belonged to something with ten-foot stilts for legs. His heart thundered in his chest with every step. Livvie. He couldn't lose her. Not after Catherine. She was all that was left of her; the only thing that kept his ruined heart beating, and even then, just so.

Deadfall littered his path, snags of trees and decayed wood to work through, each step bringing him further into a world that shouldn't exist in Appalachia. He'd been on plenty of backpacking trips with Catherine before they'd married. Nights spent sipping wine from red Solo cups with the stars sprinkled above them in great drifts of powdered sugar. The fresh scent of pine and campfire smoke. Days out here. Sometimes weeks.

In all that time nothing remotely like this.

With each step, the forest seemed to grow around him, the trees towering twenty, thirty, a hundred feet overhead. Larger and larger like he'd stepped into the middle of an old-growth preserve. Black bark giants that stretched for the sky, long strips of moss trailing from their branches to the forest floor. Massive ferns and other bushes he couldn't name. Magnolias the size of footballs. Strange colors everywhere, everything prehistoric looking. And all along he screamed for her, his voice pitching higher and higher, desperation tearing at his throat.

"LIVVIE!"

Silence. Even here in this ancient place that should be teeming with life. A black silence that infected him with terror. A palpable sense of dread, the light suffocated above by the thick canopy of leaves, rotting it so that he could barely see ten feet in front of him now. Catherine's voice in his ear. That final request: Protect her, Paul.

"LIVVIE!"

Ahead, through a copse of hemlock, weathered wood long gone to hell flashed at him. Chalk gray and leeching dust. He broke into a wide clearing heavy with waist-high clumps of wild grass and slid to a stop. A stitch of pain savaged his side, his lungs aching for air as he stared at a...cabin?

A cabin, yes, but not a cabin. Something...else. Something that didn't make sense. Support beams erupted from



the earth at impossible angles and curved through the structure in ways timber shouldn't move. Smooth bends and vicious, ninety-degree twists. A swooping front porch with no doors or railing. Thin slat planks pasted together in intersecting angles. A patchwork roof. Windows pocked the exterior with the haphazardness of a shotgun blast. Some sideways. Some upside down. All of them at odd, unnatural gradients that made no sense.

His vision blurred and he angrily wiped at his eyes. Focused. Whatever had taken his little girl had brought her here, buried her somewhere inside this monstrosity. He wasn't sure how he knew it, but he knew it like he knew gravity. He could feel her through the walls, could imagine her screaming for him. Acid splashed up his throat and the black wave of panic spread through his limbs once more. *Livvie. I'm coming.* He picked up a rock and took aim at the closest window, hurled it, watched it bounce off the opaque glass with a sluggish clunk. He tried again, harder this time, to the same result: a dull thud and the rock in the grass.

The prints. Find the prints!

He dropped to his hands and knees and scanned the ground frantically, parted the grass and crawled through the slop like a lunatic until he spotted one. Another. His heart leapt and he was back on his feet, racing around the structure after them. They led him to a black sweep of earth and a heavy set of flagstone steps descending lower. He took them two at a time until he reached a panel of ancient metal. No markings. No features. Simply a door of some sort. Rusted iron.

As he reached for it, a strange grinding scarred the air. A deep vibration that cut through the earth and rattled his bones. A jolt of adrenaline drenched his lungs and he spun around. He'd only taken six, maybe seven steps, but the stone staircase now stretched impossibly high above him, at least a hundred steps. Maybe more. Beyond them, a thin slice of morning sunlight carved down through the newly formed canyon of stone, dust motes glittering wildly.

Paul stood speechless, shook his head.

Not possible.

He swallowed his fear and spun back to the door. Examined it.

Smooth metal save one feature: a heart. The same heart from the tree at camp stamped directly in the center. No doorknob. No way in. His pulse crashed in his ears and he raised his fist, ready to fracture his knuckles if that's what it took to break through.

Stopped.

He didn't know why, but something about the door filled Paul with a terror so palpable, so thick, it erupted over his skin in a wave of gooseflesh. He hesitated for a moment, two, then unwound his fist and tentatively set a single finger

on the door. The others followed, his fingernails click, click, clicking down over the cool metal. His palm.

The heat was instant, tore through his skin like a wildfire. Liquid hot—like he'd cranked an oven burner to ten. Frantic, he jerked his hand back but it...

Wouldn't.

Fucking.

Move.

Paul stared in horror as a flare of acrid smoke curled from a fingertip. Another. Then it was his entire hand blistering, crackling like a greased strip of bacon. Seared to the metal. He could smell it. Taste it... Sweet heat. The pain was endless. Ungodly. A scream ripped from him. An otherworldly scream he didn't recognize as his own. Blacked out.

#

Woke.

Squinted against an intense refraction of light.

He was in some sort of chamber. Yes, a chamber draped in...mirrors? They surrounded him on all sides, some encrusted with glittering, nameless jewels. Colors so intense, so bright, he could barely stand to look at them. Others mere glass and metal, but everything lurid and dripping with light.

So much light.

*My hand!*

Paul whipped his gaze down his arm expecting to see blackened flesh, instead saw his arm bound, his hand smooth and pink. Healthy. What the...? He blinked hard. Flexed his fingers and glanced to his other hand which was also bound. To a chair. But not exactly a chair. To something...else. Something alive. He could sense that, could feel the heat of it against his skin. A rough, flesh-like texture. A strange pulse radiating through him.

A heartbeat.

Then he was thrashing, tearing at the restraints, which only tightened with each jerk, each pull. So tight, it felt as if they'd sever his flesh. His bone. Still he tore at the binds, Livvie on his mind, finding her the only thing that mattered. Again Catherine's voice in his ear: Protect her...

Dread suddenly enveloped him; the same thick, tangible sense of dread that had overwhelmed him at the door. Cold paralysis. The feeling of being watched. Of being consumed. He searched for it, eyes wild and squinted against the sharp illumination across the room. Saw it. Not quite darkness, not quite light. Something else. A void, air whirling around it like smoke, everything distorted. And in the center a figure.

Watching.

Movement. A straightening of bone, joints snapping into place. Rising, rising. The thing so tall it nearly scraped the



chamber vault. Slowly it lumbered toward him, that swirl of air, of light, blurring its features. Paul tried to make it out, caught snatches of impossibly purple irises, an elongated, mouthless jaw and limbs draped in translucent flesh. Black veins. Black organs. Cold sweat spackled the back of his neck as the thing drew near. Towered over him with those bright eyes, all he could make out through the brilliant sheen.

"DADDY!"

Paul's heart carved through his chest at the sound of Livvie's voice. It came from every direction, all at once. He jerked to the side, saw her staring back at him from all the glass. A thousand sets of auburn eyes. Her warm spray of freckles above lips curved wide in fear. His little girl surrounded him; was in every mirror. Paul snapped his gaze back toward the thing, those terrible eyes impossibly high above him, now slits.

"What do you want from me?"

Something brushed his cheek. The creature's hand, cool and thin, and Paul slumped forward.

#

Water rushing. Stones heaving. Grinding. The sensation of floating. Sinking. Heavy, wet weight on his chest. His arms.

"Paul. I-I can't...move."

A wretched cough next to him and he shot awake to a mouthful of dirty river. The sound of rapids. Green water swirled around him. Foam. He blinked hard and shook his head, tried to clear the cobwebs dancing through his vision. Something warm crept over his forehead and into his eyes.

"Paul!"

Catherine. He jerked toward the voice, pawed the blood from his vision. She blinked, her neck angled unnaturally away from him, but her eyes alive and panicked. Her lips were trembling, nostrils flared. "H-help...me."

He came alive at that and fumbled frantically at his seatbelt, ripped it off and sloshed his torso clumsily over the center console. His hands dove into the freezing water near her waist and went for her seatbelt, his fingers already numb with cold, heart thrashing in his chest.

"W-what happened?" she asked.

He pulled himself nearly on top of her, desperate to find the buckle. A flash of the road. The truck as it crossed the yellow line, barreled straight for them.

"Shit. Hang on." His thumb found the button and he pressed, jerked the seatbelt from her lap and circled his arms around her torso. Heaved. She was pure, dead weight. Something snagged as he jerked again. She cried out and he eased her back, his hand on her cheek. "Hey, I'm right here. Take a breath and tell me what hurts, okay?"

"I can't...I—" she coughed something wet from her

lungs "—c-can't feel anything..." Her eyes fluttered at that and he knew he was losing her. Already he was losing her.

Jesus. "Stay with me, Cat."

She blinked and gave him a slight nod, the river nearly to her chest now. Frantic, he sucked in a lungful of air and plunged beneath the icy water, felt down her leg to an angry snarl of metal. He pried at it, pulled on her leg until his lungs nearly burst. Kept pulling. Finally, he thrust up again for a ragged breath. The water was at her chin now, her eyes muddy, unfocused. "Go," she said, her voice barely a whisper above the water's roar.

"No. I'm not leaving you!"

"You...h-have to. F-for Livvie."

The SUV's frame groaned, tilted. Water bubbled through the windows. The doors. They were spinning, sinking deeper. The rapids were deafening now. His heart caught in his throat.

"Cat..."

Her eyes came alive, caught his: "Protect her, Paul. Promise me."

He sat unmoving, every fiber of his being drowning with her, unable to speak, to move.

"Promise me."

He nodded, felt for her hands one last time.

"Good. Now go!"

#

He swallowed, his throat so thick with the memory of her he could barely move. Barely breathe. It's like he'd been back there in all that frothing water. It's icy grasp. He could still feel her hand in his, could still see the panic in her eyes as she begged him to let her go for Livvie's sake.

"I can protect her."

The voice tore through him like a waterfall of glass, sharp and piercingly bright. Inhuman. He seized back against the chair that wasn't a chair. Took a sharp, painful breath and looked up again. Stared at those bright, bright eyes.

"Your life. For hers."

The thing was speaking to him. But not speaking. No sound. No words. It had no mouth. It was more a transfer of emotion laced with terrible meaning. Terrible because he instantly understood it as the truth. This thing, this creature... whatever it was, was telling him the truth. A life for a life.

"Daddy, help me!"

A blinding rage tore through him at Livvie's voice and he ripped at the restraints around his wrists once more, seized with all his strength to break free, to kill—

The crack of his wrist was instant, the bones in his right hand splitting like brittle kindling as the restraint ripped tighter. A dry: Pop! Pop! Crunch!

Anguish. He fought for a breath, could barely get the words out. His ruined wrist pulsed with pain. Throbbled unnaturally. He jerked his gaze up. "Why are you doing this? W-what do you want?"

The abomination leaned lower, traced a translucent, multi-jointed finger from his cheek, down his neck, to his heart where it stopped. A single black talon tapped his chest.

"Choose."

"Where are you, Daddy? I can't see anything. It's dark in here. I'm scared. So scared." Her voice cracked, "Why won't you help me?"

He broke at that. A trace of her as a little girl: fresh from a nightmare, her face still creased with it, long eyelashes fluttering. His hand on her cheek as he whispered her back to sleep. The pad of his thumb beneath her chin, his lips close to her ear. *Daddy's here, baby. You're safe now. You're safe...*

"Choooooose."

Paul gasped; the creature was in his head, his very cells. It was literally a part of him. He could feel it. Taste it. Smoke and ash. But what did it mean? What would he be leaving Livvie with? Just the thought of losing her to this awful... thing gutted him, flooded him with an unbearable despair. But he had to make a choice, or it would kill her. That much he knew. The words burst up his throat unchecked and urgent: "Me! Take me, goddamn you!"

The thing shuddered, its emotion spilling through him: a cold blend of ecstasy and excitement. And something more. Relief. An endless ocean of it. Cool and wet, like it had been dammed for centuries. The voice swept through him again: "Yessss. I will protect her."

The talon at his chest flicked, sliced through his shirt and hovered above his naked flesh for an agonizing moment as the creature's eyes bore into him. The finger moved again, and Paul watched in horror as the talon cut a perfect red X in his skin. A hot sheet of blood spilled over his chest. Then other fingers joined. A blur of talons.

Cutting, cutting. So sharp.

Inside him.

He screamed. The sensation more than pain. Something beyond pain. Pure anguish. Like nothing he'd ever felt. His ribs cracked. Vessels sliced. Then a terrible pressure. A fatal jerking sensation. One, two, three times. Ripping. Vital things inside him gave way, snapped free with a wet sucking sound as the creature withdrew its multi-jointed claw. And in it, Paul saw a heart.

His heart.

Still beating. Thump. Th-thump. Thump.

His. Fucking. Heart.

Paul gasped as his vision curled in at the corners, like a photograph set aflame. Still he watched as the thing lifted his beating heart up, up, up, so high, stopping at its face. The

air stilled, that hazy sheen clearing long enough to reveal a smooth, mouthless jaw. Crystalline flesh and no nose.

The creature stared at the heart mesmerized, tilted its head and began grinding its jaw back-and-forth, back-and-forth. A shredding sound filled the air. Something like stitches popping. Then that translucent skin tore, piece-by-piece, inch-by-inch, to reveal the beginnings of a...mouth. A horrible wet semicircle of a mouth that became a dark maw, black as a cave. The creature's jaw unhinged further, that awful skin ripping, popping, until, to Paul's horror, it lifted his heart and placed it inside.

Swallowed.

Then nothing at all.

#

The woman came into existence one frame at a time. A splash of color in the middle of the mirrored chamber: a yellow summer dress and a froth of brown hair over her shoulder. That smile and the tan summer skin that had slayed him all those years ago in freshman biology. *Catherine*. But it couldn't be. She was in the river, never found, though they'd dredged and dredged. Still, it was her, just a few feet away and clutching something, no, someone to her chest.

A girl.

Somehow important. The most important thing of all. Sobbing. The girl's shoulders heaved as the woman—he couldn't remember her name now—pulled her closer and whispered something in her ear. Squeezed her tighter. Paul felt a vague sensation of sinking, of being pulled down, down, down...

Why couldn't he remember her name?

Why couldn't he remember his own?

And his body—so different. So strange. Something...off.

He glanced down his arm, felt his eyes widen in shock. His skin was clear. Jesus. He swallowed hard at the sight of dark veins running through his forearm. A dense network of them cutting through muscle and bone. Dead veins. He flexed his hand, no...a claw, and a forest of black talons jerked in response. Revulsion burned down his spine and he whipped his gaze up, tried to speak, realized his mouth wouldn't open.

He had no lips. No tongue.

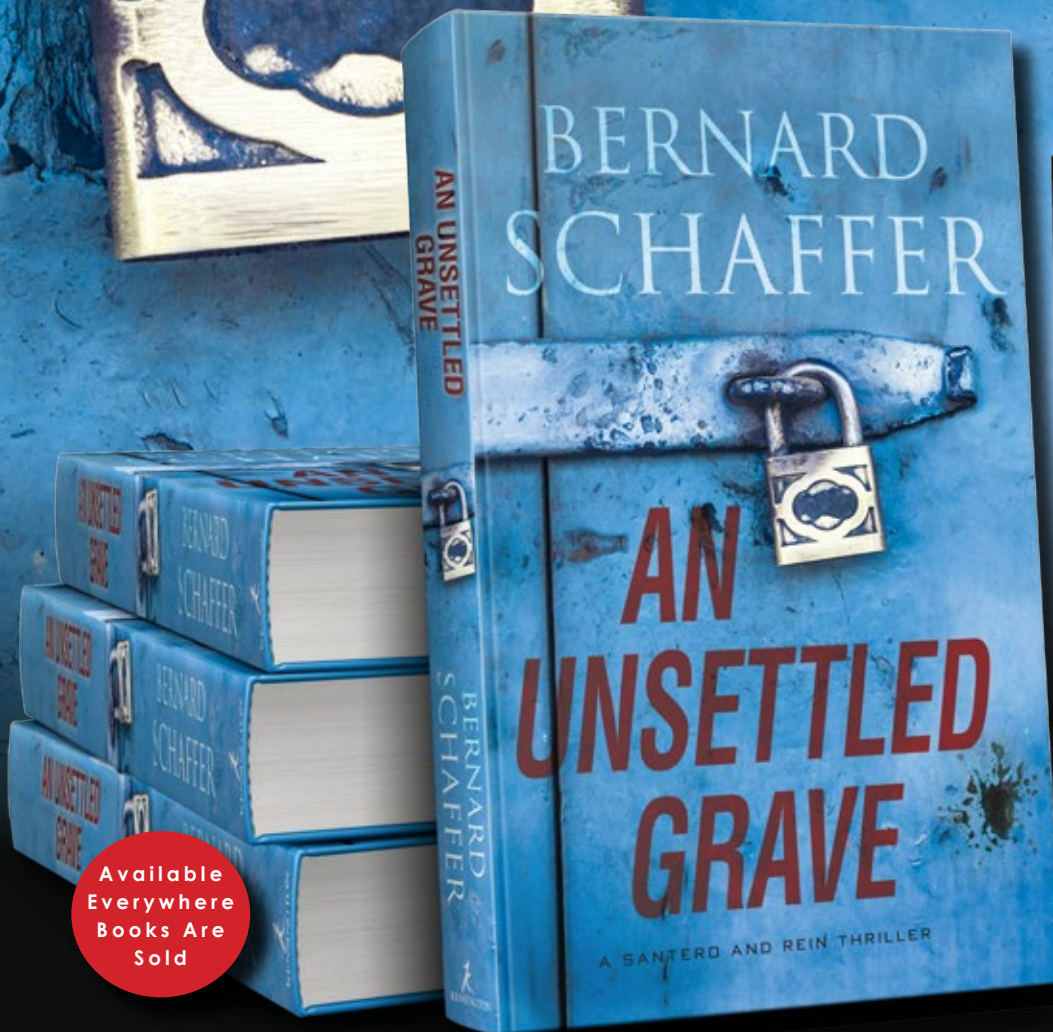
The woman stood and took the girl's hand, led her away from him and toward the dark passage. She hesitated for a moment. Glanced back. Her eyes held his for an unbearable moment, the color unnatural—a strange, liquid purple before fading to a soft brown. A color that had once meant something. As had the girl. No more. Now nothing mattered.

Nothing but finding a heart. ■

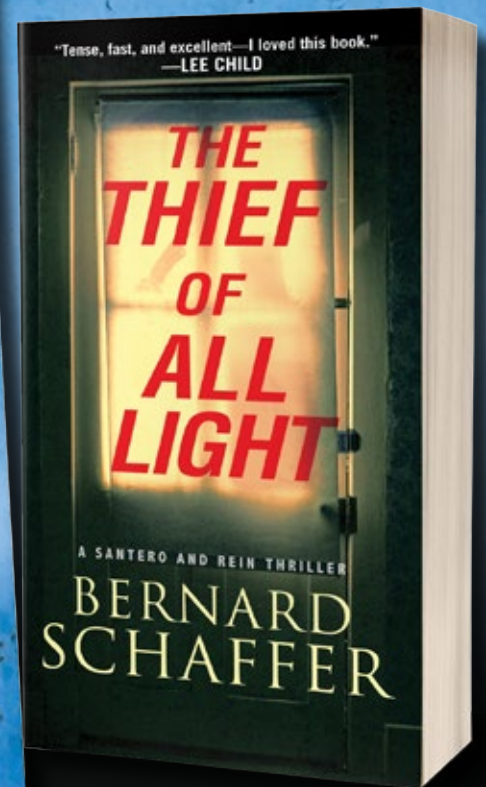


**“HEART-POUNDING  
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**—Lisa Scottoline**



# CRIME *and* SCIENCE RADIO

WITH AWARD WINNING AUTHORS

D.P. LYLE, M.D. & JAN BURKE

## THE BODY TELLS THE TALE

An Interview with the Writing Team of

JON JEFFERSON & DR. BILL BASS

Interview by D.P. Lyle, MD and Jan Burke

Press Photo Credit: Erik Bledsoe



In this interview, “The Body Tells the Tale,” D.P. Lyle and Jan Burke interview the writing team of Jon Jefferson and Dr. Bill Bass. Their latest book, “Cut to the Bone,” is a new thriller you definitely do *not* want to miss.

Jon and Bill sit down with *Crime & Science Radio* to speak about their fiction-writing team, share secrets on how forensics really works, and offer up truths that break the myths of the legendary Body Farm in Knoxville, Tennessee.

D.P. Lyle (D.P.L.): Today, Jan and I will be discussing the ins and outs of forensic anthropology, dead bodies, what

happens to people after they die, and more. We’ve been looking forward to this for a long time because of the two, very special guests, we have with us.

Dr. Bill Bass is an international treasure for the hard work he’s done and his incredible research. Trained at the University of Virginia, he began in psychology but got smart and switched to anthropology. Boy, are you talking about two ends of the scientific spectrum, I love that. He then got his master’s degree and PHD. He has been a teacher for many, many years and has been honored by more people than you can think of. And, of course, it was his work that was responsible for the spin-off of the T.V. show, *Bones*.

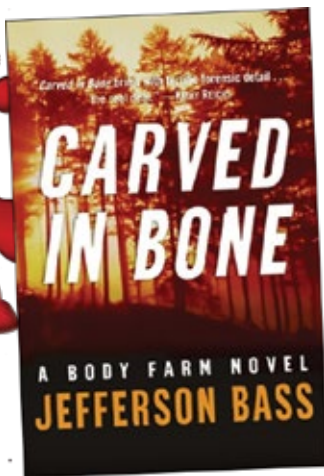
Jon Jefferson is a journalist, a writer, and a documentary filmmaker. His work has been published everywhere, from the *N.Y. Times* to *USA Today* to *Popular Science*. He’s been on NPR, and has produced a couple of highly-rated National Geographic documentaries on “The Body Farm.”

These two incredible men also work as a team, writing under the name of Jefferson Bass...

D.P.L: Obviously everyone knows the term “The Body Farm.” Even Patricia Cornwell wrote a book titled that. Located at the University of Tennessee’s Forensic Anthropology Center, it was founded by Dr. William Bass.

Doctor, when you first conceived of this idea, how did that come about and where did you expect this research to go?





Dr. Bill Bass (B.B.): Doug, I have to go back. Before coming to Tennessee, I taught at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, and I identified skeletal material for law enforcement agents there; such as, the Kansas Bureau of Investigations. I came to Tennessee in 1971, but it was in the late 1960's, when they were having trouble with cattle rustling in western Kansas that this first came into being.

You know, if you watch old western movies, the bad guys herd up the cattle and drive them over the hill and they're gone. Today, however, they don't do that. Today, the bad guys own or rent a refrigerated truck, and they will go out to these ranches in Kansas, Colorado, Texas, etc., and they will kill the cows, butcher them in the fields, hang the meat up in the truck, and drive off. The rancher comes over a week or two later and finds all these dead carcasses lying around. The question for law enforcement becomes: How long have they been there? The reason they need to know, is that it will tell law enforcement the timeline of when this meat could have been sold.

During this time, I received a letter from Harold Nye who was head of the Kansas Bureau of Investigations. He asked me if I could look at a cow carcass and tell how long it had been dead. I looked at the literature and research on a subject like this and literally found nothing. I wrote him back and told Harold that if he could find a rancher who would kill a cow, I would watch it/study it every day to see what happened to it. I then signed my name. I also put a P.S. in the letter telling him I would actually need four cows: one summer, one winter, one fall, and one spring, because the major factor in the change or decay of a carcass is temperature. Nothing happened with that; it was not fruitful at all.

By 1971, I had been invited to Tennessee to take over an undergraduate program at the university and turn it into a graduate program. I wrote to Jerry Francisco, who was the Medical Examiner in Tennessee at that time, and said I was coming to teach at the university. He wrote back wondering if I would serve on the ME staff to identify skeletal remains. After saying yes, it wasn't long before the maggot-covered bodies began to come in. There were always two questions: Who is it? Of course. But, the second was: How long have they been there? I didn't know anything about how to do this research and, I thought if I was going to work with the police, I had better know what I was talking about.

In the fall of 1971, I went to the dean and said I needed a line to where the good dead bodies were. He didn't say anything. He simply picked up the phonebook for the University

**“IT’S INTERESTING NOW, BECAUSE WHEN YOU TALK TO PEOPLE IN AND AROUND KNOXVILLE, THE BODY FARM IS SO A PART OF LEGEND, THAT THE CITIZENS ARE PROUD OF IT.”**

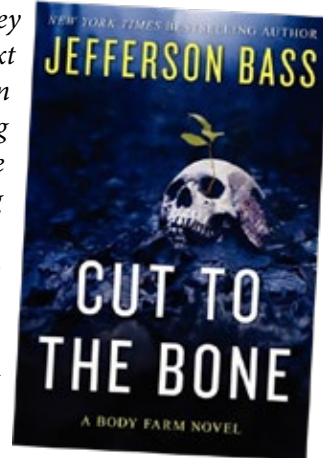
of Tennessee, and this was the beginning of the first Body Farm.

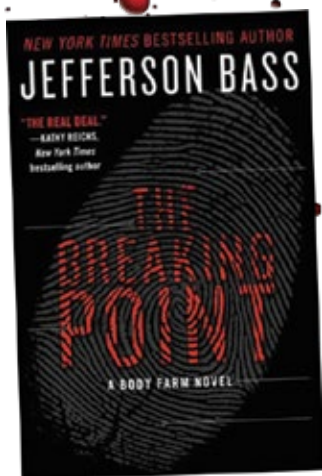
Jan Burke (J.B.): I have wondered what it would be like to walk into an administrator's office in the early 70's, and pitch the idea of setting up a place where you would be studying taphonomy? But if the dean was that understanding, were there any other obstacles you had to traverse?

B.B.: He was very understanding; he had been head of the Physics Department before becoming dean of the college. A thoughtful individual, he was a supporter of anthropology. He seemed to think I was a good guy and knew what I was doing, and I had no trouble with the administration at all.

D.P.L.: Was the community supportive?

B.B.: Well...yes. (LOL) We have a blue-collar group here in Knoxville called SICK, which stands for “Solutions to Issues of Concern to Knoxvilleans.” The head of SICK, when we first started this idea of the Body Farm, was a Mormon woman whose son ran a scraper. It's not a bulldozer; it scrapes down land. The university had given me some land behind the hospital, which is what we started on. I went out there one day and saw that all the survey sticks were knocked down and lying all over the place. I wondered what was going on, so I started checking and found out that the University of Tennessee Hospital needed more parking spaces for their staff. So what they had done, was taken the land next to the land that had been given to me. One of the guys driving the scrapers to scrape down the land in order to build the parking lot was the son of the woman in charge of SICK. She thought it was something they should complain about. They held a news conference and had a big sign that read: “This Makes Me SICK,” which I thought was kind





of funny, considering. Nothing ever came of it, though. It was a one day show, I was well enough known, and the land was for the ME, so that was dropped.

Jon Jefferson (J.J.): *It's interesting now, because when you talk to people in and around Knoxville, the Body Farm is so a part of legend, that the citizens are proud of it. People love it. They know this place has revolutionized forensic science around the*

*world. And Bill has become a folk hero in eastern Tennessee.*

J.B.: There are some imitators out there now, is that correct? Other body farms have opened in Texas and along the East Coast. What have you thought about these imitators?

B.B.: *Well, I think it's a good thing. Seeing as that your major factors in determining decay are temperature and the climate in which you have a dead body, they are needed. Not all the world has a climate like east Tennessee does. For years I went out and lectured and tried to get other body farms started. Since I retired, there have been a number of them. There are two in Texas, in fact: one at Baylor and one at Texas State University in San Marcos. The San Marcos one is run by two of our doctorate students. To really understand decay rates better, we need one in Tucson, Arizona to study the low desert climate, and one in Albuquerque, New Mexico to study the high desert.*

D.P.L.: One of the most common questions I get from writers is, "I have this person who is killed and thrown into a body of water. What will they look like in three weeks?" So I do understand the various locales and how decay will vary in different parts of the country. But on the Body Farm, you create certain scenarios, like placing the body in the shade, in direct sunlight, in the trunks of cars, etc. Can you tell us some things that you might have uncovered in the work you did there?

B.B.: *Well, what we do, essentially, is work for the ME. We always try to recreate the various scenarios where bodies have been found in Tennessee. So you have all of those factors to study: sunlight, shade, trunks of cars, bodies inside automobiles—all of these crimes occur, and what we try to do is reproduce as many of those scenarios as possible. There was very little literature at the beginning, so we started all this with something simple: How long does it take for a right arm to fall off? Well, there are a lot of things to take into consideration.*

*Does the arm have clothing? No clothing? After 42 years of looking at dead bodies, people think I'm an expert, but there are things I don't know. We've only really scratched the surface.*

D.P.L.: What other factors would you consider to be important when it comes to the rate of decay?

B.B.: *Various scents also come into play. If you have an individual who has had cancer and gone through chemo, that body smells differently from a body that has not. We have really not looked at things like, does chemo change that rate of decay; and, if so, how? We are looking at things like that now to see if we can get a better feel of how drugs change things. We do know if a person was on drugs because maggots feast on the body. We can grind up the maggots and find out what drugs the person was taking when they died. But we really haven't looked at whether this changes the rate of decay or not.*

J.J.: *Another factor I can speak to, as a frequent visitor to the Body Farm, is the access of insects into the body. If the blowflies can't get to the body, that slows the rate of decay down dramatically.*

B.B.: *Yes, the critters are a major factor in determining decay, and the first critters to be attracted are the blowflies. These blue and green iridescent flies will lay their eggs, and the eggs hatch into maggots. The maggots then begin to destroy the soft tissue. One thing we have learned is that maggots can't get through the epidermal layer of the skin. So, let's say you find a body and the right arm is down to the bone and the left still has fingerprints on it. That's a red flag. Say the person was stabbed, and they held their right hand up for protection, causing that hand to be cut. This allowed the maggots to get through the epidermal layer and into the muscle. When you find a skeleton or decaying body, those are the telling factors that you need to look at; the hand that's down to the bone because it sustained a bludgeon or cut.*

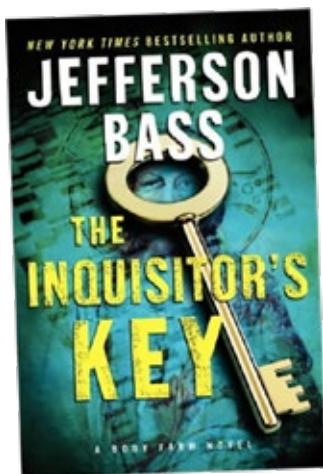
D.P.L.: You would expect an open wound was there.

B.B.: *Right. Normally the blowflies are interested in eyes, the mouth, and any wound on the body.*

J.B.: I was thinking about a talk I heard about the differences between individuals' microbial fingerprints. Are you seeing any variations in individuals in that way; conclusions you have come to when judging things like this, or weight and age factors that may affect decay and how the body changes?

B.B.: *You are right on the edge of science, actually. You have asked a question that we need to look at; I'm not sure we really have yet. When you ask questions like that, you've gotten past*





the “ease” of sunlight versus shade. But these questions, I believe, are what the next generation of anthropologists will be studying.

D.P.L.: Do you do studies with high-tech stuff, like electronic nose devices and gas chromatography, or is your research more anatomical?

B.B.: As a matter of fact, the very beginnings of that research was done here. One of my doctorate

students is a man by the name of Arpad Vass; he works over at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Instead of looking at the body the way I do, looking at the decay of tissue, he looked underneath the body. As a body decays and the skin cells break open, they leech out of the body and will stain the carpet under the body; or, if the body is outside, they will kill the vegetation underneath the body. Arpad, for his doctoral dissertation, took soil samples within the first two years and set up a scale. By using this process, he created a very good indicator for how long a body had been dead.

J.J.: It is interesting work. He looks at the ratio of those chemicals, and as the decomposition progresses the ratio changes. So, if he sees a certain ratio, he can correlate that with his research. What he did was pull vapors off the bodies for years and analyze the ratios of the chemicals for various intervals to match the research data he’s gathered over the years. He can literally tell you how long the body has been decaying. It’s kind of astonishing.

B.B.: One of the things I have tried to teach is something that occurs all the time. After the blowflies, creatures like bears or coyotes will head to the decaying bodies. You don’t usually even realize you have a body out there until the dog brings the arm into the yard. A dog will normally not venture more than a mile from the house, but there is a whole lot of land in a mile. I tell the police if they wonder where a body originally laid, they can look for those balls of fatty acids that will have killed the vegetation. It will take up to two years for nature to reclaim that area, so these stains can be found. So, if the body is dead for a year and has been spread around by animals, you can still find where they originally laid just by finding that stain.

J.J.: The spots or stains are areas where it looks like something has been burned, but it’s actually been killed by the acidity of the cells.

D.P.L.: I have to say, I’ve learned a lot today. When you’ve been studying these corpses, is there something that has surprised you the most about this process?

B.B.: When we started 42 years ago, remember, we knew nothing at all about what would happen when a body decayed. So it is interesting to see that there is a pattern, and if you know what the variables are, you can estimate fairly accurately the length of time since death. It’s not a haphazard type of situation. It just involves sitting down and watching this, which is not appetizing at all, and recording the pattern.

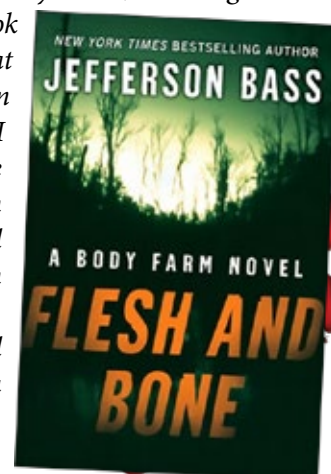
J.B.: You said you were working with the ME’s office. Can I assume you’ve worked with the FBI or other law enforcement agencies beyond your local area?

B.B.: Oh, yes. Actually, this will be the sixth or seventh year we have offered a week-long course for FBI evidence response team members. They spend a week with us in March to study five bodies we bury and the bones we scatter on the hillside. We also have two or three groups from Kentucky, and the Bureau of Investigation agents come, as well as the Knox County Sheriff’s Office, which comes every year.

J.J.: You also have DMORTs. They are the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams and they do disaster training every year using corpses from the Body Farm.

J.B.: For those who do not know what a DMORT team is, we should mention that someone realized years ago that you could “plan” what would happen in a mass disaster, but you wouldn’t really know until it happened. And someone would have to figure out what to do with the fatalities. So, how did your partnership with Jon first begin?

B.B.: Jon approached me, ten to twelve years ago now, when he was working at Oak Ridge (the atomic energy facility) as a science writer. Jon called and wanted to know if he could do a two-hour documentary on the Body Farm, and I agreed. He came over and we began to look at things; I had just retired at that time. The students asked me when I would write a popular book. I talked to Jon and we wrote the first one: a non-fiction based on my career. But then Jon wanted to try our hand at fiction. When it comes to the series we’ve done, he comes up with the story and I do the science, making us a scientist/writer team.



D.P.L.: An unusual combination. How do you work together so well? When you're plotting and outlining your stories, how do you go about it?

J.J.: *One of the things we do early on while developing a plot is, we think about forensic techniques that we wish to highlight in that specific book. One of the books has multiple bodies that are burned, so we talk about the effects of fire on bone and skin; one book focuses on skeletal trauma, so blunt force is the particular issue that's highlighted. In the latest, "Cut to the Bone," there are saw marks in bone, which is one distinctive identifier that comes into play. The hyoid bone and its role in revealing strangulation as a cause of death, also features prominently.*

J.B.: Now, this is a little different from the others because it's a prequel, correct?

J.J.: *That's right. The first seven books have been essentially set in the present moment. So, the first novel published in 2006 was set in 2006. And that's been the case for seven years. In this novel, we go back in time two decades where our readers can see our hero, Dr. Bill Brockton, relatively young. Late thirties, he's just come to the University of Tennessee. He's just finding his path. He creates the Body Farm in "Cut to the Bone," so although it's the 8<sup>th</sup> book in the series, it reads as the first.*

J.B.: And there is a novella out now?

J.J.: *Yes. Actually it is the prequel to the prequel. "Jordan's Stormy Banks" is 50 to 60 pages and is set in 1990. Bill has only been at the university a few months. It is the first real case he finds himself working, and it's almost his last.*

J.B.: Dr. Bass, this makes me think about the amount of time that the actual Body Farm has been around. Are most bodies donated by individuals who sign on to have their bodies used this way?

B.B.: *Yes. When we first started and I was a member of the ME's staff, these bodies were unclaimed at the beginning. Up until 2003, the most bodies that came in during any one year came through that system. In 2003, many people knew about the Body Farm and that we would accept donations, so the most bodies since 2003, came from people who willed their bodies to the University of Tennessee. Last year we attained 148 bodies, so we were essentially gaining one every two days. We built up a collection of modern skeletal remains. All the bones of those individuals are kept clean, numbered, and stored for any individual who wants to come and study them. It's an excellent collection of the modern population.*

D.P.L.: How big is the facility right now? How many bodies would be in place at any given time?

B.B.: *There's probably about 70 or 80 up there right now, but it would depend on the time of the year. Most are used for dissertations, masters' theses, etc., so more would be there in the summer when the students are there, than there would be in the winter. We do have clean-up parties and try not to leave a body out there longer than a year. If you do that, then they begin to get longitudinal cracks from the sun damage to the skeletal material.*

J.J.: *It's also easy to lose small bones to scavengers that can get into the facility.*

J.B.: Do you have room for more donors, or is the facility full?

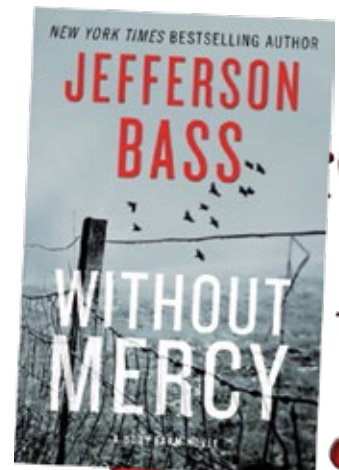
B.B.: *We are now taking only individuals who have filled out the forms and preregistered to donate their bodies. Anybody who did that, we will take. But if a family member were to die and you call us, we normally would not do that.*

D.P.L.: Dr. Bass, what do you see down the road for taphonomy and progress in forensic science?

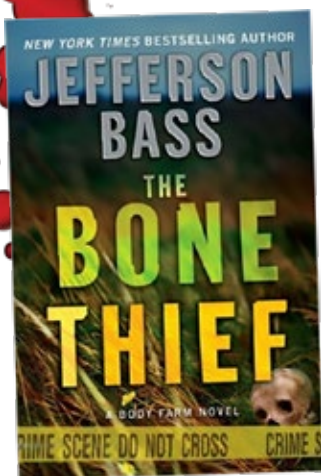
B.B.: *We are doing research now on locating missing buried bodies. The best procedure now is to use a cadaver dog. We are also looking at these things while running into problems in places like the Middle East, trying to figure out better methods of forensic science and taphonomy.*

D.P.L.: Jon, what have you found to be the most intriguing thing about working with Dr. Bass and writing these fiction stories? What really gets your motor running when it comes to these particular scientific procedures, etc.?

J.J.: *A couple of things, actually. One, is seeing how each step builds on a previous step. The "lightbulb" notion of scientific progress has some small kernel of truth, but most science is incremental. So to read about the early stages and see how much more sophisticated the Body Farm has become by building on the past, is astonishing. The work that Arpad Vass has done to be able to read the chemical byproducts of a composition, almost like a stopwatch, is fascinating. The other thing is just how heroic, in some ways, that the people who do*







this type of work are. It's as far from glamorous as you can get; this job is disturbing, messy, but so important in order to solve crimes. Work done by the Body Farm has been used around the world and they've made huge changes to forensic science. It has been a privilege for me, because it's been like a 12-year tutorial. The more informed you are, the more creative you become, so I'm a lucky guy.

D.P.L.: What I'm hearing is that your industry progression is a lot like the history of medicine. We started out anatomically, went microscopically, and now the field of medicine has gone biochemically. And that's sort of what you're doing now.

B.B.: A very good observation. You've hit the nail on the head there.

J.B.: I think one of the things I love about forensic anthropology is that there are so many things it encompasses. You're not just looking at one thing; you're in a field that covers a tremendous number of informational branches.

B.B.: You definitely need to know a little bit about a whole lot of things.

D.P.L.: So, how did the new book do and what is on the horizon?

J.J.: The new book was named one of the best of 2013 by Suspense Magazine, and has gotten great reviews. For the next, since we journeyed back two decades, we are going to come only partway back to the present. We have a great plot and we'll lay a little groundwork for the book that will come after that. Of course, very little of this exists on paper at this point.

J.B.: Sometimes it's hard to go back because you suddenly realize there was no iPhone to use and things like that.

J.J.: This is true. The main difference in our book is that Dr. Brockton doesn't have a cell. There would be a moment or two where it would have been helpful if he had one, but he's not what you would call an early adopter of technology. Also, when we are in the past, Bill's beloved wife is alive and well, so it's interesting to write that whole different personal life for Brockton. It was fun. He wasn't alone or sad or getting involved

in a disastrous relationship, which is what happened in Books 1-7. He was definitely enjoying this less-scarred period of his life.

D.P.L.: But did you have to catch yourself and check back in the scientific world to see if what you were writing was being done back then?

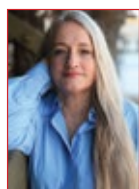
J.J.: I had some great help there. Being able to write Bill's career that went through a series of cases allowed me to refer to things he worked on in the early 90's, so I didn't get into too many of those problems, thankfully.

D.P.L.: It was a real thrill to speak with you gentlemen. I want to tell everyone to go to the Crime & Science Radio site for further study. Until next time, everybody. ■

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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 [www.dplylemd.com](http://www.dplylemd.com) and <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com>.



Jan Burke is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author. She has won the Edgar for Best Novel, and the Agatha, the Macavity, and the Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine Readers Award for Best Short Story, among other honors. Her books have been published internationally and have been optioned for film and television. Jan is the author of over thirty short stories. Her work in nonfiction includes serving as the associate editor (with Sue Grafton) for MWA's Handbook, "Writing Mysteries." Her forensic science and criminal justice columns appear in Sisters in Crime's InSinC Quarterly.

A nationally recognized advocate for the improvement of forensic science, she has led efforts that resulted in new laws to aid in identifying remains and better funding for labs. She has spoken before the National Institute of Justice, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the American Society of Crime Lab Directors, and other organizations. She is a member of the advisory board of the California Forensic Science Institute. She has coordinated forensic science programming at several mystery conventions. She co-hosted the podcast Crime and Science Radio with Doug Lyle.

Jan has taught at the UCLA Extension, Book Passage, and at numerous conferences and conventions. For more information, check out her website at [www.janburke.com](http://www.janburke.com).

# EVE CALDER

## “Cooks” Up a New Cozy Series

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*

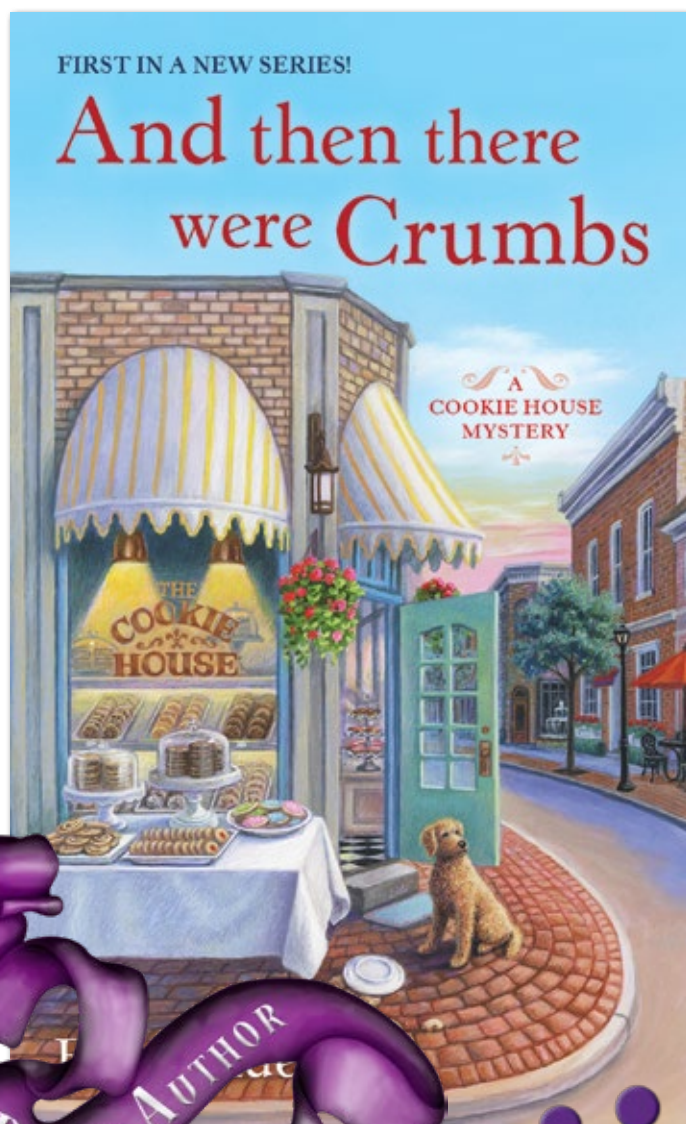
Debut author Eve Calder brings out a cozy mystery, “And Then There Were Crumbs,” starring pastry chef, Kate McGuire. A talented baker, her own ‘secret’ recipe involves solving crimes...

### WELCOME TO THE COOKIE HOUSE

Kate McGuire’s life was sweet in Manhattan...before she lost both her restaurant job and fiancé. But sometimes that’s just the way the cookie crumbles, and soon she finds herself starting from scratch in the island town of Coral Cay, Florida. It has everything she’s looking for: sunny beaches, friendly locals, and a Help Wanted sign in the bakery shop window. Once she convinces the shop’s crusty owner Sam Hepplewhite to hire her, Kate can’t tie on her apron fast enough. Little does she know that trouble, like warm dough, is on the rise.

### WHERE CRIMINALS GET THEIR JUST DESSERTS

Stewart Lord is a real estate developer with a taste for a different type of dough: the green kind. He knows that he could make a killing by purchasing the Cookie House from Sam, who flat-out refuses to sell. But when Stewart turns up the heat on Sam—then turns up dead after eating a fresh batch of Sam’s cinnamon rolls—all eyes focus on the town’s beloved bakery. When the police arrest Sam for murder, Kate must somehow prove that her curmudgeonly boss is innocent. Enlisting the help of a team of lovable locals, Kate sets out to catch the real culprit with his hand in the cookie jar...before someone else gets burned.



Check out her interview below.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG): First, congratulations on your debut! It is sure to grab millions of cozy fans. Could you tell us what it's like to be a debut author: How you began your writing career, and what made you first want to be a writer?

Eve Calder (E.C.): *Thank you! Seeing this book in print is a dream come true. And the folks at St. Martin's have been great when it comes to spreading the word about, "And Then There Were Crumbs," as well as the entire Cookie House Mystery series.*

*As for becoming a writer, I blame my parents. I come from a family of readers. So visits to bookstores and libraries were a regular part of life—usually combined with a meal out. No big surprise that when I write, the stories revolve around food!*

S. MAG.: Where did you get the idea for your first-in-series cozy mystery, "And Then There Were Crumbs"? And, could you offer a "sneak peek" at the plot and characters for our readers?

E.C.: *I wanted to do a mystery series that was light and fun, but also with a twist. Editor Alex Schulster at St. Martin's wanted a cozy series featuring a pastry chef who bakes cookies. So I sketched out the plots for a trio of stories and that was the start of the Cookie House Mysteries.*

*My main character is Kate McGuire, a twenty-something pastry chef. In one very bad day, she lost her job and her Manhattan studio apartment. Then she caught her fiancé with another woman. So Kate decides to shake up her life. She sells everything, packs up her car and drives, sight unseen, to a place she's always wanted to visit: Coral Cay, Florida.*

*This is where the book opens, and it's the kind of place I'd like to live. It's a quirky little island off the southwest coast. A working small town with a grocer and a bookstore, and a lot of interesting shops with even more interesting people running them. The village is also a popular vacation spot, so there are resorts, money and a bit of glamor.*

*The town bakery is called "The Cookie House." And it's clearly seen better days. Crusty Sam Hepplewhite runs the place. Despite the name, he doesn't sell cookies—just breads, rolls and a mouthwatering sourdough. By this time, Kate's running low on funds, so she talks her way into a job as temporary counter help.*

*That means she has a front-row seat when a greedy developer makes his latest attempt to strong-arm Sam into selling the bakery. When the developer dies shortly after eating rolls from The Cookie House, police arrest Sam and shutter the shop.*

*Luckily, Kate has made friends with the town florist, Maxi Más-Buchanan. They put their heads together and decide to keep the bakery going and try to clear Sam's name. And they get a lot of help from Maxi's crime and mystery book club, the Coral Cay Irregulars.*

*In Coral Cay, food equals hospitality. So as Kate is welcomed to town, she's offered a lot of really good meals—from Cuban food at Maxi's house to a feast of a potluck supper at the book club meeting. Not to mention what Kate herself creates when she hits the kitchen to bake.*

S. MAG.: Do you have any personal authors, cozy or otherwise, who you would list as inspirations when it comes to your own work?

E.C.: *Stephen King is a big one. I love the way he creates realistic characters; so realistic that when they encounter the supernatural, you have to believe it all and go along for the ride. Also, his book "On Writing" is one of the best ones I've ever read. His advice is simple and profound. Basically: "Sit down and write. And keep writing."*

*Also, J.K. Rowling. There's no one better at storytelling and world-building. And I love the way she shares setbacks from her writing life to encourage the rest of us.*

*"I want to give readers  
a Florida vacation—from  
the sound of the gulls  
and the smell of the salt  
air when Kate's walking  
down Main Street, to the  
feel of the sand under  
her feet when she's at  
the beach."*



S. MAG.: Readers would love to know if there are other genres you wish to or would consider delving into at some point in the future? If so, could you tell us what they would be and why they are of an interest to you?

E.C.: *I love a good thriller. And I've had an idea for one banging around in my head. At some point in the future, I might write it. That said, I'm having a great time in Coral Cay.*

S. MAG.: Is bringing your characters to the small or big screen, at some point, a goal you have in mind? If so, it is always fun to know who you'd envision playing your lead character, Manhattanite and pastry chef Kate McGuire?

E.C.: *What a great question! Kate, Maxi, Oliver and their friends are already alive in my mind, so I never thought of it. I love the idea, though.*

S. MAG.: Being that you are a Florida native, and Kate McGuire is a woman who has just relocated to Florida, is it safe to say that the Sunshine State offers you a great deal of inspiration? Are your characters loosely based on yourself and others that you know?

E.C.: *I want to give readers a Florida vacation—from the sound of the gulls and the smell of the salt air when Kate's walking down Main Street, to the feel of the sand under her feet when she's at the beach. I even have one scene where Kate gets caught in one of South Florida's famous twenty-minute downpours. So even if Coral Cay is a bit idealized, Florida is definitely a character in the book.*

*Oddly enough, the denizens of Coral Cay aren't based on people I know. Although I did give Kate my mom's eyes. And I'd love to have an Oliver puppy of my own.*

S. MAG.: Could you tell our readers about some events, perhaps, where you will be in the next few months? Will you be attending Thrillerfest?

E.C.: *I'm a big fan of Thrillerfest! Unfortunately (or fortunately, really), I'm going to be finishing Kate McGuire's next mystery, "Sugar and Vice," which is coming out this spring. So I'm under self-imposed house arrest.*

S. MAG.: What characters in fiction, or titles themselves, are among your favorites?

E.C.: *I love classic detectives, like Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Nero Wolfe, and Jane Marple. And I also enjoy the modern ones, like Aloysius Pendergast, Jack Reacher, Spenser and Agatha Raisin. And I love books with a Florida setting. Authors Randy Wayne White, Edna Buchanan, Tim Dorsey, and Carl Hiaasen are favorites.*

S. MAG.: Are you a fan of social media? Do you believe that the variety of social media groups, communities, sites, etc. help an author to create a fan base?

E.C.: *I've had fun with social media for "And Then There Were Crumbs." But I have to admit that I've kept it on a very small scale. I have a website ([CookieHouseMysteries.com](http://CookieHouseMysteries.com)), and I'm on Goodreads and Twitter (@EveCalderWrites). I'm still trying to balance talking about storylines and characters in real time without revealing too much about the book I'm currently writing!*

S. MAG.: We must know...what is up next for the *Cookie House Mysteries*?

E.C.: *"Sugar and Vice" has a pirate mystery, a murder mystery, lost gold, treasure hunters, and more than a few big secrets. With an assist from Oliver, Kate and Maxi discover a skeleton they believe to be one of the town's original pirate founders: Gentleman George Bly. But the find touches off a chain of events that will bring some major changes to Coral Cay. Oh, and cookies. Lots of really good cookies.*

We would like to thank Eve for taking the time to talk with us. Fans of cozy mysteries will love this book, so take a chance on a debut author and "sink your teeth" into this great read! ■

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# AUTHOR

# CHRIS BAUER

## SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON HORROR/THRILLER FICTION

Interview by Weldon Burge for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Chris Bauer is a Philly guy. It's ingrained in his nature and, not surprisingly, in his writing. Growing up in northeast Philadelphia—playing sports on blacktop and concrete, grappling with neighborhood kids, and enduring twelve years of Catholic education—flavors much of his work. His horror/thriller novels include “Hiding Among the Dead,” “Scars on the Face of God,” and “Jane’s Baby.”

Chris took some time from his busy schedule to share some insights about his fiction, his writing strategies, and his thoughts about publishing in general.

Weldon Burge (W.B.): Thanks for talking with us today, Chris. Tell us about your latest novel, “Hiding Among the Dead.” What’s it about?

Chris Bauer (C.B.): So, this Navy SEAL named Philo Trout retires from the military and buys a small Philly business that specializes

*in commercial crime scene cleaning. He runs smack-dab into a local crime syndicate of unlikely pedigree: the Hawaiian mob. Thought to be eradicated in Hawaii, the mob family has resurrected itself in the unlikely confines of Philadelphia, its business model now including organ trafficking, preying on desperate immigrants for their raw materials.*

*Add to this, Philo is also a retired, undefeated, illegal bare-knuckles boxing champ. Plus, one of his employees is an amnesiac. Another employee, the former owner, a woman, needs a lung transplant from all the toxic cleaning chemicals and two packs of Camel cigarettes she’s inhaled each day.*

*Great conflict, plenty of action, and a bit of gore—’cause, after all, they’re crime scene cleaners, and some crime scenes have been known to make even the toughest of cops and EMTs lose their meals.*

W.B.: Yep, crime scenes can be nasty. How much and what kinds of research were required?

C.B.: I followed a certain Australian crime scene cleaner named Sandra Pankhurst whose personal struggles have been chronicled by Sarah Krasnostein's *"The Trauma Cleaner: One Woman's Extraordinary Life in the Business of Death, Decay, and Disaster"* (St. Martin's). I also did extensive research on grain elevator explosions in stevedore environments, like in Philadelphia, where a few pivotal scenes are set in an abandoned grain elevator. I even researched Smokin' Joe Frazier's Gym, now a Philly landmark on the National Trust for Historic Preservation list. But the real question is, have I personally visited any bona fide gruesome crime scenes that needed remediation?

The answer is...drum roll please...

Nope. I pulled up pictures of many a crime scene online. I also looked online at what meth operations and hoarding can do to a private residence and checked into the cost of remedying murders and messy suicides and other destructive events. Plus, I looked into the illegal organ trafficking market to price some organs. Wanna buy a bowel?

W.B.: When writing the novel, was there ever a point where you thought, "Wow, I've gone too far"?

C.B.: Yes. At the beginning of the novel with the inciting incident, and again with the death of a hoarder while she was "indisposed" in her bathroom. The first trauma scene the Blessid Trauma Cleaning team (Philo's company) must remediate is a suicide by Amtrak—a mother and her two children, one an infant. It does push the boundaries a bit when having to deal with children as victims. Frankly, I think the scene sets a realistic tone for what real-life crime scene cleaners must frequently face—powerful images that convey the realism of how harsh these environments can be. Not gratuitous gore here. The demise of these characters is, sadly, important to the plot.

W.B.: How is the book different from your previous novels, "Scars on the Face of God" and "Jane's Baby"?

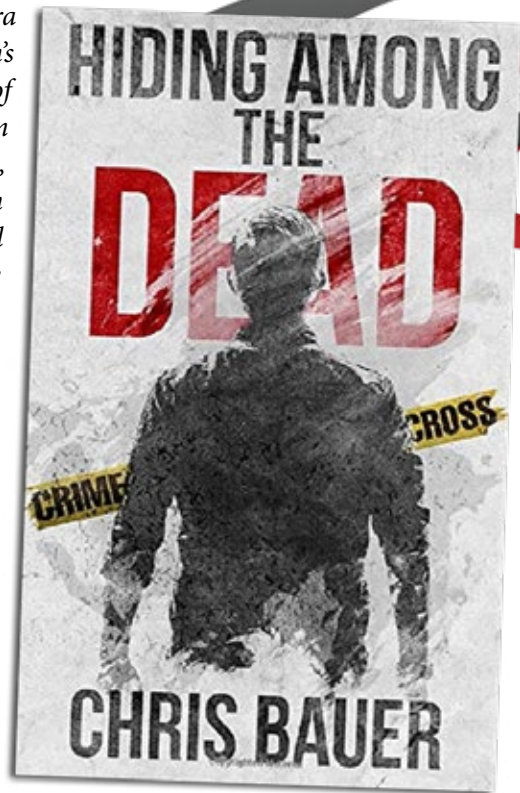
C.B.: Hugely different. "Scars on the Face of God" is pure, unadulterated horror with biblical undertones and overtones. It's set mostly in 1964 but uses a real-life 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscript known as "The Devil's Bible" (also known as "Codex Gigas" or the Giant Book) as a catalyst. "The Devil's Bible" became the spoils of several European wars since its handwritten origin in Podlázice, Bohemia, by a Benedictine monk who, according to legend, finished writing it in a single night by summoning the Devil's help. It's on display online, and the original manuscript is housed in the National Library of Sweden.

The novel deals with a copy of the codex written in German (literary license: different European language versions were written around the same time) that terrorizes a small German Catholic parish outside the city of Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century, before its rediscovery in the mid-sixties creates a panic in the same parish.

W.B.: Stephen King once said, "We make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones." Do you think that applies to your work?

C.B.: With "Scars," absolutely. The germ of the novel came from my experience with children my age born with birth defects in the Mayfair section of northeast Philadelphia. When I began writing "Scars," I'd just read "A Civil Action" by Jonathan Harr, which highlighted a real-life leukemia cluster located in Woburn, MA that was caused by tainted water allegedly coming from local toxic waste dumping by Beatrice Foods and W.R. Grace and Company. Outstanding, heart-wrenching, real-life story.

For me, a classic "what if" emerged. What if what I saw as a child in Philly was the result of a leukemia cluster coming from similar culprits and poor or nonexistent environmental practices in the 1940s and 1950s? Some significant research later, I discovered that my section of Philly had been a hotbed for the tannery industry at the turn of the twentieth century. The tanneries were notorious for burying their waste or dumping it into the local water supply like the Delaware River and various small creeks. This was how the novel started, but it took on an abrupt horrific edge when a) I saw the movie *The Devil's Advocate* (Pacino, Reaves) where Pacino's character talks about the Devil's writings, and b) I discovered the existence of "The Devil's Bible." I blended





two stories, one about leukemia clusters and corruption and heartbreak of families losing children to disease, and one coming from a legend surrounding the potential birth of the Anti-Christ foretold in my reconstructed version of “The Devil’s Bible.”

W.B.: “Jane’s Baby,” on the other hand, was *not* straight-up horror.

C.B.: It’s a political thriller that attempts to answer the question of what happened to the baby in the middle of the 1973 Roe v Wade landmark Supreme Court decision. Contrary to what most folks realize, the Jane Roe baby was born. She was put up for closed adoption, where neither party knew the other. She would now be in her late forties. The novel looks at what might happen if she became a prominent adult in the judicial system, then learned later in life that she was the Roe baby. Antagonists have learned her identity and intend to use it to their advantage. One antagonist intends to kill her.

W.B.: Sounds again like an incredible amount of research. Plus, Roe v Wade is such a controversial topic.

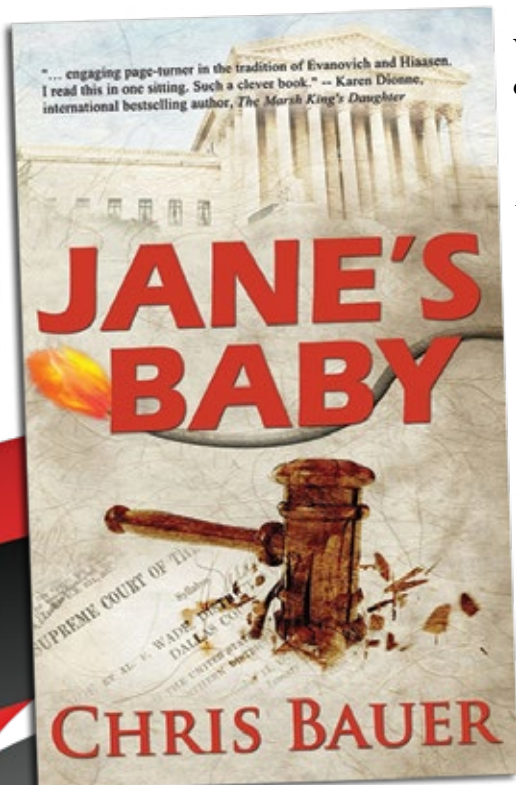
C.B.: I’m very proud of this timely, what-if novel about a woman’s right to choose in that it does not try to solve the abortion debate. But it does use it to fuel a literally and figuratively explosive time bomb that threatens to overturn the 1973 decision.

W.B.: You’ve been picked up by Severn River Publishing. What are the advantages of working with a traditional publisher?

C.B.: “Scars on the Face of God: The Devil’s Bible” was first published by Drollerie Press in 2009. Drollerie Press went under, returned all rights to me, and I re-pubbed the novel myself in 2011.

When I closed the deal with Severn River Publishing, they wanted to republish “Scars” as part of it, which made me happy. It’s a great sleeper of a horror novel, has been reviewed well on Amazon, received some nice blurbs, and it gained some notoriety as runner-up for the best in eBook horror per the 2010 EPIC Awards.

The advantages of working with independent Severn River Publishing vs. self-publishing are editing, marketing, and their interest in branding/re-branding their authors. I’ve received what I consider excellent content and copy editing from folks who are or have been Penguin Random House editors. Severn River also prides itself in understanding the Amazon marketplace inside and out, and is adept at strategically aligning novels within the Amazon genres so they can perform at their best. (Okay fine, we’re still waiting for that spike in readership that other Severn River authors have enjoyed, but I’m hopeful this will happen with a few more books under my belt—and interviews like this.)



W.B.: Do you have an agent? If so, what advice do you have for an author seeking one?

C.B.: I’m currently unagented. I intend to get back on the agent query horse in 2020 after I fulfill my contract with Severn River Publishing. I like Severn River as a publisher and might stay with them if they’ll still have me. But, regardless, I do hope to interest a new agent. I’ve had two already, and both relationships have been good experiences for me, but we weren’t able to close the big-ass deals we were both looking for so we parted ways. My most recent agent and I severed our relationship just before I signed the Severn River Publishing deal.

**“MY BYLINE READS ‘THE  
THING I WRITE WILL BE  
THE THING I WRITE.’ ”**

*My advice would be to stay vigilant and keep writing and querying. It took more than 75 queries to find my first agent. The door opened a little quicker when I queried re: "Jane's Baby," but it still took time.*

W.B.: How do you think your childhood on the streets of northeast Philadelphia impacts your writing?

C.B.: Wow. I've been calling myself a "brute force" writer, a "wysiwyg" (what you see is what you get), meat-and-potatoes kind of storyteller. My byline reads "The thing I write will be the thing I write." I'd say that my attitude probably comes from my hometown environment.

*My blue collar machinist father, smart enough to have gone to a good engineering school but who never had the chance. My homemaking mother (three kids, beauty parlor on Fridays, loved drinking her Manhattans there). And a large extended family on my mother's side. This all provided the basics for my education—at Catholic elementary and high schools, and at Penn State and for entertainment. I did love my youth spent on the Philly streets and playgrounds, playing sports and watching my beloved Eagles and Phillies through some of the toughest years (60s, 70s).*

*I played rugby for my high school, Father Judge (go Crusaders!). Being one of the smaller guys on the pitch meant I usually took more of a beating than I could dish out. I really hated some of the opposition. As the "hooker"—or the "center" equivalent on a regular American football team—sans any padding, my face and shins took a god-damn beating. It's one of the reasons the protagonists I typically choose to write about, both male and female, are all good with their fists and can handle themselves when necessary. It's to provide a little payback, and some straighten-your-ass-right-the-fuck-out action for the underdog. Yes, extremely gratifying.*

W.B.: What author(s) do you most want to emulate?

C.B.: Steve Shilstone ("Chance," a baseball book); Dean Koontz for his Odd Thomas series, as much or more so than Stephen King; Elmore Leonard for his minimalism; Jonathan Lethem ("Motherless Brooklyn"), Jennifer Hillier ("Jar of Hearts"). All wonderful voices. The thing is, I love using a hard-edged voice for my protagonists, and these writers have done such a great job in creating voices for their characters. Adding to this list, on the strength of one interview I saw in the *International Thriller Writers The Big Thrill* magazine last year, I want to add Chantelle Aimée Osman, author, and an editor at Agora Books (a Polis Books imprint), who tells it like it is every time I see her quoted somewhere.

W.B.: Do you read reviews of your books? If so, how does it (or does it not) affect your writing?

C.B.: Yes. ALL. THE. DAMN. TIME. For me, it's a sickness. One way it affects my writing is, simply, it keeps me from doing it. I'll go searching for new rankings and reviews on my novels regularly (got three novels out there, will add two more attention-hoggers/personal distractions by the end of 2020). If I see unflattering comments, even though they may be very few, I do take them to heart, because I want EVERY reader to love the story.

*Does it change my writing? It could, if it's very specific, if I missed something about the characters/plot/theme, etc. I have yet to run across one that made me genuinely stop and rethink my purpose in life, that I might have no idea what I'm doing, etc. Of course, I don't need feedback like that because I typically arrive at that conclusion all by myself at least once daily, then I talk myself back inside off the ledge.*

*Here, for example, is a review on Amazon for "Hiding Among the Dead" that, for this reader, genuinely reflected her feeling about the novel, but it made me question why she picked it up to read it to begin with. Her review title is "This book will keep you up at night." So far, so good, right? It's actually a flattering title, IMO. Then, "Unable to finish this book. Found the subject of cleaning up crime scenes and the criminal aspect of disposing of body parts to be too distasteful." Two stars. The more I thought about it, and in acknowledging that she'd invested some time in it, she was actually being nice by not making it one star. HOWEVER, potential readers, PLEASE be aware of a novel's content before you decide to post a poor review because the subject matter wasn't a match for you.*

W.B.: Do you participate in public readings, like Noir at the Bar?

C.B.: Yes. I LOVE participating in Noir at the Bar readings and other public readings. I've done a few to large (80+) audiences and one to an audience of only two (excluding other readers), the latter a bust but still fun. I've sweated my way through all of



them, literally, but I still love doing them.

W.B.: What advice would you offer to writers who haven't done one yet?

C.B.: First bit of advice is to do them if invited. You're probably reading your material out loud already (you need to do this as part of the manuscript review process if you aren't). So, these kinds of readings are as exhilarating for the author as doing a theatrical play vs. film is for an actor. Instant gratification from audience reaction.

The operational advice:

Stay within the time allotted. Seven-to-eight minutes is usually best, and exceeding ten minutes is at your own risk. I don't care what you think about your material, it is NOT the exception, people's eyes will glaze over, so stay within the allotted times. The audience will thank you, and you won't piss off the organizer.

Practice, practice, practice. Get the inflections right, the gestures right if any, the facial expressions right (if any are necessary), the voices right.

Do not speed through the reading like you don't want to be there, or like it's 2 a.m. and you just heard "last call" at the bar. Slow down, enunciate your material, and don't slur through your words, which also means staying sober.

Make the font on the page large enough for you to read easily. Make your written page breaks occur at the end of paragraphs if possible, or at least not have you needing to turn the page in mid-sentence.

I like to bring more than one copy of the reading with me (for those of you who, like me, do not read from an electronic device). Some of us now have trust issues when it comes to doing readings because CERTAIN OTHER AUTHORS OUT THERE on occasion like to mess with your printed reading material if it's left unattended. 'Cause, you know, it can be fun watching someone scramble, blank out, get sick, or panic in front of an audience, right?

And don't forget your glasses if you need them. I did that once. What a disaster.

W.B.: What's your next project? A Philo Trout sequel?

C.B.: Next crime thriller, "Binge Killer," releases later this year (2019). The protagonist is the younger sister to my well-received protagonist in "Jane's Baby," and the novel is the start of a new series about her that I expect to call the Lethal Women series. After that, a Philo Trout crime scene cleaner sequel (Blessid Trauma Thriller #2, title TBD) moves into the rotation, due out mid-2020. It's my current WIP and I'm having a ball with it. It takes place in the Hawaiian Islands. I'm working on how to get someone else to pay for some research trips there. Not having any luck.

W.B.: Last question: Quentin Tarantino or Francis Ford Coppola?

C.B.: Tough call. I've liked more of Coppola's material, because he seems to get the best out of his actors almost every time he films. But damn, Tarantino has some really interesting, crazy, violent, in-your-face takes in so many films of his that I've liked.

My choice: Tarantino. His good stuff is consistent (IMO) and it's newer. Coppola's good stuff is off-the-chart incredible, but I haven't taken to his newer offerings. Yet. Because, see, I've been busy, doing a lot of novel writing lately, with deadlines and shit, and that's taking up so much of my time, you know, and yada yada, and so forth, etc., etc.

Thanks so much for the interview, Weldon. And thanks to the team at Suspense Magazine.

W.B.: Always great to talk with you, Chris!

You can find out more about Chris on his website, <https://chrisbauerauthor.com/>; check out his Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/cgbauer](https://www.facebook.com/cgbauer); or follow him on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/cgbauer>. ■





# Wrapped in Secrets:

## Deborah Goodrich Royce Debuts "Finding Mrs. Ford"

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Lydia Maclear

Deborah Goodrich Royce has a diverse background when speaking of the entertainment industry. You might recognize her name from starring on the T.V. soap opera *All My Children*. Perhaps you remember her from her starring roles in the films *April Fool's Day* or *Just One of the Guys*. However, the path we're about to walk down with this incredible talent is focused on her latest craft—writing.

Her debut book is titled "Finding Mrs. Ford," and it has garnered great reviews in the thriller realm. Deborah introduces the world to three completely different characters. Her star, Susan Ford, is what you would call a woman living a privileged life by the sea in New England. Of course, not everything is what it seems. On a sunny summer morning by the sea, Susan is threatened when the FBI arrives at her cottage to speak to her about an Iraqi man, Sammy Fakhouri. Susan swears she does not know of this man. Trouble is, she most definitely does. In fact, the FBI state that he specifically boarded a plane in Baghdad to come to New England to reunite with her. The FBI state that this man is a Chaldean Christian from Mosul, where ISIS has just seized control...

Back in the summer of 1979, on the outskirts of a declining Detroit, Susan was a college coed when she met up with a charismatic and reckless girl by the name of Annie. They are an unlikely duo, to say the least, but each sees something in the other they'd like to possess. Studious Susan is a moth to the flame that is Annie. Yet, it is dazzling Annie who senses that Susan will be the one who makes it out of Detroit. Together, the girls navigate the minefields of a down-market disco where they work their summer jobs. It's a world filled with pretty girls and powerful men, and a young man by the name of Sammy? Why is he looking for Susan all these years later? Why is Mrs. Ford lying? A mountain of secrets are about to be revealed.

John Raab (J.R.): I'm interviewing Deborah Goodrich Royce today, and I am very excited to hear what she has to say about becoming a debut author in the thriller genre with the release of her fantastic book, "Finding Mrs. Ford." Personally, the one thing I always love in a thriller are the secrets. Can you tell us, Deborah, what brought this idea into being; and give us a taste of what the book is all about?





Deborah Goodrich Royce (D.G.R.): Well, there are definitely a lot of secrets in this book. LOL. The first, oddly enough, is the decision to purposefully refer to Susan in the title as Mrs. I have to say, it's not only old-fashioned, to me, but it is almost a term of concealment. It sounds almost as if the person does not really reveal anything about themselves by using that title.

Beginning in the summer of 2014, in a beautiful, coastal town in New England, the FBI show up out of the blue at Mrs. Ford's house to question her about a man they have taken into custody. She says she doesn't know him. The FBI, however, finds that odd considering he had gotten off a plane from Bagdad and was specifically on his way to see her.

This is when I take everyone back to 1979 and introduce them to Susan when she's in college. She meets this kind of wild and crazy girl named Annie Nelson, who convinces Susan to get a job in a very questionable disco that sits right on the outer edge of Detroit. Susan knows it's a bad idea but does it anyway. In that world, she meets a lot of people; one being this man named Sammy. That is really the initial set-up. The reader goes in wondering what happened in 1979, why the man would be coming to find Susan all these years later, and what happened back then to make Susan lie about knowing him in present day.

J.R.: I always think about this, especially when speaking about a debut: What was the passion that brought you to the computer to start writing? Characters, plot...what was it that made you need to put this on paper?

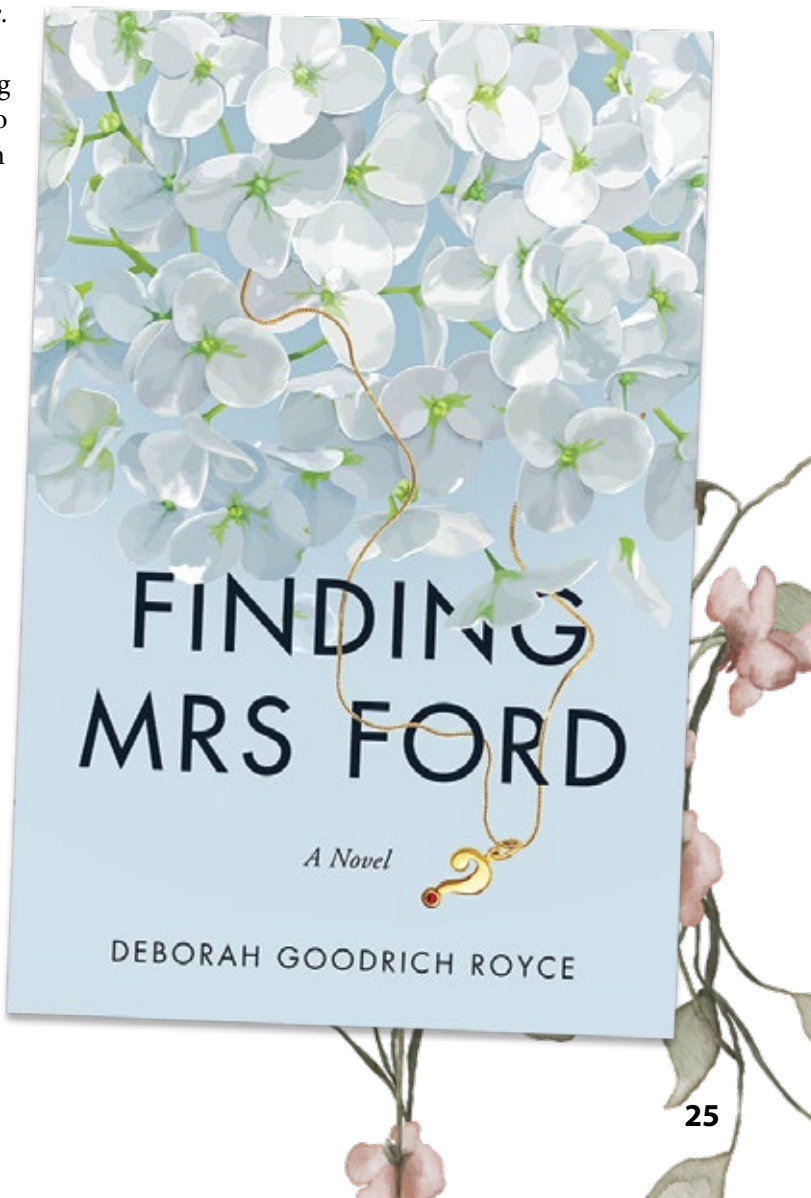
D.G.R.: I think I'd been thinking about these characters a long time. The summer of 2014, was really that moment when everything was going on in Iraq with ISIS, and I had always been intrigued by the Chaldean people. They live in Detroit, and I'm from Detroit. When ISIS was marching into Mosul, it was right in that region of Iraq where the Chaldean people are from. And it was just so interesting to me that this was all coming full circle, which was really the emphasis for me to create Sammy. Even more than that, I am intrigued by the concept of a person's identity, and these two women came about from that intrigue. Susan and Annie really brought up questions for me, such as: Who are we really in life? Are we the same person throughout the entirety of our lives, or do we change under certain circumstances? Do we or can we intentionally turn ourselves into fresh new people if we're trying to shake something off from the past? So all of those concepts of identity had been percolating in my head for a while.


J.R.: Authors will say there is a time during their writing journey where the characters take over and start talking to them. At what point were you in the tale when these women really started talking to you?

D.G.R.: That is so true. Writing is really kind of a magical process because, you're absolutely right. You have an idea. In my case, the two women and Sammy made up that idea. But there is a moment when you put them on the page when they do take over and, if you go with it, you as the writer are really given something. Susan was the primary character in my mind from the very beginning. I really wrote the book early on from Susan's point of view. But there was a point where I believed I really needed to get a handle on Annie and bring her forth. I wasn't really sure how to do it.

It was while I was on a trip to Detroit when it happened. Crain's, this business publication, put on a huge Detroit homecoming. Expats were invited back to the city to get involved with this huge revival. I went back for the homecoming and I was just walking around. I went to some old sites from my childhood including, oddly enough, the church I used to attend with my grandmother. And for some reason that was the journey to Annie that I had been trying to find. It doesn't make any sense, really, because she's in this wild and crazy world. But for some reason, I rooted that church into her childhood and she all of a sudden truly made sense to me.

J.R.: People might know your background in Hollywood. All





My Children, the movies, etc. And then you left in 1982 and did some behind the scenes things, like scriptwriting. I know that writing scripts is much different than writing a book. How was that challenge for you—transitioning from one to the other?

D.G.R.: *Excellent question. I am from the script/movie world. My book, too, is very cinematic; many people who read it actually say that to me or in their reviews. But I had to make it a little less so. Particularly, being a thriller, I had to get 100% into the head of the character and make sure that no reader could see around any of the corners Susan couldn't see around. It was a challenge to write this bird's eye view. I've gotten rid of almost all of that. At the very beginning, however, there is one scene where the FBI is tailing her through town as she's walking her dogs. You know she's seen them, but she's kind of distracted and not paying attention. So you're not completely outside of her head, but it's really the only time you're not 100% inside. So, I believe that's really what I had to become focused upon. Doing it completely as a novel and dropping the screenplay perspective.*

J.R.: And that's always a struggle, I would assume. I mean, working in film and movies, you know how you want it to look because you've been there. You've seen how the dynamic works, whereas many other authors don't have that experience. So, in that way, you have an advantage. You can kind of see the entire stage. But in order to create a book, you've got to be able to get involved and be emotional with your characters. How difficult was that? Putting yourself in situations that you would not normally find yourself in?

D.G.R.: *When you're acting, no matter who you're playing or how bad or different they are from you, you have to find a common thread. There is a certain range of human emotions. Say you're playing a character who kills someone; even though you've never done that, you have to play it. As an actor, you sit and think; you go as deeply as you can and find a time when you felt completely enraged, or jealous, or feeling that kind of brutal intensity. You conjure that up and use it.*

*I think a similar thing happens as a writer. You're creating many characters, men and women, but you have to be able to write human emotions. Sammy is a Chaldean man, I am not one and I do not want to write a simple caricature of a Chaldean man. Although I've done a lot of historical research, I am not writing a non-fiction story. I have to write a real man with a range of human emotions. I need to create that flavor of this type of person I want to portray. (Gosh, I hope I did a good job. LOL.) I just feel you need to be as true as you possibly can.*

J.R.: I was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, so I'm definitely Midwest like you. (Although, I am a Michigan fan NOT an Ohio State fan...just need to be clear on that one.) But when reading your book, I think back to 1979. I was nine years old at that time, and I think about that period, that setting, and remember what it was like. I find that the setting is a character all its own. How long did it take for you to make that time period its own "character" and bring it to life as you so perfectly do?

D.G.R.: *I, too, think it's very important. I think Watch Hill, Rhode Island in 2014, and Detroit in 1979 are definitely characters. They are so steeped and completely polar opposite ceilings. You go from this gorgeous, sunny seaside to Detroit in the summer. Whereas Rhode Island is a stunning façade, I see Detroit in the 70's as a very dark time period. I lived through the 70's there and it was a weird time: the economy was bad, we were dealing with the oil embargo, the president had resigned...and all of this came after the 60's and all that optimism. It was a period of disillusionment. And this disco world was this bright, glittering thing at night. Flashy, dazzling...yet artificial. So I tried to conjure that aspect, this world of extremes.*

J.R.: I see that. I go back to Columbus and now, of course, it's different. I loved the 80's personally, that decade of excess. So I love it when authors go back, and then offer up all those secrets. Now, why a thriller for your first book?

D.G.R.: *I am a huge Hitchcock fan! I like suspense and figuring out the pieces of the puzzle, so that was appealing to me. I had some plot points that I wanted to have happen leading up to a big surprise within the story. I had the surprise in my mind, and I wrote it. When I got an agent, I started working with Molly Glick at CAA which is, ironically enough, a huge film agency. But they do have a literary department. She asked if I would bring it further into the realm of thriller. So there was a little bit of plot restructuring at that point; I added some more key elements to bring it more into the genre.*

J.R.: So it was more of a suspense than a thriller pace at the beginning?

D.G.R.: *Yes. I would compare the structure to a roller coaster. A jolt at the beginning, like when the roller coaster lets go of its shackles and begins to chug, chug, chug up the steep incline. Then, it hits the top and drops rapidly. I love that structure, and the book always had that, but now there's just more suspense at the beginning.*



J.R.: So, you have dipped your toes in to the thriller genre. How is the marketing facet going? Getting out, traveling, doing interviews...? I would assume that's different than when it comes to the film or T.V. industry?

D.G.R.: *Actually, I like this a lot better. I feel like writing a book is much more of "me" that's there on the page. I've created each and every one of these characters, and I like talking about them. The writing journey feels more fulfilling to me in every way.*

J.R.: You're the creator, judge and executioner.

D.G.R.: *That's right. Look at all the power. I like it.*

J.R.: And it comes with great responsibility. (LOL.) Is this going to be a series, or are you thinking about a standalone for your next novel?

D.G.R.: *I have written another book and I have a first draft all set. It's not a sequel. In fact, it's gothic. So, I guess maybe that's the way my mind thinks. It's spookier than this one and I definitely would have to put it in the gothic genre parameters.*

*It's about a little girl named Ruby who is visiting waterfalls by the same name in Tennessee. She's standing in a cave with her father, and the tour guide clicks off the lights. She's practically paralyzed with fear. The strange echoes of the cave make it virtually impossible to even hear where the waterfall is. The tour guide drones on and on about various divers who have never been able to find the bottom of these falls and then...her father lets go of her hand. The lights come back on and he has completely vanished. That's the beginning; it's a primal trauma in this little girl's life. Then, twenty years later, she's an actress going by the name of Eleanor Russell, and she's just been written out of a soap opera under somewhat questionable circumstances. You, as the reader, do not really know why she's been written out. She goes to Europe, meets this Englishman and marries him spontaneously. As they are heading into the catacombs of Rome, she has an attack of claustrophobia because of what happened when she was a little girl. She has to get out in a panic and she knows she should tell her new husband what happened to her as a child, but doesn't. She begins her marriage as a liar with even more secrets. But then, her husband may not be the person he appears to be either.*

*We take it from there. This is a little more along the lines of "Rebecca." That kind of gothic story.*

J.R.: Which I saw was one of the influences you mentioned. Isn't writing, now that you've released that debut, a lot like a tattoo? You get one and just HAVE to get another?

D.G.R.: *I definitely think it is. It's a really great chapter of my life. Very fulfilling.*

J.R.: Now, you're going to Thrillerfest. Are you doing any other book signings or events we should know about?

D.G.R.: *A ton, actually. I will be in NYC for Thrillerfest and all over New England and NY State over the course of the summer. I have a bunch of events in Detroit in September, and I'm going to be at the Harbor Springs Festival of the Book, also in September. There are even more all the way through January. I'm really excited about it; it is so fun to talk about the book. I'm also doing a lot of book club events which I'm really looking forward to, because they've read the book and that opens up a whole different conversation.*

J.R.: Where is the best place for readers to find out all about you?

D.G.R.: *On my website, <https://deborahgoodrichroyce.com>, I have all kinds of news, radio interviews, written interviews, and even an event section that lists the appearances and a way to reach me if you want me to attend your book club. It's really thorough.*

J.R.: That's fantastic. Thank you so much for writing "Finding Mrs. Ford." Congratulations, and I can't wait to see what comes in the future.

We'd like to thank Deborah for joining us. To learn more, follow her on social media. ■

# Join the search for a cold-blooded killer with an ambitious goal . . . **AND DEADLY INTENT**

Former Army Night Stalker Rick Jordan usually has his camp for foster children to himself during the winter months. But someone has visited recently—leaving a trail of blood. One of the two clues left behind tips Rick off to the identity of his visitor, who soon turns up dead. The police deem it an accident, but Rick isn't convinced.

With the help of private investigator Heather Shields, he sets out to decipher the remaining clue. Except someone doesn't want them to succeed—and will stop at nothing to keep them from finding the truth.

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# SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

## TILLING THE TRUTH

By Julia Henry

Lilly Jayne has always been known in her hometown of Goosebush, Massachusetts, for her integrity and fairmindedness. So when her dear friend Harmon Dane asked her to be the executor of his estate when he died, Lilly, of course, said yes. Harmon's one caveat was to protect the birds nesting on his property, and to be sure they had a sanctuary in perpetuity. This turns out to be easier said than done.

Harmon has two greedy heirs, Brandon and Miranda, both incensed that money to protect the birds took such a huge part of their inheritance. Also unhappy with the idea of a bird sanctuary is Gladys Preston, Harmon Dane's neighbor and Goosebush's perennial grouch, who enjoys nothing more than stirring up trouble.

The Dane house, located on Swallow Point, a prime piece of Goosebush real estate, is listed for sale by Lilly's best friend, Tamara O'Connor. But the sale seems jinxed, because every time Tamara hosts an open house to entice buyers, something horrible happens.

At a town meeting an angry Gladys demands to know what's really going on at Swallow Point and how it's going to impact her property. Gladys stalks out of the meeting, but the argument continues later in a local restaurant where Tamara, in the heat of anger, appears to threaten her. Then Gladys is discovered dead and Tamara is kneeling over her body.

Under master gardener Lilly's leadership, Tamara and several other civic-minded Goosebush citizens have banded together as the Garden Squad to beautify parts of town that sorely need a facelift, like long overgrown and neglected vacant lots and other public spaces. When Tamara is suspected of murder, it's up to Lilly and the Garden Squad to clear her name.

"Tilling the Truth" is the second in Julia Henry's *Garden Squad* mystery series. A great read with a likeable protagonist and a clever plot.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE TITANIC SECRET

By Clive Cussler and Jack Du Brul

This is the latest installment of the *Isaac Bell* series from the fantastic Clive Cussler. The one big change fans will catch is that, for the first ten books the co-writer has been Justin Scott, but now an "old" face in the Cussler universe comes back with Jack Du Brul as co-writer.

The book starts off with Dirk Pitt escaping danger while finding a letter written by Isaac Bell, talking about a case he had to solve back in 1911. When nine people were tragically killed in a mine explosion, Isaac started to wonder if things weren't what they seemed to be at the time.

When he discovers that at the center of this case lies a rare element called byzantium, which has extraordinary powers, Isaac knows there is much more to the story than what he was originally told. The race is on for Isaac and company to stop the element from getting into the wrong hands. And when Bell is forced to leave the United States to track down the enemy, even he doesn't know the extent of where this case will eventually take him.

Jack Du Brul is a breath of fresh air and takes the series in a different direction. It's easy to see why Jack was missed in the Cussler world. It's an outstanding read that will leave the reader saying: "I definitely got my money's worth with this one!"

Reviewed by John Raab ■



## OUTBREAK

By Davis Bunn

Readers look on as a biological researcher from the U.S., Avery Madison, makes his way to the West African coast in order to solve a horrific mystery.

Apparently, the water has turned to blood in West Africa; but this is not a "biblical" thing, mind you. What has happened is that the waters have become full of algae that, in some places, is thick enough to walk across. Odd and mysterious deaths are happening in a number of nearby villages, which gets everyone into a panic. But before they can scream and ask for aid, the currents alter their course and the algae literally vanishes. When the deaths stop with this sudden "Mother Nature" miracle, things return to normal. And all the government can do is sigh in relief and be thankful that the press was never the wiser.

Assigned the job of traveling there and uncovering the truth behind what could have been the worst disaster ever seen, Avery must locate the danger. Paired up with an investigative reporter, Della Haverty, the duo open doors on a pair of brothers, a million-dollar company, and a previously unknown "killer" that is now stalking the globe.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## BURIED IN THE STACKS

By Allison Brook

Carrie Singleton is settling into her new life as head of programs and events at the Clover Leaf Library and loving the fact that she has reconnected with family. Her life also includes an element that's been missing for a long time—love—in the person of her handsome landlord, Dylan. Her new job has its share of challenges, however. First, Sally, the head of the library, keeps adding to Carrie's job description. Sally "suggests" that Carrie become the library's next "Sunshine Delegate," meaning she'll be responsible for sending out cards and small gifts to staff that are ill or have had a tragedy in their family. Then Sally tells her that the most disagreeable member of the staff, Dorothy Hawkins, has fallen outside the local supermarket and is in the hospital. So off Carrie goes, bearing a gift and planning to make as speedy an exit as good manners will allow, to visit the cantankerous staff member. The visit doesn't go as Carrie hoped, because Dorothy tells Carrie that her fall wasn't an accident. Her husband pushed her and is trying to kill her, and he murdered her wealthy Aunt Evelyn, a library aide, six years before. What Dorothy doesn't know is that her Aunt Evelyn is the library's resident ghost, and only Carrie and her young cousin can see her.

Then Dorothy is murdered. Evelyn begs Carrie to find her niece's murderer, which is no easy task because it turns out that Dorothy was a blackmailer. Carrie also has her hands full dealing with the homeless people who have taken up residence in the library during cold days. Good thing she can count on the ghostly Evelyn for help.

"Buried in the Stacks" is the third in the *Haunted Library* mystery series by Marilyn Levinson, writing under the pen name of Allison Brook. The books are so good that I finish reading them much too soon! Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## MOLDED 4 MURDER

By J.C. Eaton

This is #5 in the fantastically fun (with great covers) *Sophie Kimball Mystery* series.

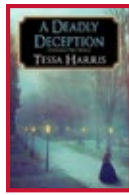
Yet again, readers get to enjoy hanging out with Sophie "Phee" Kimball, who still enjoys her job as bookkeeper for a private investigator. The only thing that's really disturbing her now is the trouble her mother, Harriet, is having at her retirement community in Arizona called Sun City West. Instead of what most retirees do there, like enjoy the sun, swim, play cards, etc., Harriet has a penchant for starting up relationships with retirees who, oddly enough, are dying before their time.

Her track record is not changing a bit. This time her romance choice is Quentin Dussler. A well-respected man, high-up in the Sun City West sculpting club, Quentin is found dead. The only clue left behind was a piece of paper clutched in his hand with Harriet's name written on it.

Absolutely convinced that assassins are out to get her, Harriet pulls Phee to her side and begs her to find out what the heck is going on. What Phee isn't ready for, however, is the fact that a very intelligent, well-planned-out game is being played at Sun City West that only a brilliant murderer could conceive.

Filled with clues that make you go "Huh?" and a list of potential subjects that range from the charming to the witty to the intense, readers root for Phee as she goes up against a killer who may not stop until Phee is taken out well before her time. Enjoy this, once again, laugh-out-loud funny mystery that will make you scream for the author to get busy on Book #6!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## A DEADLY DECEPTION

By Tessa Harris

For the many fans who have fallen in love with the *Constance Piper* series, you will be happy to know that this third installment is just as great as the first two.

Yes, this is all about the psychic flower seller who is called upon to solve murders. This time Constance, just like the rest of Whitechapel, is getting over the horror that Jack the Ripper brought into their daily lives.

It is July 1889. Mary Jane Kelly (a murder so horrific it is still talked about in our day) was brutally murdered by The Ripper eight months ago. His swan song, so to speak, seeing as that the never-caught serial killer just stopped out of the blue after Mary Jane experienced the most evil side of him. Whitechapel is much calmer now; however, when a much older woman by the name of Alice McKenzie is found dead, throat slashed, residents of the area once again go back to locking their windows and hoping the horror is not him, striking again.

Constance called herself a friend to Mary Jane and Alice, and with the help of both her deceased mentor, and police detective Thaddeus Hawkins, she begins to use her gifts to uncover links between the murder and a gang whose members focus on creating an independent Ireland.

From a bomb plot to Whitechapel's murky streets, all the way up to a place of supreme power in England, Constance delves into all types of locales and does everything she can to bring the killer to light as fast as possible.

I love this time period. I love anything to do with The Ripper. And Tessa Harris, yet again, offers up another unforgettable gem.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## WONTON TERROR

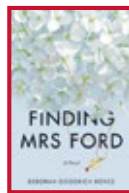
By Vivien Chien

Restaurant manager Lana Lee has little to worry about aside from planning a romantic getaway with her boyfriend, police detective Adam Trudeau. That simplicity is soon complicated by a devastating explosion at the Asian Night Market in Ohio that leaves a family friend dead and nearly kills Lana in the process. At first the tragedy that destroyed the Wonton on Wheels food truck is believed an accident, but police soon announce the deadly blast was intentional. The tight-knit Asia Village shopping plaza is stunned by the horrific news. Who would want Ronnie Chow dead?

Still recuperating from her proximity to the blast's concussive force, but egged on by her roommate Megan, Lana begins her own investigation into the deadly act. A number of suspects emerge from the get-go, including the dead man's own son, Calvin; his wife, Sandra; and the mysterious Uncle Gene. While Lana's own family is still reeling from Ronnie's murder, they're paid an untimely visit by Lana's Aunt Grace. A travel writer who contrasts sharply with her more conservative sister, Grace immediately puts a strain on the family dynamic, much to Lana's chagrin. Recurring characters, such as Ho-Lee Noodle House chef, Peter Huang, his mother, and the lovable curmudgeons, the Mahjong Matrons, all play a role in unraveling this latest affair. And, of course, Kikkoman, Lana's black pug, returns for emotional support as Lana navigates family squabbles, death threats, and the specter of domestic violence.

Funny, warm, and terrifying at times, "Wonton Terror" adds yet another delicious dish to Vivien Chien's growing menu of enticing, cozy mysteries.

Reviewed by Patrick Whitehurst ■



## FINDING MRS. FORD

By Deborah Goodrich Royce

It is 2014, and we are in New England by the seashore.... It is here that Susan Ford is enjoying a bright, sunny day; however, she has no idea that a man from her past is, at the same moment, boarding a plane in Baghdad in order to throw a wrench into her privileged life.

Of course, Mrs. Ford's life was not always one of privilege. Although the mask she portrays while living in her lovely cottage in Watch Hill, RI is superbly set in place, she has secrets in her past.

Knocking on her pristine door are FBI agents. They are visiting her to ask questions about an Iraqi man from Mosul; a place where ISIS has just seized control. His name is Sammy Fakhouri. They have already taken him into custody, but what they want to know is why this Sammy person was en route to Mrs. Ford's house when they caught up with him.

Readers are thrust back into the summer of 1979, in the sickly outskirts of Detroit. This is when Susan, a college coed, meets up with an unlikely friend. Her name is Annie and she is the complete opposite of calm, quiet Susan. But as they work in the disco together that summer, things occur (including Sammy coming into Susan's life) that will have the reader up all night, completely glued to the pages.

The descriptions are vivid, the characters are memorable, and delving into the completely opposite worlds of Detroit in the 70's and posh Rhode Island in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is beyond interesting. This debut author should know that no matter how much the acting profession may "call out to her," it is this reviewer's opinion that she stick to the book trail for a long time to come.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## LOVE AND DEATH AMONG THE CHEETAHS

By Rhys Bowen

Believe it or not, this is the thirteenth *Royal Spyness* novel, and the author's characters and plots have not run out of steam whatsoever. This time out, Georgie and Darcy are enjoying their honeymoon in Kenya's Happy Valley but, as always with this duo, a murder interrupts their entertainment.

It is Darcy who announces that they are flying off to Kenya for an extended honeymoon, which makes Georgie extremely excited. Trouble is, she finds out soon after they arrive that this was not just time for them; Darcy was actually sent here on an assignment. Apparently, there have been some wild robberies in both London and Paris, and supposedly the thief (a member of the aristocracy, no less) fled to Kenya.

Georgie isn't angry; she's still excited because, after all, they are in the stunning landscape of Kenya staying in a beautiful house in Happy Valley, so what could possibly go wrong?

Georgie finds herself a bit taken aback by Happy Valley, however. It is the "center" of English nobility; it's filled with people who tend to walk around with their noses in the air while complaining about absolutely everything they can complain about. The lifestyle is beyond decadent and even a Lord tries to hit on Georgie and she quickly tells him where to go. The Lord, however, is then found dead along an abandoned stretch of road. What first seems to be the product of a lion attack soon turns into something more as Georgie and Darcy begin to investigate further. There are many motives to be found and a great many secrets and lies are unveiled in the Happy Valley community.

Rhys Bowen just keeps on going. This 13<sup>th</sup> tale is just as sharp, keen, and interesting as the twelve that have come before.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## BARK OF NIGHT

By David Rosenfelt

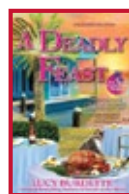
"Bark of Night," the newest title in the *Andy Carpenter* mystery series, starts off with what appears to be an idyllic deep-sea diving trip off the coast of Florida. That image is shattered on page 2 when one of the "friends" cuts the air hose on the first diver, and he suffocates to death. And that's the first two pages!

In Chapter 2, Paterson, New Jersey defense lawyer Andy Carpenter has found a suspicious lump on his beloved Golden Retriever, Tara, and is paying an emergency visit to Tara's veterinarian, Dr. Dowling, to have it checked out. When the vet calls Andy in for a private consultation, Andy fears he's about to receive the worst kind of news. Instead, Dr. Dowling introduces Andy to a healthy French bulldog who was dropped off a few days earlier by a man who claimed to be the dog's owner, with instructions to euthanize him. The man said the dog's name was Buster. The vet is immediately suspicious as to why anyone would want a perfectly healthy dog euthanized instead of finding him a new home. After the purported owner leaves, he examines the dog very carefully, and discovers a microchip on the bulldog identifying him as Truman, not Buster, with a different owner's name. When Dowling attempts to clarify the confusion with the man who dropped off the dog, that man has disappeared. The vet asks for Andy's help, and Andy agrees to get to the bottom of Truman's ownership.

That's only the beginning of the story. The next surprise is that Truman's real owner has been murdered, and a young man has been arrested for the murder. Andy visits the young man in jail, takes him on as a client, and ends up following a trail of murders across the country that eventually involves the FBI.

"Bark of Night" is a terrific read for any mystery lover who enjoys twists, turns, and surprises on every page!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## ELEVATOR PITCH

By Linwood Barclay

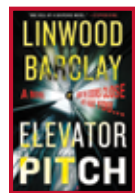
Linwood Barclay returns with this fantastic suspense, taking what should be a normal elevator ride and turning it into one of absolute terror. Not once, mind you, but multiple times.

Someone is quite literally crashing elevators in New York City skyscrapers, causing the mayor and all other law enforcement agencies to work fast in order to figure out who's behind it and how they can stop it immediately.

In classic Barclay fashion, the reader is taken on a roller-coaster ride of thrills and chills. It's not even a stretch to say that, with this, he's done to elevators what Benchley and "JAWS" did to the ocean. Barclay is a master of character and setting. He puts the reader inside the box and traps them until the very end.

"Elevator Pitch" is a book that you don't want to miss. And Linwood Barclay is an author that every thriller reader should have on their bookshelf. Fans will devour this creation in one sitting, because it is just "that" good. The only reason to put it down will be to catch your breath for a minute or two, so you can jump right back in!

Reviewed by John Raab ■



## A DEADLY FEAST

By Lucy Burdette

It's Haley Snow's wedding day in beautiful Key West, Florida. But the blushing bride has a big problem—she can't find her groom, hunky police detective Nathan Bransford. Truth be told, Nathan was also a no-show at her family's Thanksgiving feast the day before. And her good friend Lorenzo, a fortune-teller who gives tarot card readings on Duval Street, has seen that something ominous is in store for Nathan. Hayley isn't the only one who can't find Nathan. His colleagues on the force have been trying to locate him, too, although they know he's currently working on a case that's very hush-hush.

The missing groom is only one part of what's been the week from hell for Hayley. It begins when Hayley, a writer for the Key West lifestyle magazine *Key Zest*, joins a walking tour of local seafood restaurants for a story she's writing. The tour comes to a screeching halt when Audrey, one of the other guests, collapses and is rushed to the hospital, where she dies of an apparent stroke. Tour guide, Analise Smith, is terrified that she'll be held responsible for the death and begs Hayley to talk to the victim's husband. Perhaps the woman had a pre-existing health condition that could have contributed to her sudden death. The husband can hardly contain his grief and denies that Audrey was ill. A conversation with the victim's sister paints a much different picture. She blames the husband for Audrey's death, claiming that she was mentally ill and on meds to control her condition. Pastry chef Martha Hubbard, whose key lime pie may have been the reason behind Audrey's death, also begs for Hayley's help. The situation gets even worse when the dead body of the husband is found in a local dumpster. And is this the mysterious case Nathan is working on that he won't share with Hayley?

"A Deadly Feast" is a delectable addition to a satisfying, well-plotted mystery series. Highly recommended. Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## GRAVE EXPECTATIONS

By Heather Redmond

This is the second “gift” in *A Dickens of a Crime* series, and is one of the most satisfying mysteries you will read this year. The author uses her wit and skill to reimagine the life of Charles Dickens.

It is 1835, London. Charles is a young journalist, and he and his fiancée Kate are making sure to check on his neighbor, a woman by the name of Miss Haverstock who lives in the flat right above his own. But as the couple begin to climb the stairs, they notice an odd smell coming from the place. When they open the door, they are surprised and sickened by the sight that meets their eyes: Miss Haverstock is dressed in a faded wedding gown and propped up in a chair, looking like she’s been decomposing for some time.

The news is out that a convict, Ned Blood, has escaped from Coldbath Fields, and Charles is sure that this is the man who took his neighbor’s life. Kate, however, does not agree. Just by the way the woman was dressed and left, she feels that there are different motives happening here and that the killer knew Miss Haverstock personally.

When a local blacksmith is arrested, it is the man’s wife who comes to Charles and Kate and begs them for help. She knows her husband is innocent. When they attend the inquest, they are surprised to meet a foster daughter of Miss Haverstock’s who is beyond cold and heartless when she speaks. It soon becomes abundantly clear that the real criminal will be found in the very strange and twisted past of the spinster.

These are great tales that offer up a completely fresh side to Charles Dickens that readers are (and should be) falling in love with!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## OLD BONES

By Preston & Child

Preston & Child is one of those “names” on a book that make you want to set *everything* else aside in order to read what amazing words they’ve written. With this, the reader gets even more, because we’re talking about the first in a brand new series (the *Nora Kelley* series), that expertly weaves the legend and history of the Donner Party with a superb present-day tale of suspense. (The only thing missing is a cameo with the number one Agent Pendergast.)

Nora Kelly is still a young curator, but she has built a career on important excavations that she has already completed. Guy Porter is a historian who approaches Nora to ask for her help on an expedition he’s putting together, the likes of which have never been seen or done before.

Nora becomes enthralled with the story Guy tells her. He regales her with information about the Donner Party who are known by the world as a group of American pioneers who migrated to California in a wagon train. It has been said that they spent the winter of 1846-47 snowbound in the Sierra Nevada. Guy talks about how the first emaciated survivors of the Party stumbled out of the California Mountains in 1847, talking about things like murder, barbarism, and cannibalism.

Nora agrees to be a part of this expedition and they take off into the Sierra Nevada in search of the legendary “starvation camp.” But a camp is the least of their discoveries. A world is opened about those long-dead pioneers that is more surprising than anyone ever imagined. Not to mention, the expedition puts both Nora and Guy into the path of a very real and present danger.

From the best writing team out there, you do not want to miss this book. As always, the only bad part is that there will be time to wait between this awesome thriller and Book Two.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE NANNY

By Gilly Macmillan

Even though the title may make you think in one direction, be assured that this book is not your “run of the mill, nanny-is-nutso” plot.

This tale is about Jocelyn (“Jo”) Holt. When Jocelyn was only seven, the nanny she loved with all her heart, Hannah, disappeared without a word in the summer of 1988. Jo’s life went downhill with that event. She spent years haunted by the loss of Hannah and desperately wanted to know where she went and why she possibly would’ve left without saying a word. Jo’s parents were among the rich, wealthy bunch that talk to their kids about as much as they talk to their dogs. So it was not a surprise that when Jo was old enough, she left them, the money, and the big house (Holt Hall) behind to venture out on her own.

Now, at the age of thirty, Jo returns to that place in order to confront her relationship with her estranged mother. What Jo doesn’t expect is for a human skull to be found in Holt Hall’s adjoining lake. Perhaps this is Hannah’s skull and Jo should be far more worried about her mother than she ever has been before. But when Hannah actually appears on their doorstep, very much alive, the book takes a swift turn and the secrets and lies that are exposed leave the reader breathless.

“The Nanny” is a tale of pure evil and wickedness; one that will have you staying up all night in order to get to the stunning, unforgettable conclusion.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## HERE COMES SANTA PAWS

By Laurien Berenson

Christmas is coming for Melanie Travis and her family: husband Sam, a professional dog handler, and two sons, fourteen-year-old Davey and four-year-old Kevin. Melanie also has a canine family of five gorgeous Standard Poodles, and Bud, a rescue dog who enjoys getting into trouble every chance he gets. Plus, Melanie has to deal with her crusty, irascible but still loveable Aunt Peg, who’s been raising and showing Standard Poodles for years. Melanie is also a special needs tutor at a local private school. And then, there are all the dead bodies that she just can’t help finding. With all this on her plate, the holidays are usually overwhelming for her. But this year, Melanie’s determined to be organized and not let the stress of everything get to her. Just this once.

Meanwhile, her event planner friend Claire, who’s married to Melanie’s ex-husband (yes, it’s confusing) is busy planning holiday parties and doing holiday gift shopping for her many wealthy Connecticut Gold Coast clients. Claire’s personal shopping service is going very well until she arrives at a client’s house on an ultra-private New Canaan estate to deliver some purchases and finds her client murdered. Hysterical, she calls 911, then Melanie, and just like that, Melanie’s resolve to have a calm holiday goes right out the window. Claire insists that Melanie be present the first time she’s interviewed by the local police, to lend moral support. The interview does not go well. As suspicions about Claire continue to ratchet up, she doesn’t help her cause any when she sneaks back into the client’s house to get a cherished piece of jewelry she lost the morning of the murder. Then, she disappears.

“Here Comes Santa Paws” is another satisfying title in Laurien Berenson’s *Canine Mystery* series. Boomer, Lilly and I give it our highest rating—ten dog biscuits!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Milestones Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## LET'S FAKE A DEAL

By Sherry Harris

Garage sale entrepreneur Sarah Winston has built a spotless reputation for the professional way she runs her business. As a former military spouse, she's a real pro when it comes to organizing and packing. She also has an eye for spotting priceless finds in a client's dusty basement and knows how to display and price items correctly to maximize profits.

Sarah's confident that her latest project will run as smoothly as all her others. She's been hired by a young couple who need to downsize. The morning of the sale, Sarah is shocked when the police arrive to shut it down. All the items in the sale were stolen, the young couple have disappeared without a trace, and Sarah is accused of being involved.

Sarah still has a few close friends from her military spouse days and is happy to learn that her good friend Michelle is in line for a big promotion. But life isn't going well for Michelle, either. She's been hit with an anonymous discrimination complaint which could not only stop her promotion but destroy her entire military career. Sarah, powerless for the moment to help her own case, reaches out to Michelle when one of the men she suspects is behind the accusation is found dead in Michelle's own car.

Sarah is sure Michelle is innocent. The two women were together at a local bar the night before the murder, and Sarah and all the other patrons witnessed an ugly exchange between the murder victim and Michelle. Unfortunately, Michelle has no alibi for the murder, because she had too much to drink and, when Sarah arranged to get her home, she passed out cold. The more questions Sarah asks as she tries to prove her friend's innocence, the more she realizes that her own problem and Michelle's are connected.

I just love Sherry Harris's *Garage Sale* series. It's provocative, well-written, and always entertaining. Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## DARK STORM

By Karen Harper

The many fans of the brilliant *South Shore* series by Harper will experience a whole lot of excitement with this incredible tale.

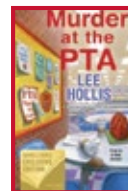
Forensic psychologist Claire Markwood, is back. And for those who have been following her story, you'll know all of the disaster and pain she's experienced over time. But even with all of those harrowing events, not one can hold a candle to the phone call she receives. Although the call comes in from her sister Darcy's phone, the person on the other end of the line is Darcy's boss, Ms. Gerald, from the butterfly sanctuary. The woman is more than confused. Apparently, she'd gone up to the post office and, upon her return, found Darcy's phone on the floor, she and her car gone, and a door left wide open on one of the butterfly houses that stored a priceless, rare species of butterfly that have now vanished into thin air.

Knowing that her sister would never leave a door open like that and simply walk away from the job she loves, Claire rushes to the sanctuary in order to find clues that will allow her to get back her sister ASAP.

Claire is literally frantic; she and her sister have always had a very close relationship, and she will not stop until she finds the truth. With leads popping up and a series of complete dead ends in their path, Claire and her criminal lawyer husband, Nick, dig as deep as possible into the case. Trouble is, the deeper they dig for the truth, the more they uncover secrets from her family's past that Claire had no idea existed.

Karen Harper hits another one out of the park! We shall wait in excitement to see what her next gift will be.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## MRS. JEFFRIES AND THE ALMS OF THE ANGEL

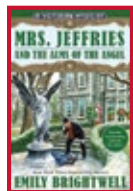
By Emily Brightwell

Emily Brightwell is back with another *Mrs. Jeffries* book, this one called, "Mrs. Jeffries and the Alms of the Angel." Emily is a wonderful author, a throwback to the times when the "whodunit" was so enticing that it was all about running to the back page to see who did it before going back to start the book.

She excels at building up a mystery with several characters that all want the victim dead. In this case, the victim is Margaret Starling, a board member of the London Angel Alms Society. Mrs. Jeffries goes to work once Margaret is found dead outside her home. She finds out that this mystery is much more than it seems on the surface. Mrs. Jeffries must peel back many layers and explore some pretty devious people in order to bring the killer to light.

Emily pens an excellent story and gives the reader that warm, fuzzy feeling when they start to read the first page. You are transported back to a time when technology wasn't available and detectives had to hit the street and use their sixth sense to solve the mystery. Fans of those classic tales will devour this book in one sitting. This is definitely a tale you will need to start in the early afternoon and continue through the night while drinking a perfect hot cup of tea.

Reviewed by John Raab ■



## MURDER AT THE PTA

By Lee Hollis

"Murder at the PTA" is the first in the new mystery series by Lee Hollis. Maya and Sandra are former Portland High School classmates. In adulthood, Maya married Max Kendrick, a Portland police officer, had one daughter, Vanessa, and joined the force herself. Sandra married a rising politician, Stephen Wallage, and had two sons, Jack and Ryan. Stephen is elected to the U.S. Senate, while Sandra plays the role of dutiful political wife at home.

When Maya's husband is arrested and thrown in prison for police corruption, Maya resigns from the force and starts her own private detective agency. Sandra's life is shattered when an online blog, Dirty Laundry, accuses Stephen of paying hush money to a prostitute. The timing of this couldn't be worse for Sandra—she's just been elected president of the high school PTA and is confronted at the first meeting she is chairing. Stephen, of course, denies all wrongdoing. Sandra believes him and defends him against all the ugly accusations.

The lives of the two women come together unexpectedly. Maya's daughter and Sandra's son are high school classmates and each audition for the school play. When they're both selected and begin spending time together at rehearsals, there's instant attraction and ... fill in the blanks. Maya discovers the two kids in a passionate embrace in her living room, and immediately calls Ryan's mother. Of course, the timing for having to deal with still another crisis couldn't be worse. But there is a silver lining to all this: Maya's detective agency specializes in exposing straying spouses.

Sandra and Maya join forces and figure out who's behind the Dirty Laundry blog. When they storm into the woman's office to confront her, they find her lifeless body.

I really enjoyed "Murder at the PTA." It was a treat to watch Sandra emerge from her political wife role and become her own person, thanks to Maya. Well written, and lots of fun!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## DEAD SILENCE: A FOUNDLINGS NOVEL

By Wendy Corsi Staub



Fans will be thrilled; they have waited for this, Book 2 of *The Foundlings* trilogy, with bated breath. And the author has made sure that readers will love

this as much as the first.

In this book, the epitome of a psychological suspense, the twisted mind of *The Angler* is brought into focus. This is a nightmare of a person who spends his time luring human prey the same way he catches fish. Sometimes, he gets one worth keeping. But most times...they are "thrown away" because they no longer hold any interest.

Investigative genealogist, Amelia Crenshaw Haines has her own dark, troubled past. She has strived to uncover her own "roots" in the world. What she focuses on now is utilizing DNA evidence to help her fellow foundlings uncover *their* roots. However, things get more than a bit creepy when a stranger comes across her path who is holding on to a very familiar childhood item.

Detective Stockton Barnes works in the NYPD Missing Persons section. He has spent his entire career searching for the lost family members of people who come to him with broken hearts and make out missing persons' reports. What Stockton stumbles across, however, puts him on a personal quest to locate one woman from his own past that he still, to this day, regrets leaving. The only trouble is, a brutal killer is looking for her as well.

Readers will be on the edge of their seats as they watch Amelia and Barnes uncover frightening things from the past while they attempt to outrace a psychopath who is coming closer each and every day.

Wendy Corsi Staub has penned more than ninety novels, and it always leaves me amazed that with each new book, she finds yet another way to scare readers to their very core.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of *"The Double-Edged Sword"* published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## MURDER AT MORRINGTON HALL

By Clara McKenna

It's spring 1905, and American heiress Stella Kendrick is excited to take her very first trip to England. She and her ambitious, self-made father have been invited to attend a mysterious wedding at Morington Hall and are delivering two of the family's racehorses as a wedding gift. Once Stella and her cold, unloving father arrive at the estate with the horses, she learns to her horror that she's also part of the wedding—as the bride. The family of the Earl of Atherly have fallen on hard financial times; Papa Kendrick wants to add a British title to his family tree, and a bargain was struck, with the unsuspecting Stella as the prize. Several wedding guests have arrived for the wedding, including the pompous Caroline Westwood. Not only that, the impending nuptials are set for the upcoming weekend and the clergyman who is to perform the ceremony is already in residence at the estate.

Stella begs her father to put a stop to the upcoming nuptials, despite the fact that she can't help but be attracted to Lord Lyndhurst, her intended groom, known in the family as Lyndy. Of course, her father refuses, so she decides to make the best of an impossible situation while she figures out a way to save herself. She tries to make a good impression, but it's immediately clear that, as an American, nothing she does is up to the rigid British social standards.

The nuptial plans come to a screeching halt, however, when Stella and Lyndy discover the body of the clergyman, and it's obvious that he's been murdered. Stella and Lyndy, drawn together by their joint discovery of the body, decide to solve the murder themselves, with surprising results.

"Murder at Morington Hall" is the first in the historical *Stella and Lyndy* cozy series by Clara McKenna. The book is an intriguing peek into British society with likeable, believable characters and a fast-moving plot. Great fun.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of *"Milestones Can Be Murder,"* published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## LETHAL TRUST

By Lala Corriere

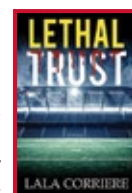
When Daddy dies and leaves his fortune to the "last man standing," so to speak, it's a battle. When that father just happens to be Paul Childs, owner of an NFL team called the Tucson Scorpions—and there are seven siblings—the battle becomes pure and utter pandemonium.

Who will take over the team rights? Will it be his two sons, his new wife's children, or the ones they share together? You thought the Trump dynasty was a mess; wait until you get a load of these guys.

As they all face down one another, through lawyers, the stress takes a toll. Soon, car wrecks and explosions claim lives. Coincidence? Or are they rubbing each other out for the privilege of taking over the fiefdom? Tucson-based private detective Cassidy Clark is hired by one of the daughters to figure out how to stay alive.

With a complex mishmash, Corriere weaves a tale strange enough to give you a case of 'the black dog,' as Churchill described his depressions. Only one can win. Will it be through concession...or will it all go to the lone survivor?

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler ■



## SMOKESCREEN

By Iris Johansen

Twenty-six! I cannot believe that the beloved Eve Duncan has been around for twenty-six novels. The best praise I can give is the fact that the books are so well-done that I still remember when Eve, the forensic sculptor, was first introduced in "The Face of Deception" as a heartbroken lady who was throwing herself into her work after her precious daughter disappeared.

This time around, Eve Duncan is going to the location of Africa with the purpose of helping families heal. These families have been torn apart by a violent attack that happened deep in the African jungle.

Jill Cassidy is the journalist who told Eve of this event. Landing on her doorstep, she tells Eve about the small African village that has lost half of their citizens (a great deal of them being children) at the hands of guerrilla soldiers. It is a fact that the bodies were burned beyond all recognition, but the families need Eve's expertise to gain closure and be able to move on.

Without a thought, as always, Eve throws herself into the fray. But when she sets foot in the remote location, suspicions arise that Jill's "story" may have been a cover for a far more sinister game that's being played.

An unstable country that has evil combing through its forests. A village that is isolated, leaving Eve alone with no idea who to really trust. And a threat that seems to be creeping ever closer to her; one that will make it impossible for Eve Duncan to ever see her home or family again. Yes, even though we are at 26 books (WOW!), it is not difficult to see why we want, need and hope Eve Duncan will continue for at least 26 more. This is dangerous, riveting and extremely awesome—adjectives that also describe Iris Johansen to a 'T'.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of *"The Double-Edged Sword"* published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE VANISHED BRIDE

By Bella Ellis

Every time I even see the last name of these incredible sisters, I get excited. In this brand new *Brontë Sisters Mystery* series, readers get to meet legendary writers, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, and Anne Brontë, but not when they were putting pen to paper. In fact, the tale is set before that period of time when the sisters were actually in the...detective business.

It is 1845, Yorkshire, and a lovely, young wife and mother has literally vanished from her home. The only thing she's left behind are the two children she loves and a pool of blood that causes the hair to rise on the back of your neck.

Sitting just a few miles away from the scene is the home of a humble parson. Inside, dwells three sisters who hear of the crime and are extremely intrigued and adamant about finding out what happened.

Because of their future path as writers, the sisters are more than creative. What they (and readers) realize is that, because of their imaginations and strong will, they are the perfect choices to become a group of "lady detectors."

Leaping into this, their first career, the sisters' deal with the fact that they are in a world, not to mention a society that frowns upon women doing anything besides staying in the home and taking care of their husband and children. In a way, this sheltered and biased mentality sparks the sisters' need to solve the crime even more, and they will stop at nothing to find out the truth so that this poor bride can be returned home to the people who love her; or, a killer can be brought to justice.

A great start to what I already know will be an incredible series, it is so much fun to see these beloved ladies come to life on the page once again.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## CLAUSE & EFFECT

By Kaitlyn Dunnett

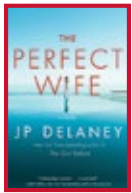
Freelance book editor Mikki Lincoln is content with the quiet life she's leading in her hometown of Lenape Hollow, NY. A "seasoned" citizen of sixty-plus years, the now widowed Mikki has returned after a long absence and her editing business is going well. But when she's drafted by the town fathers to rewrite a script celebrating the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenape Hollow, she can't refuse. The script was originally drafted to celebrate the town's bicentennial and has been sitting untouched at the local historical society for the past quarter century.

The historical society is being renovated for the first time since the bicentennial, making for a noisy work environment. The more she reads the original document, the more she's appalled at the amateurish way the script was written. She decides it would be helpful to get more background on the bicentennial, and combs through old newspaper accounts of the celebration. She discovers that the original script was written by a young woman named Grace Yarrow, who had no writing experience whatsoever. As Mikki muses over how Grace was selected for the job, she's interrupted by a tremendous crash from the room where the historical display is being set up. She and a colleague rush to see what happened and discover that a workman has found a dead body hidden in a bricked-up fireplace.

The body has been encased in the fireplace for twenty-five years, and when Mikki learns that Grace Yarrow disappeared before the bicentennial pageant, and the police determine that the dead person is Grace, Mikki starts to ask a few questions. Mikki discovers that Grace had many lovers and enjoyed sharing intimate details about her previous lovers with her current ones. A motive for murder, for sure. But with all those lovers to pick from, whodunnit?

"Clause & Effect" is a well-plotted mystery that cozy fans will love. I did!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE PERFECT WIFE

By JP Delaney

Abbie Cullen wakes up in a hospital bed disoriented and unsure of how she got there. Her husband, Tim Scott, stands beside her crying, and she begins to piece together that she must have been in some kind of accident. However, what she doesn't expect to learn is that this accident was actually her death, and it happened five years ago. Even worse, she's not really Abbie, but a robot version that Tim, the CEO of a major robotics company, has created.

Tim is in near complete control of her memories; to her, her death is a mystery. Tim tells her that she was the perfect wife and the perfect mother to their autistic son. So it comes as a surprise when she begins to find hidden pieces of the past that suggest a less than perfect life.

When she uncovers evidence that the real Abbie might still be alive, cobot (companion robot) Abbie must decide whether to embrace her human side and help her, or her robot side. The side that says she's a better partner for Tim than the real Abbie ever could have been.

JP Delaney weaves a twisted tale about the frightening future of artificial intelligence, alongside a family drama that begs the question: Is there really such a thing as the perfect marriage?

This captivating story will keep you on the edge of your seat and leave you guessing until the very last page.

Reviewed by Abbey Peralta ■

## HANDMADE HO-HO HOMICIDE

By Lois Winston

Jersey girl and reluctant sleuth Anastasia Pollack can't seem to catch a break, even at Christmastime. Deeply in debt thanks to her deceased louse of a spouse, Anastasia is now permanently saddled with her Communist mother-in-law, Lucille, Lucille's "Devil Dog," Mephisto, and Lucille's best buddy, Harriet, a.k.a. the permanent uninvited dinner guest. Her family also includes Ira, her husband's half brother, and his three annoying children. The one bright spot in Anastasia's life is Zack Barnes, her tenant and so much more, who may or may not be a spy. Anastasia could probably cope with all this stress, but there's one more thing—the dead bodies, who seem to drop into her life at a dizzying pace.

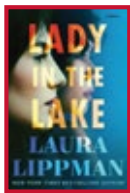
In "Handmade Ho-Ho Homicide," the eighth in this series penned by Lois Winston, Anastasia returns from her job as crafts editor for *American Woman* magazine and discovers that every tacky display of cartoon characters ever created are displayed on her front lawn. Knowing that the well meaning but clueless Ira is responsible, Anastasia dismantles the display and drives to Ira's house with Zack to give them back. Ira's holiday display is even more garish than the one he dumped on Anastasia's lawn, and his neighbors are irate. Loud music is blaring, Santa and all his reindeer are circling the house that's lit up like, well, a Christmas tree, and the area is jammed with people to see the display. Not all are happy about it, of course, which is quickly evidenced by the man who rushes Ira and socks him in the face. Anastasia decides to return the following morning to give Ira back his decorations instead, which is when things really get interesting. Because she discovers that the mechanical Santa now has a person lying across his lap, and that person happens to be dead.

"Handmade Ho-Ho Homicide" is a laugh-out-loud, well plotted mystery, from a real pro! A ho-ho hoot! Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Milestones Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## LADY IN THE LAKE

By Laura Lippman



It is 1966, and readers are brought to Baltimore. In this town, not only does everyone seem to know everyone else, but they also know each other's lists of secrets, whether they be naughty or dangerous.

There is one in town, however, by the name of Maddie Schwartz, who has had the ability to keep her secrets under wraps. She would make for good gossip, considering it was only last year that she was living as a pampered housewife. Yet now, she has left her twenty-year marriage far behind.

Maddie was married to Milton and gave birth to their son Seth. She had resigned herself to the fact that being a wife and mother was her life's path. One night, at a small dinner party, a person from her past reminds Maddie of all her original ambitions and reignites the passion she once had. What Maddie didn't expect was to stumble over a murder.

Tessie Fine goes missing. It is Maddie who walks the streets of her past and finds the young girl dead. Maddie comes to believe that Tessie's death has something to do with the case of a missing woman by the name of Cleo Sherwood, whose body was found in the fountain of a park lake. Taking the case that no one seems to care about on herself, Maddie spends her time reading up about Cleo's life and how she died, bringing her into contact with a variety of characters. What she also meets up with, however, is the ghost of Cleo Sherwood who tells Maddie that she does not want her investigating her past...yet offers no reason as to why.

With her new job at the city's newspaper, the *Star*, Maddie takes on a whole new role in life and forges ahead to find a killer from the past, one from the present, and build a career that she's always wanted.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## RELATIVE FORTUNES

By Marlowe Benn

This cool new series has already achieved bestselling status on Amazon in the Amateur Sleuth Mystery category, and it's not a surprise. I have a feeling these *Julia Kydd* reads will be around for a long time to come.

Readers get to play in one of the most awesome periods and places possible: 1920's New York City. Being 1924, the once hot topic of the women's suffrage movement is no longer making headlines. Julia Kydd is not a lover of politics, only books, and wants nothing more than to start up her own independent business; a new, private press.

But even though the movement is not making headlines, Julia must still deal with the fact that she's a female and must fight twice as hard for what she wants. In order to start her press, she also has to fight for what is rightfully hers. An inheritance for Julia is something she now has to go to battle over with her half-brother, Philip. He has challenged her right to the money and Julia must deal with an estranged half-sibling who's a real jerk.

When a friend's sister passes away of an apparent suicide, Julia is not only sad for her friend's loss, but also appalled at the way the wealthy family who has just lost a child deals with it; they are nothing but cold and unfeeling. Apparently they felt, since one of their own had the nerve to live in poverty as a suffragist who would not deal with being "controlled" by her husband, she should then just be forgotten about all together.

Both of these issues in Julia's life come together as Philip states that if Julia can prove the woman's death was murder and not suicide, he'll walk away from the inheritance. Trouble is, Julia is walking into a case that could actually turn her into the next victim.

A fantastic start to a new series!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

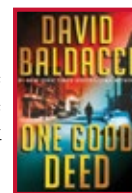
## ONE GOOD DEED

By David Baldacci

"One Good Deed" is a treat for Baldacci fans. This contribution to the noir fiction genre features Aloysius Archer, or just "Archer" as the character prefers to be called. Archer is a more sensitive, humanized version of characters such as Richard Stark's Parker and Lee Child's Jack Reacher.

"One Good Deed" is an entertaining suspense novel that is full of misdirection, which will have you guessing about who the real killer is until the very end.

Reviewed by Joseph Badal, Tony Hillerman Award Winning Author of the *Lassiter/Martinez Case Files* ■



## THE LAST WIDOW

By Karin Slaughter

This is Will Trent and Sara Linton like you've never seen them before. In her ninth *Will Trent* thriller, Karin Slaughter ramps up the tension by putting Will and Sara's love affair in the center of a neo-Nazi cult showdown.

With a gun to your head, would you agree to help domestic terrorists, or would you choose to die? After a bombing that rocks Emory University, near her family home in Atlanta, Sara must choose.

One minute, Sara is there, the next minute she's gone.

One month earlier, a scientist from the Centers for Disease Control is kidnapped from a shopping center parking lot. Now, Will's partner, Faith Mitchell sits through an FBI briefing on the prison transport plan for their "high-value" prisoner Martin Novak. When the bombs explode, Faith and Amanda Wagner, Deputy Director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, must figure out a way to infiltrate the white supremacist group that has sent a message, much like the previous messages sent by Novak. Is he connected to the terrorists? And if the group is behind the CDC kidnapping, could a deadly pandemic be only a test tube away?

Will, Faith, and Amanda race against the clock to save Sara and stop the group's plan to create a master race.

In a riveting story that seems ripped from current headlines, Will and Sara must determine how far each will go to save the other, and what they're willing to lose to save the world as they know it. An un-put-downable book that will have your heart thumping and your fingers turning pages faster than a GBI bullet barreling toward its target.

Reviewed by K. L. Romo ■

## THIRTEEN

By Steven Cavanagh

Steve Cavanagh, in "Thirteen," has written a fascinating story about a serial killer that will remind the reader of Thomas Harris's worst villains. This thriller has it all: suspense, courtroom drama, a colorful cast of characters, and twists and turns that will shock the reader. The battle waged between Cavanagh's protagonist, Eddie Flynn, and his antagonist, Joshua Kane, is one of the epic conflicts in the thriller genre.

This is a masterpiece of creative writing that grabbed me from page one and ratcheted up the action until the very end. You will lose sleep over this one. But I want to leave you with one warning: make certain that your doors and windows are locked before you read this book.

Reviewed by Joseph Badal, Tony Hillerman Award Winning Author of the *Lassiter/Martinez Case Files* ■





## MURDER AT CROSSWAYS

By Alyssa Maxwell

The 1898 summer party season is coming to an end in Newport, Rhode Island. But the smart set have one more event, and it's a real doozy. Mamie Fish, wife of millionaire railroad tycoon Stuyvesant Fish, is hosting a Harvest Festival at her mansion, Crossways, complete with scarecrows and the promised appearance of European royalty—Prince Otto of Austria. Mamie has a reputation for doing outrageous things, so nobody who's anybody wants to miss it.

As acting editor-in-chief of the *Newport Messenger*, Emma Cross had hoped to assign covering the party to another reporter, but she has to fill in. Emma's no stranger to covering these events and blends in easily. Family connections are important in Newport, and her distant kinship with Cornelius Vanderbilt and his family always helps her at gatherings like this. Nearly every eligible daughter in Newport high society is in attendance, each one hoping to catch the eye of Prince Otto and have him fall madly in love with her.

But as the evening drags on, there's no sign of the prince, and Mamie Fish is running out of excuses. The next morning, Prince Otto's nonappearance is explained. He's found, stabbed to death and disguised as a scarecrow in the side garden of Crossways; making it clear that, despite all the security, a murderer was an unwitting guest.

The prince has been stabbed in exactly the same way as another man whose body was found a few days before on nearby Bailey's Beach. Emma had the misfortune to view this body, and was shocked that the dead man bore a remarkable resemblance to the father of her half-brother, who supposedly disappeared in a yachting accident thirty years ago. Or did he? As Emma investigates the possible connection between the two victims, she uncovers family secrets a prominent Newport family is desperate to hide.

"Murder At Crossways" is an intelligent, well written mystery. The addition of real historical characters and settings make it a must-read!

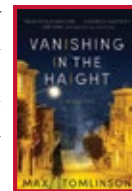
Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "In-Laws Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## VANISHING IN THE HAIGHT

By Max Tomlinson

The intensity that came from every chapter of this book showed the immense control this author has to create a truly wild ride.



We join P.I. Colleen Hayes—a woman who is literally struggling to get her life back on track. Not only is she dealing with a scuzzy parole officer while trying to make ends meet, but she's also trying to make a new start with her runaway teenage daughter.

Taking on a case that will make her cash, Colleen decides to help a very wealthy retired man by the name of Edward Copeland. The poor man's daughter was brutally murdered eleven years previously in Golden Gate Park and no one ever found out anything about it. This was the time of the "Summer of Love," although there's nothing lovely about his daughter's cold case. And now that the elderly man is seeing his finality on Earth coming closer, he wants more than ever to find his daughter's killer in order to attain the peace he craves.

Now, Colleen is someone who understands both sides of murder, if you will. She certainly was never a psychopath, but she was sent to prison for killing her ex. Instead of closing herself off, she takes the case on in a world that is ripe with police who love to turn the other way. Not only is the corruption frightening, but Colleen also finds herself engaged to the case as "clues" start to arise; odd clues that lead the P.I. to believe the dead girl left a path to follow that will lead her to the killer Edward Copeland has been searching for.

This is a new series that already will leave you stunned. And it is a breath of fresh air that the lead is a strong, intelligent woman who's just the right guide through the tough climate of San Fran in the 70's. I can't wait to see where Colleen goes next.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE BETRAYED WIFE

By Kevin O'Brien

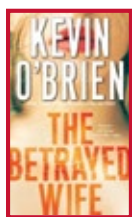
This, the latest book by Kevin O'Brien, is a definite must read. Kevin is a master at the suspense "horror" genre. I only say horror in the context that it's not gory, but it does have you turning on a few extra lights while you read it.

"The Betrayed Wife" stars character Sheila O'Rourke, whose world gets turned upside down, real quick. When a young girl shows up at her house and claims to be the daughter of her husband, Sheila begins to question if she even knows him at all.

The pain keeps piling up when Sheila begins receiving anonymous text messages, hearing odd noises coming from her neighbor's house, and having the feeling that she is being watched. And that's just the first fifty pages. Sheila no longer feels safe and doesn't know if she can turn to her husband. She realizes that while she wants to trust him, she has to be very careful in deciding who will keep her family safe.

"The Betrayed Wife" is the perfect book. Kevin loves to take the reader to the very edge and dangle them off a cliff, which makes this absolutely perfect for fans of almost every genre.

Reviewed by John Raab ■



## WHEN HELL STRUCK TWELVE

By James R. Benn

It is hard to believe, but this is the 14<sup>th</sup> Billy Boyle mystery, and even after all this time U.S. Army detective Billy Boyle is still one of the coolest characters out there.

This time around, we begin in August of 1944. Captain Boyle is working for General Eisenhower in the Office of Special Investigations of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force. Each day, the Allies move closer to their goal of destroying Hitler and his horrific use of power. It is right now, in fact, that the Allies are closing in on the enemy who are trying to escape the Falaise Gap.

It is Billy's assignment to interrogate prisoners in order to learn what the Germans have planned for Paris. His interrogations, however, have a much deeper meaning. The Allies actually want German forces to believe they are desperate for information about Paris so the enemy will believe that they actually want to attack the city. Eisenhower has no need for this data, of course, because his plan is to bypass Paris entirely.

When one of the captured soldiers, a member of the Resistance, reveals that there's a French traitor by the name of Atlantik who's taking classified plans of the Allies directly to German leaders, Billy's assignment changes.

But it's not what you think. Even though the Resistance is supposed to believe that Billy is helping them track down the traitor, what he really needs to do when he's assigned to the Resistance, is stop them from taking out Atlantik. After all, the orders the traitor is carrying to the Germans are false. The Allies are simply making them up, playing a game of deception in order to reach the German border and essentially end WWII.

This scheme is exciting. Billy Boyle is one character I would love to see on a movie screen.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■





## WORD TO THE WISE

By Jenn McKinlay

As the head honcho of the Briar Creek, Connecticut Library, Lindsay Norris is used to answering patron's questions about where to find information on a wide variety of subjects. So, when a new town resident, Aaron Grady, a gardening enthusiast, enlists her help, Lindsay's glad to oblige. Connecticut is in the middle of its worst draught in years, and Grady is concerned that his precious roses may not survive. Lindsay gets the feeling there's something a little "off" about Grady. He stands just a little too close to her, and makes her uncomfortable. But after he leaves, she decides it was only pre-wedding jitters at work. Her wedding to the love of her life, Sully, is fast approaching, and Lindsay hasn't even picked out a gown yet.

The next day, Grady turns up at the library with a bouquet of beautiful roses from his garden as a thank you for Lindsay's help. But that's only the beginning. He finds out where she lives and shows up there, too. And when she's trying on wedding gowns and Grady sends her a creepy text telling her which gown he prefers her to wear, she really freaks out. She reports Grady's unwanted attention to her boss, the Briar Creek mayor, who brushes off her fears and tells her she's overreacting. He reminds Lindsay that the library is a public place so Grady can't be banned from it, and further suggests that Lindsay should be flattered by Grady's attention, not frightened.

When Lindsay and Sully go out for what they hope will be a relaxing dinner and Lindsay spots Grady, Sully confronts him, warning him to leave Lindsay alone. The next morning, Grady's dead body is found outside the library, and Sully's status changes from a nervous groom-to-be to number one on the police suspect list.

Jenn McKinlay really knows how to keep readers enthralled until the very last page of her books. I loved this one.

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

## MURDER IN THE BALCONY

By Margaret Dumas

This *Movie Palace Mystery* is the second book in the series, following the outstanding "Murder at the Palace."

This time out, Nora Paige is loving her new career. She is the manager of the Palace Movie Theatre and her life is nothing but good. Unlike most business owners, however, who worry mostly about overhead costs and bringing paying customers inside, Nora's issues are a bit different.

You see, a truly scuzzy real estate developer wants the property she so loves, and Nora must work every day to keep him from getting his dream. She also has a staff of employees who seem to go through personal breakdowns on an hourly basis. The last issue Nora must deal with is also the most fun: She has to hide the truth when it comes to Trixie—her new best friend, and ghost, who worked as an usherette at the Palace and ended up dying in 1937.

You would think this would be enough on her plate, but Nora is also fighting with herself. Her ex-husband who definitely is in the category of "cheater" has returned, and she has no clue whether to accept his apologies and try again, or run from the charm that he oozes out like slime.

It doesn't seem fair when a murder occurs of someone who's extremely close to the Palace. With all the suspects on the table, it will take Nora a lot of work, time, and effort to stop the killer before he or she strikes again.

The first book was charming and fun; the second is just as good! This is a series you don't want to miss out on.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine ■

In a time of social and political unrest, you might as well take a break and traverse the oldest city in the United States with a man and his dog.

## GARY WILLIAMS

In this second installment, Gary and his dog, Guen, return to the historic streets of St. Augustine, Florida, to discuss such wide-ranging topics as sporks, speed humps, James Bond, Common Core math, a gigantic water bowl, Antonio Banderas, and a superhero Dachshund named Edgar.



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## THE MURDER LIST

By Hank Phillippi Ryan

"The Murder List" takes you down a dark path rife with tension and deception and, in the end, will stun you. Just when you're certain that your empathy and sympathy are committed to the appropriate character, and your disdain is correctly directed at a character you have come to despise, you discover that you have it all wrong.

Hank Phillippi Ryan is a master storyteller who entertains, frightens, and shocks. Don't miss this well-written mystery.

Reviewed by Joseph Badal, Tony Hillerman Award Winning Author of the *Lassiter/Martinez Case Files* ■



## TIN BADGES

By Lorenzo Carcaterra

As a fan of this man's incredible title, "The Wolf," it was exciting to throw myself into yet another one of his creations.

It is a truth that the NYPD is a brotherhood: a true family that stands behind each other for support and in front of each other for protection. Tank Rizzo, now retired, is a member of this huge family and has earned a reputation as being one of the most trusted "tin badges." This term, given to retired detectives called in to solve cases that the everyday force can't, is something Tank Rizzo is a master at, seeing as that he's gone up against some of the City's most fearful criminals.

A case arises that will have Tank and his ex-partner Pearl, battling with Gonzo, a heavyweight kingpin in the City. Pearl has an interesting background. Although he's living his retirement years in peace as the owner of an Italian restaurant, he's also a former mobster, so his "special skills" will help Tank enormously.

Tank is also dealing with confusion in his personal life. Receiving a horrible call telling him that his brother (estranged for many years) and sister-in-law have died in a car accident, Tank must now take in his teen nephew, Chris. Talk about complete opposites; when Chris moves in with Tank it's not exactly paradise for either. But when Chris shows that his passions are computers and true crime, Tank feels more at ease. He also sees another member he could add on to his team attempting to bring Gonzo down, seeing as that Chris is basically a computer genius.

Following this odd group of crime fighters that include police, friends, and family that have stood on both sides of the law is extremely intriguing for the reader. Watching the action play out, with Gonzo working hard to make sure he comes out the winner, once again shows that this author definitely deserves a "gold badge" in writing.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine ■



## LAND OF WOLVES

By Craig Johnson

Those on Netflix enjoying the heck out of the *Longmire* TV series, will be thrilled to learn that this, Book #15, is out and has already earned its place in the beloved bestselling series.

We are back by the side of Wyoming Sheriff Walt Longmire as he takes on yet another harrowing case. He tried to rest, so to speak, attempting to recoup from the horrific events he played a part in back in Mexico.

Unfortunately, recovery time is zero for Walt, seeing as that he has found himself all wrapped up in a new investigation. A shepherd has been found hung. Whether or not this falls under the category of suicide or murder has yet to be known.

Not only is this an odd case, but it also has a connection to the Basque family (a clan all fans love to hate), who have made a name for themselves for a variety of horrific reasons. One being, they have a reputation for cutting the legs off county sheriffs. Add to all this the fact that a huge wolf has been spotted roaming in the Big Horn Mountains, and you have a case where it seems like Walt would much rather “hang out” with the canine than deal with any of the humans roaming across his stunning Wyoming backdrop.

Once again, *Longmire* will make headlines. A fantastic tale, a great character, and a mystery that will keep you riveted.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## BENEATH THE SURFACE

By Jo Spain

For all those who were thrilled by Inspector Tom Reynolds in Book #1 of this series, you will absolutely love the fact that he has returned.



Here, we have a murder; a killer that Inspector Tom Reynolds and his team are assigned to find and stop before more people end up dead.

What the reader is shown is the meeting of two men; a duo who are among the hierarchy of political power-mongers. They set up this secret meet in a remote location in order to discuss a plan set in place that's about to be played out. One is extremely nervous about the whole thing and believes that something will go wrong; whereas the other is more than smug, offering assurance that absolutely nothing bad can come to pass.

Inspector Tom Reynolds steps into this crime that revolves around a high-ranking official named Ryan Finnegan. The crime is brutal, but what's most frightening is that it happened inside the Irish Parliament Building, one of the most secure buildings in the country. So not only must he find clues and uncover a murderer, but the P.I. must also question suspects in a realm where huge egos and liars run amok on a daily basis.

It may be easy to write this one off as your typical politically-motivated crime. But, as with the first book in the series where twists abound and there are surprises around every corner, Tom's investigation is not one that's “easy” to solve. Just when he thinks he has answers and is on the right path, he and his team find themselves turned in the opposite direction.

As the reader, watching this all play out is incredibly intoxicating as the law tries its best to find a motive and bring to light the person who could possibly have wanted this man dead.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## PEACH CLOBBERED

By Anna Gerard

This new “cozy” series, *Georgia B&B Mysteries*, begins with this entertaining and downright fun tale.

Readers meet Nina Fleet. She has plans to open a B&B, after being awarded money in her divorce. At 41, she has moved into a historic Queen Anne house in the quaint town of Cymbeline, Georgia. Almost immediately upon settling there, however, a man shows up on her doorstep dressed in (of all things) a penguin costume. His name is Harry Westcott and he tells Nina that he's the rightful owner of the house she just purchased.

The reason he's currently in a penguin costume is because Harry is an out-of-work actor who's getting paid to be the mascot of an ice cream shop in town. He's in possession of a letter from his great-aunt, pledging to leave him the house. Unfortunately, those words were not placed in her Will.

At virtually the same time, the Sisters of Perpetual Poverty have lost the lease on their home. A real estate developer is going to transform the convent into a golfing community, so Cymbeline's mayor asks Nina to take in the elderly nuns until something else can be arranged.

After this takes place, Nina runs into the “penguin” once more; he's lying in an alley with a kitchen knife sticking out of his chest. Trouble is, it is not Harry inside the costume. Instead, the real estate developer is the victim. But was he supposed to be? Nina and Harry find themselves teaming up in order to find the killer and restore peace to the small community.

This tale was wonderful. And it is no surprise once you discover that Gerard is actually another name for Ali Brandon, the writer of the beloved *Black Cat Bookshop Mysteries*. This is definitely another series that is sure to grab fans!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## VOW OF JUSTICE

By Lynette Eason

This is a sad time for some readers, but will be a thrill as well when you witness how the *Blue Justice* series comes to an end with this fantastic book. What began in “Oath of Honor,” and continued with “Called to Protect” and “Code of Valor,” comes to a stunning conclusion. But remember, do not read the last page first. You do not want to miss this great plot.

FBI Special Agent Lincoln St. John is living a life that has no meaning. In fact, the only thing Lincoln can think about 24/7 is the fact that Allison Radcliffe—his true love—is dead. His entire focus is on tracking the murderers down and making them pay the ultimate justice.

What should be a difficult thing to do, turns on a dime and shocks Lincoln when he finds out that Allison is still very much a living/breathing human who was not murdered at all. This is a time of relief for Lincoln, but also one filled with hurt and confusion, seeing as that he has no idea why Allison would allow him to believe that she'd been taken out of his world at the hands of a truly evil being.

Now, even though Lincoln is extremely upset, he and Allison must team up together in order to stop a true killer out there who may just be the person who takes Allison out once and for all.

This is a series that will be truly missed by author Eason's fans. Yet, as all of us know, she's most likely working on another as we speak that will have us falling in love with new Eason characters in a very short time.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THIS TENDER LAND

By William Kent Krueger

There are very few books (or movies, for that matter) that you can describe as “epic.” But “This Tender Land” by Krueger is just that. Set against the incredible backdrop of the wild American landscape (Minnesota in 1932), this tale is all about the wonders and the nightmares that make us who we are.

We enter the Lincoln School; this is a place filled with sadness and sorrow because hundreds of Native American children are sent here in order to become educated. The sorrow comes from the fact that these children were forcibly taken from their parents in order to receive this “education” they never wanted in the first place. We do have a bit of happiness here, however. It comes in the form of an orphan named Odie O'Banion. He loves life, he laughs, and he goes on adventures that bring the superintendent's anger down upon his head. Because of certain things he does, he is forced to run away from the Lincoln School with Albert, his brother, and their best friend Mose. Also along for the ride is a little girl by the name of Emmy who is so young yet lives with a broken heart. Swiping a canoe, the quartet head to the Mississippi River in order to find a place where they can start a life of their own.

This is an epic tale that encompasses one summer. The four orphans meet up with all types of people, both good and bad, who range from farmers struggling to make ends meet to faith healers to families who are trying to find their own place to start over.

This story will make you look at the world from a variety of viewpoints, as you watch these lost souls befriend one another in order to form their own unbreakable family unit.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE RULE OF LAW

By John Lescroart

The newest entry in John Lescroart's long-running *Dismas Hardy* series gives Lescroart a chance to tie up a few loose ends in the adventures of the former detective who became a lawyer and moved to the defense side of the court. At the same time, it's a thriller that deals with stories Hardy could be reading in this morning's *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Hardy has noticed out-of-character behavior in his secretary, Phyllis, with unexplained absences and abrupt departures from the office. But nothing prepares him for having the police show up and arrest her for abetting a murder, injuring Phyllis as they roughly handcuff her like the most desperate criminal. The victim is a bottom-dweller named Hector Valdez who exploits illegal alien women in his bar that doubles as a whorehouse. Phyllis had helped the woman accused of the murder get out of San Francisco in an Underground Railroad operation, only to have the woman betrayed and arrested by ICE.

The case smells rotten to Hardy from the start. There are three witnesses, but their stories are too carefully constructed, and one of the witnesses is Phyllis' ne'er-do-well brother who'd recently been released from prison and who's taken over running Hector's criminal operation following the murder. In addition, the detectives originally assigned to investigate were abruptly removed.

Hardy has clashed with the recently-elected DA, Ron Jameson. Jameson's challenger in the election was Hardy's partner and friend, Wes Ferrell, so the way the investigation and arrest were handled smells of political payback. Hardy mounts an aggressive defense of Phyllis, but there are currents of old secrets and crimes swirling below the surface that threaten to not just claim Phyllis, but Hardy as well. Hardy must figure out how to survive with an opponent who's more than willing to twist the rules of law for his own purposes.

Lescroart delivers a sharp mystery/thriller that will delight his longtime readers, yet is fully accessible and engaging even for someone who's never read a *Dismas Hardy* novel before.

Reviewed by David Ingram ■

## THE THIRD MRS. DURST

By Ann Aguirre

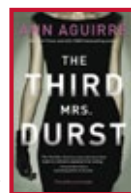
There are controlling husbands and then there are *really* controlling husbands! Marlena Durst has one of the latter who, quite literally, has placed himself in charge of every move she makes. She can't even eat a certain type of food or wear a certain piece of clothing without this man's approval. The outside world sees them as the perfect couple in the perfect marriage, yet behind closed doors it is a fact that Marlena traded her freedom and ability to have a mind of her own in order to live the life of luxury.

It's not a shock that she always wanted money and the ability to not have to worry about her financial future, considering that she had a seriously rough childhood. Her mother was a drug addict and created many half-siblings for Marlena with a variety of different men. So when the wealthy and powerful Mr. Durst finds Marlena intriguing, and asks her to become his third wife, she jumps at the chance, so to speak.

Now, Marlena was preceded in the “wife” role by two women who are now dead. She is on track to become the next dead Mrs. Durst, but her horrific upbringing and the skills she had to hone in order to survive it, has made her a master at staying alive no matter what. She has also gained the skills to get away with murder. This is the ultimate duel: a cunning, intelligent woman versus a violent husband who believes that he is the strongest one in the relationship.

I will give away no spoilers. Let's just say that this is one you must “see” with your own eyes. It is an experience you won't forget.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## BURIED

By Ellison Cooper

Ellison Cooper is one of those authors who, when her next book appears, has readers go crazy to get it. This new ‘gift’ is no exception.

She brings back neuroscientist, Senior Special Agent Sayer Altair. This woman has a frightening job, to say the least; she delves into the minds of psychopaths. But even she shows signs of fear, as well as surprise, when she finds herself hot on the trail of a serial killer who has brought a cold case back to life.

Sayer has quite a past. She unearthed a killer in the very private cocoon of the FBI. She also uncovered a plethora of corruption within the organization. For six months she has sat at a desk trying to recoup from the bullet she took for her endeavors. She is also still mourning her fiancée, and is working on a project studying anonymous psychopaths who use their frightening traits to rise in their chosen careers.

Sayer is called back to the field when an off-duty FBI agent, and his loyal cadaver dog, fall into a pile of human bones hidden in a hole in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park. Although the remains are found to be almost two decades old, there are two brand new corpses among the bones. There is a cold case dating back twenty years, and the new bones seem to tie in with a recently kidnapped woman and her daughter.

It's up to Sayer to find the connection between past and present, while dealing with a killer who is always one step ahead of her. Not knowing if this is déjà vu and even more corruption is happening within the organization, Sayer is given unwanted aid by one of her psychopath subjects; a person who may just have their own plan for Sayer's demise.

What can I say? Cooper does it again and offers up a perfectly written, intelligent mystery with a side dish of pure, 100% suspense. Bon Appétit!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## SPIDER-MAN: FAR FROM HOME

### 2019

Genre – Action/Adventure/Sci-Fi (PG-13)

After the events of *Avengers: Endgame*, it would be difficult for any film that followed set in the world of Marvel to not be a bit of a letdown. But it should come as no surprise that Spider-Man's latest film is just as good as the previous entry, *Spider-man: Homecoming*. In fact, it could be argued that it's even better. All Peter Parker wants to do is chill with his classmates on a field trip to Europe, but of course that's not going to happen. Nick Fury recruits him to assist with an invasion of beings from a parallel Earth. With the help of Quentin Beck who has been tackling these elemental creatures, Parker juggles trying to save the day while also

trying to work up the courage to tell MJ how he feels about her. The high school scenes ring true, and diehard comic fans will know a twist that comes halfway through, which propels a quick, surprising, and intense

second half of the film. Tom Holland as Peter Parker has been a revelation, and his last few appearances are fuel to the best appearances of Spider-Man on film to date. And watch the end credits for two sequences that are both game changers. ■



## THE LION KING

### 2019

Genre – Animation/Adventure/Drama (PG)

Disney has been going overboard lately with turning their animated films into live action stories. You heard it here first: At some point a Disney live action film will be turned into an animated film. Director Jon

Favreau had a massive job on his hands to tackle this film that is loved by many in both

animated and Broadway form. At first it's a bit jarring to see "real" animals conveying the story, but one is soon drawn in to the visual style and immersed into the narrative. Elements that would not work in live-action form, such as the scene with Timon wearing a hula skirt, have been revised in clever ways. The added sequences to stretch the running time work well, and help with the overall scope of the finished film. If you are a fan, and were reluctant to watch this, give it a shot and you won't be disappointed. ■

## FAST & FURIOUS PRESENTS: HOBBS & SHAW

### 2019

Genre – Action/Adventure (PG-13)

The past few films in the *Fast and Furious* franchise have mixed well high-octane action that defy the laws of physics, while also delivering more laughs than many





comedies. *Hobbs and Shaw* takes those elements to another level, and after the credits roll, you will have a guaranteed smile on your face. The MacGuffin deals with a supervirus that a terrorist group has stolen. A woman named Hattie Shaw, and sister to the notorious Deckard, works for MI6 and is forced to inject herself with the bioweapon to keep it from an operative named Brixton. He is a superhuman with cybernetic implants, and he frames Hattie for treason after she escapes with the supervirus. Luke Hobbs and Deckard Shaw are forced to reluctantly work together to save Hattie and keep the bioweapon away from Brixton. The story builds in the action elements as well as the humor. Hopefully this is just the start of a series of films featuring these heroes. ■

## IT: CHAPTER TWO 2019

Genre – Drama/Fantasy/Horror (R)



*It: Chapter Two* is the conclusion of the bestselling Stephen King book. When we left Derry, Maine last, Pennywise the Clown had been defeated by the Losers' Club. Now, fast forward twenty-seven years later...and Pennywise has come back. Eddie, Richie, Bill, Bev, Stan and Ben, have all grown up and become successful, but they all left Derry far

behind. Mike Hanlon stayed

in Derry, researching the past, and having to make the call to the others letting them know that IT has returned.

If you loved the first, than you will find *It: Chapter Two* just as satisfying. *Misery* is considered to be the best of King's books (by many) to be adapted to the big screen. ("The Shawshank Redemption" was a short story novella). But, *It* and this sequel are either a very close second or tied for first. I can already see in my future a long night of watching both movies, in the dark, hopefully far away from any traveling circus that might be in operation.

Reviewed by John Raab ■

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."

"A delicious glimpse at what happens when the veil between the two worlds unexpectedly parts. I dare you to put this book down!"

—Suzanne Giesemann, Author of "Messages of Hope"

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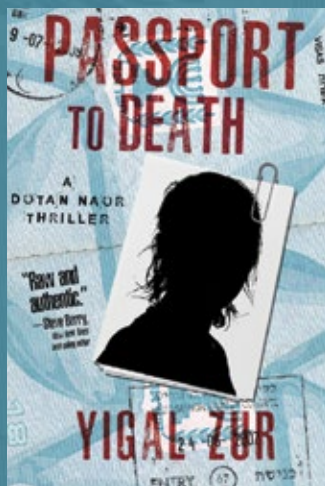


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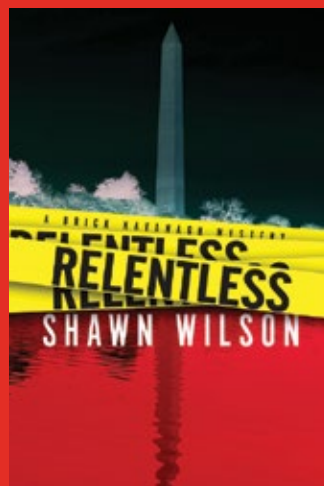


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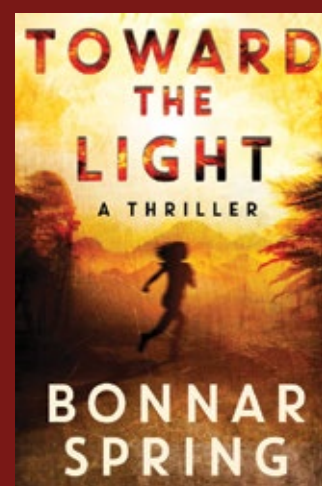


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# Featured Artist

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazin*



*Anne Wipf*  
Shares her Love of Life

*Over the Clouds*





Any lover of the arts who wishes to create their own “French Connection” must seek out the beauty of this artist. Anne Wipf, a French artiste who would make every Impressionist proud is, in fact, a composition as amazing as the ones she creates for the world to view. A sixty-eight-year-old grandmother

with a wonderful heart, she has found herself in a world where living from day to day can sometimes be a struggle, yet she continues to soldier on and be an unforgettable mentor to those all around her.

Her wildly creative imagination produces art that is nothing short of magical. From dreamscapes to awe-inspiring landscapes, the fantastical worlds she offers are astounding on every level. As a long-time member of the popular deviantArt community, Anne shares not only her works, but also advice, inspiration, and encouragement to industry up-and-comers.

She was kind enough to “sit down” with *Suspense Magazine* and talk about her life, passion, and the beauty surrounding us all.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): I must begin with the “natural” beauty that appears in so many of your images—from the icy wilderness, to the lone deer in the forest, etc. Is there a specific “call” to you when it comes to nature and the vastness of the open landscape? Is this a category of art you began with?

Anne Wipf (A.W.): *Since I was a little girl, I have always been attracted to nature; it is a part of me. I was a lonely girl (single child) and dreamy, and loved the weekends I spent at my grandparents’ house in the country. I wanted to know the names of all the wildflowers, and spent a lot of time observing the little colorful spiders in the grass.*

*It is not surprising that I came back to settle in the countryside in the 80’s, and that I essentially painted the landscapes that surrounded me. (I started by working the traditional arts: acrylic, pastel, watercolor, etc.). I still think it’s an art category that suits me.*

S. MAG.: Along those lines, what was it, specifically, that drew you down the artistic path to begin with?

A.W.: *As far back as I can remember, drawing was for me a way to get away from everyday life: I especially imagined places where I would have liked to find myself. Painting helped me hold on when I became unemployed and then when I got sick. I have breast cancer that occurred in 2001, then I relapsed after a long period of remission in 2015. Since then, I am under heavy treatment. But, perhaps, because I have a temperament I can bear it, and it has been able to stop the development of the disease, despite the side effects, including intense tiredness.*



*I Ching 06 - Song  
(The Conflict)*



*I Ching 28 - Da Guo  
(Great Preponderance)*



*I Ching 63 - Chi Chi  
(After Completion)*

*I discovered the art of photomontage around 2008, by frequenting sites to publish my work, especially on deviantArt. I immediately caught the virus and, since I had time because of my illness (I was fired for incapacity due to the handicaps caused), I began to study it thoroughly—passing the ‘clearer’ moments of my time by following tutorials to get a good technical mastery.*

S. MAG.: Being from France, can you offer up some data on how your country (one that is on many peoples’ “bucket lists” to see during their lifetimes) helps you keep those creative juices flowing? Is there a specific spot you go to that inspires you the most?

A.W.: *I’m lucky to live in a beautiful place. This southwest area of France immediately seduced me with the beauty of its medieval architecture and its wild landscapes, with its caves, its chasms and cliffs.... But I also like many other French regions, especially Brittany. There, it is the sea and its granite rocks. All this inspires me a lot.*

*Of course, as a Frenchman, bathed in French culture, I am also inspired by artists of the past, especially the Impressionists and, above all, Claude Monet, the painter of light. His “Nymphéas” were a shock for me when I went to see them in Paris. Hence, no doubt, the importance that light has for me, and on which the essence of my work rests.*

*As for the fantasy touch, it certainly comes from the enchantment I got from reading Tolkien’s Lord of Rings, which was my favorite bedside book for a long time during the 80’s.*

*Of course, many contemporary artists also inspire me, but I can’t quote them all.*

S. MAG.: Your work on deviantArt is stunning. It states that you are a “senior member” of the site. Can you tell us how (and why) you became involved with that site? And, if you are a mentor, have you had some interesting experiences with “newbies” coming to you for suggestions on how to enhance their own creativity?

A.W.: *I was very surprised when I was promoted to “Senior.” It is a great honor. From the wonderful comments I received on that occasion, I learned that I had been honored for the work I had done in the community, especially the help given to many groups to address their challenges. I also published a weekly “Best of” from the best photomanipulations on dA, which I unfortunately had to stop because of the worsening of my tiredness, which forces me to restrict my activities. Finally, I always find it a great pleasure to help novice photomanipulators when they ask me: it is a wonderful satisfaction to see their progress. I also do some tutorials, as I see a need for this or that technical problem. I have just one in preparation, on the importance of shade and light in the composition that was inspired by the work of one of my very own students.*

S. MAG.: I know it’s highly improbable that an artist can choose a “favorite” from their own gallery of work. But if you could pick a couple, could you tell us what they are and what aspects make them the most memorable for you?

A.W.: *I have a hard time classifying my work, but of course I have some favorites. In particular, those who have been inspired by a painful experience, such as “Freedom - The Carousel” or “If I Could Dream”; or inspired by my concerns, such as “Invader.” The state of the planet, as I leave it to my grandchildren, is of great concern to me.*

S. MAG.: As with writing, there are some creative types that have a set plan in place before they create their work, and others who just let the magic happen as it happens. Are you one who plans ahead, or just lets the “idea” come to you while you sketch? Are you ever surprised by the end result?

A.W.: *Inspiration is my main problem. Sometimes it takes me a long time to find a topic of inspiration. The theme of a challenge or the work of another artist helps me sometimes, and I often regret not remembering my dreams! Once I get the idea, I get to work, but I do not usually have a pre-established composition: it depends on the stocks found and the progress of my work. Once I have everything, the most interesting part of my work begins: settings and textures. There, I feel a real jubilation, and I am always surprised by the generally good result. (When the result must be disappointing, I feel it from the beginning of my work; I throw a lot of work out even before they have been finished).*

S. MAG.: As an artist, have you ever worked doing book covers? Can you give us some information on your background in the industry?

A.W.: *My job remains amateurish. It’s a choice. My past is behind me, I have no future to build. Retired, pensioner, I’m not rich but I have enough to live, and I spend little. It’s a great freedom to be able to create what you want, when you want, without*





*Dangerous Cargo*

*Memories of a Rainy Night*

constraints or instructions. I really want my work to be a pleasure, not a way to earn a living. In addition, my state of health no longer allows me to invest in a commercial activity or otherwise, I would never be sure to be able to carry it out. Also, although I have already received many proposals (covers of books, cards, games, tutorials, etc.), I have refused all.

If I have any advice for those who hope for a career in this field, it would be the following:

Be patient. Do not expect a quick profit in this area. Work tirelessly to improve your skills and become good enough to attract the attention of the professional community. The proposals will then arrive by themselves and bring others. This is the single method, beware of advertisements that claim to make you known against a financial participation: it's a scam.

S. MAG.: Do you feel like technology in your industry is improving and helping you create more than, say, a decade ago? Is there a particular piece of equipment or technology you have not tried that you would like to one day?

A.W.: This question amuses me a lot, having known (because of my old age) a time where neither the web, nor even digital technologies existed, and where we had only our hands and pigments for instruments. Of course, technology has influenced my art a lot: I could never have done photomanipulations. That said, I do not think, a priori, that the techniques will still evolve a lot in this sector: if Photoshop is very different from what it was at the beginning, the last evolutions since 10 years, relate mainly to details which certainly facilitate the task, but do not question the basic techniques.

S. MAG.: Is social media a large part of meeting others and getting your work out there? Are fans able to see your work in any other place/site besides deviantArt?

A.W.: My main social media is and will remain deviantArt. I found everything there: tips, materials, tutorials, and links to everything else. It's thanks to dA that I established contacts and made myself known.

I also have a Facebook account, but I don't publish my work there anymore, except in the form of a link to the original image published on dA: too much hacking and theft.

I'm not interested in other social media, I do not see the point. I do not even have a smartphone; I only communicate with my pc. I am a 68-year-old grandmother! :D

S. MAG.: Where do you see yourself and your art in the next ten years? Is there a particular theme or niche in the art world that you wish to explore?

A.W.: As for your last question, it is a very kind one: I hope to live 10 years more, but I can't be sure. I live from day to day, and don't think about the next day. I don't think I still have time to explore other areas, nor do I have the energy. Younger, I would certainly have turned to digital painting, or even animation or 3D. It would have been a logical step. But I'll be content to continue my little way to the end. :)

The talent, the skill, the kind heart and strength as a mentor...there are so many positives to artist Anne Wipf that it is not a stretch for me to declare that even Monet would have fallen in love with her work. For more information, and to see this incredible woman's creations, visit <https://www.deviantart.com/annewipf>. ■

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## Staking Territory:

# KAREN KATCHUR

## on “*The Cold Woods*” of *Northampton County*

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



**K**aren Katchur may be a new name to mystery enthusiasts, but her fascination with the whos, whys, and wheres of crime is longstanding. After a childhood spent exploring the great outdoors of Pennsylvania (and the streets of nearby New York City), she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from West Chester University and interned at a district attorney's office. Though Katchur, who also holds a Masters of Education degree from East Stroudsburg University, ultimately decided not to pursue a career in law enforcement, that background proved fertile when she began writing novels.

The wife and mother's first two books—"The Secrets of Lake Road" (2015) and "The Sisters of Blue Mountain" (2017)—were marketed as women's fiction but mined the darker undertones of mystery/suspense. Last year, Katchur completed her rebranding as a crime genre author by joining Amazon's Thomas & Mercer imprint, which published "River Bodies." Both a bestseller and an *Entertainment Weekly* New and Notable selection, the book launched her *Northampton County* series featuring Detective Parker Reed, whose beat includes the Pennsylvania territory of Katchur's youth.

The series' second entry, "Cold Woods" (August), revisits Det. Reed in the aftermath of trauma. Now partnered with the distractingly attractive Geena Brassard, he's tasked with investigating a thirty-year-old cold case when a human skull is unearthed in the Blue Mountains, not far off the Appalachian Trail. Enter Vegas socialite Trisha, whose unexpected homecoming marks a reunion with her mother and the two girlfriends she skipped town on decades before. The secrets they've carried are about to be revealed, exposing a truth more complicated than anybody knows.

Now, Karen Katchur reveals the depths of "Cold Woods"...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): "Cold Woods" is the second book in your *Northampton County* series, following "River Bodies." Tell us about the construction of this saga, and how this allows each story to stand alone while adding to the overall tapestry.

Karen Katchur (K.K.): *When I set out to write the series, I knew it was going to be a little different than the typical detective mystery. I purposely called the series, Northampton County, rather than Parker Reed and Geena Brassard, or Reed and Brassard. My goal was to explore how crime impacts more than just law enforcement. I didn't want the stories to be just about Parker, or his new partner, Geena. I wanted to write about how crime affects the victims, their families and friends, and entire communities.*

Having the series set up this way, gives me the freedom and flexibility to play around with new characters and also gives them the opportunity to take center stage. For this reason, the books can be read as standalones.

In “Cold Woods,” it’s the three friends that become the main characters. I got the idea for the book from the quote, “A good friend will help you move, but a best friend will help you bury a body.” There are several variations out there, but you get the idea. I wanted to write about the kind of friendship between women that lasts a lifetime. And to do that, I felt the friendship had to start when they were kids. There’s something special about childhood friends. They know you like no one else can ever know you. They sleep over at your house, eat meals with your family, go on family vacations with you. They get to see what your life is like from the inside. How many times can we say that as we get older? Friends we meet later in life only know us from what we show them, what we tell them. They don’t live inside the walls of our home to truly see what is going on behind closed doors. But childhood friends see it first-hand, and I built my characters around this belief. I didn’t sugarcoat the friendship. It’s not always perfect. But I tried to create characters that are real, and that care for and protect each other no matter the cost. I wrote most of the past chapters first, and later went back and wrote the present-day chapters. Some of the chapters were written out of order. It was all very messy, and it took me a long time to put it together. I don’t advise anyone to do it this way if they can help it. Unfortunately, this seems to be my process.

J.B.V.: Here, we revisit homicide detective Parker Reed, who has been assigned a thirty-year-old cold case. How did the events of “River Bodies” influence his current circumstances—and in what ways is Becca Kingsley still a presence, despite being a more peripheral figure in this book?

K.K.: In “River Bodies,” Parker is a rookie detective whose first case as lead takes him to his hometown of Portland. When a man commits suicide in front of him, it takes a toll on him. He’s still learning how to compartmentalize the job emotionally and mentally. His struggles carry over into “Cold Woods,” and for this reason he’s assigned to a cold case where the body isn’t “fresh.” His lieutenant also gives him the miserable assignment of having to sit on the cold mountain as punishment for getting involved with a witness (Becca) in the last case.

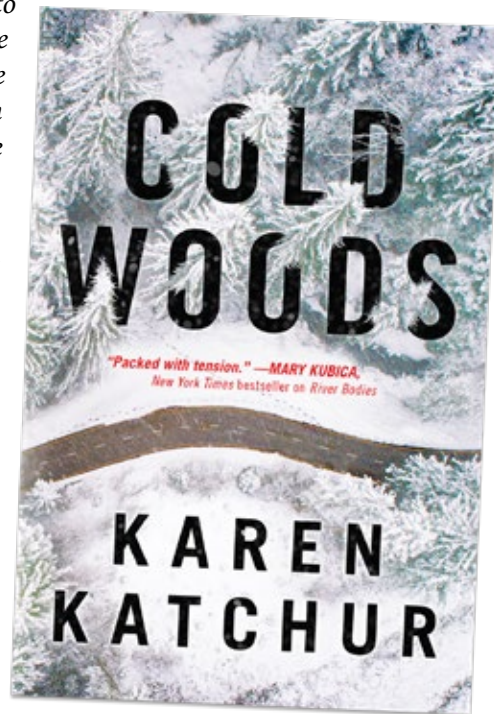
As for Becca, she’s Parker’s best friend, although their relationship has drifted into something more, but not without complications. Her presence will be felt throughout the series, and we’ll just have to wait and see where it goes.

J.B.V.: The narrative alternates time periods, and centers on three childhood friends who are reunited as adults with secrets to keep. In what ways does this set-up serve to maximize character development—and how does the juxtaposition of past/present heighten the overall suspense?

K.K.: We are the sum of our experiences, and the past influences who we are today. In order to understand the predicament the characters encounter in the present day, I needed to understand what led them to their current circumstance. Going back and forth between past and present was the only way I knew how to tell their story. I think it’s important to show the reader the depth of their friendship in the chapters written in the past, to fully empathize with who they are as adults. In terms of suspense, it’s a fun way to shuffle the pieces of the puzzle around to raise the stakes.

J.B.V.: You explore physical/sexual abuse and its consequences throughout the story. What was your research process like to capture the nuances of such traumas—and how did you endeavor to balance the realities of abuse with sensitivity in your rendering?

*“We are the sum of our experiences, and the past influences who we are today.”*





K.K.: Decades ago, I was an intern in a district attorney's office. One of the cases they were working on at the time was a rape case. I remember sitting in the courtroom listening to this brave woman tell her story, again. I had heard it before the trial had started, and each time she told it, my heart broke a little more. In the end, the man accused of raping her was found not guilty. I was young, devastated, emotionally exhausted, and I was angry. I struggled processing all these complicated emotions. I couldn't comprehend how the system could've failed her so horribly. If I was feeling all these things as a bystander, a mere witness, imagine what she was feeling. All these years later, I still think about her. I've never forgotten her. I hope she has been able to move on and is living a happy life.

When I sat down to write "Cold Woods," I tried to write from a place where my feelings for this woman and her circumstance originated. I tried to understand what it was like to be trapped and alone at a time when the system was ill-equipped to help or protect women suffering from domestic violence and sexual assault. A lofty goal, for sure. I'm not sure I accomplished what I set out to do. I hope I did.

J.B.V.: You use the Pennsylvania mountains as your backdrop. In your opinion, how does setting enhance story—and in what ways does season (winter) underscore the tone you were looking to establish?

K.K.: I love talking about setting! Setting is often a character itself in some of my favorite books. Whenever you're dealing with nature, in this case a mountain, there's an underlying danger in that anything can go wrong. I knew in "Cold Woods," I wanted to capture what it was like living in Pennsylvania during a particularly cold and snowy winter. The weather can work for or against the detectives trying to solve the case. It can also screw with the person(s) trying to commit and get away with a crime. I had to research how a person would go about burying a body with 6 to 12 inches of frost. It's not easy digging, that's for sure. And I had to learn how the cold and the mountain terrain could affect the decomposition of human remains, especially after thirty years. Part of the fun for me is researching how nature plays a role in crime and figuring out a way for the characters to navigate through these challenges.

J.B.V.: You have a background in Criminal Justice (and Education). In what ways are you able to draw on this expertise to inform your work—and how much creative license will you allow yourself for the sake of storytelling?

K.K.: So much has changed in the field of criminal justice since I've been in school. However, I have a solid foundation as to how the system works, for better or worse, and I'm able to build off of that. Talking with experts in their fields is a tremendous help. That said, I admit that sometimes I struggle coming up with creative ways for my characters to get around certain protocols. I'm a realist. There's a right way of doing things! But that doesn't always make for an interesting read. My detectives take way more liberties in their job than they would in the real world. It bothers me when they don't follow the correct procedures, but again the story has to be interesting, or why read it? I end up having to tell myself to get over it.

J.B.V.: Your earlier books are generally classified as women's fiction. Why did you choose to transition to mainstream suspense—and how have you found that the former influences the latter?

K.K.: I'm glad you asked this question. Honestly, it's more about the marketing than it is about the stories. My earlier books can easily fall under the mystery/suspense genre. But the publisher at the time was trying for a women's fiction/book club audience. So the titles and book covers were marketed to target that crowd. When I switched publishers, I wanted to be marketed as mystery/suspense, not because the way I tell stories has changed, but because I have more creative freedom under the genre. I describe my books as part police procedural and part character-driven crime fiction. I can lean one way or the other without worrying about being boxed in.

J.B.V.: Leave us with a teaser: What comes next?

K.K.: Recently, I turned in book 3 in the series, and I'm waiting for developmental edits. It's titled, "Spring Girls," and scheduled for release in June 2020. Instead of Parker's point of view, the reader will get to hear from his partner, Geena Brassard. I don't have an official blurb, but it's about a series of rapes and murders that occur in spring. The cases forced Geena's old partner into retirement for reasons that aren't clear. The investigation leads Geena to Janey, a single mom struggling to raise her six-year-old son. There's something about Janey's son that she doesn't dare share. How can she help the detective without exposing her secret?

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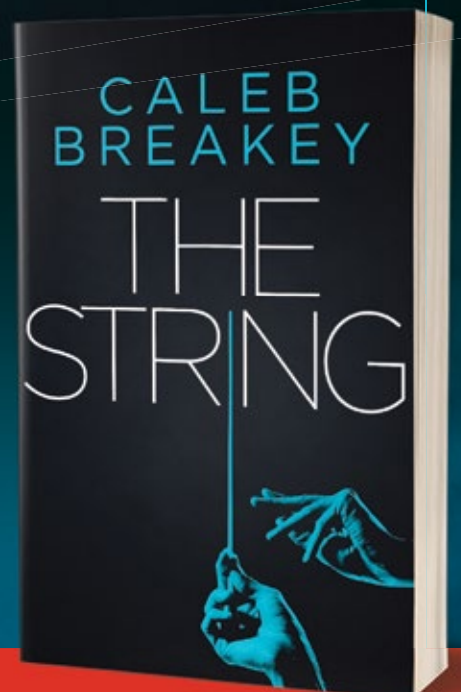
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# ADRIAN McKINTY

## ON "THE CHAIN": A BOOK THAT ALMOST NEVER WAS

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Leah Garrett



**A**drian McKinty is an Irish crime novelist and critic born in Northern Ireland. He introduced the world to his incredible talent with the 2003 debut crime novel, “Dead I Well May Be.” This was the first book in his *Michael Forsythe Trilogy*; he went on to publish other books, including the *Sean Duffy* series. Adrian has won a host of awards, including the Edgar Award, the Ned Kelly Award, the Barry Award, the Audie Award, and the Anthony Award.

But it was just recently that, after having vowed to give up writing for good, Adrian penned “The Chain.” Rave reviews followed, and the book claimed a spot on a variety of bestseller lists, including *The New York Times*. In addition, “The Chain” also hit the bigtime!

What follows is a very special interview that Adrian gave to *Beyond the Cover* co-hosts, John Raab and Jeff Ayers, only a few hours after being given the amazing news that the rights to his stellar book, “The Chain,” were sold to Paramount for seven figures.

John Raab (J.R.): Welcome, Adrian! You have a fantastic story to tell and I want *everyone* to hear it. Let us begin with “The Chain.” Can you tell

our readers about the book and how it came to be?

Adrian McKinty (A.M.): *It's a pleasure to be here. So. Just imagine...You are driving in your car. You have just dropped your daughter off at a school bus stop and you get a phone call. A frantic stranger tells you that “they” have kidnapped your daughter. You think that's impossible, but they send you a picture on the camera phone and it is most definitely her. You ask, why would someone do this? The stranger goes into a frightening explanation that your daughter has been abducted by an organization called “The Chain.” This stranger abducted your daughter because her son had also been abducted, and the only way to get her son released was to pay the ransom AND replace him with another in “the chain.” It will work the same way for you. In order to get your daughter back, you must pay the ransom, but also abduct a child and replace your daughter with another. This is the system of this organization. If you do not follow the rules, or go to the police for help, the organization will kill your child and move on to someone else.*

*So it starts off where my protagonist is most definitely a victim, but then they must become a kidnapper (a criminal), and an enforcer for “The Chain.”*

*Behind all of this is an organization that is completely in the shadows and absolutely frightening. You believe, 100%, they will do the terrible things they claim they will do to anyone and at any time a person tries to defect or break the rules. So it's like*

the “uber” of kidnapping. All the clients do all the work and the people behind “the chain” just keep getting richer.

It is different from Ransom, where Mel Gibson was a millionaire; and Taken, where Liam Neeson had a “special set of skills.” My protagonist is a woman who has no special skills at all. Just an ordinary woman living in Boston and gets involuntarily inducted into this terrifying, awful experience.

Jeff Ayers (J.A.): She also has a great deal of physical and emotional issues going on, correct?

A.M.: *That’s right. She’s also getting over a divorce, she’s a single mom, she’s a cancer survivor, and she doesn’t have a lot of money. So she has a lot of external pressures, as well. This is the last thing she needs. But, mind you, this is not a doom and gloom book. This is a book where an ordinary person is put in an extreme situation. She has to deal with psychological, emotional, and moral conundrums but somehow has to look deep within herself and meet the challenges. She must rise above, while also succumbing to these moral pressures and making these tough decisions.*

J.A.: I have to ask...because I love this book. It is such a cool premise. I was worried about the payoff but then it was fantastic. When did you know the payoff and how cool that was going to be in the end?

A.M.: *I knew the story all the way to the bottom of the first act when I began. Basically, when I was a kid, I remember this story from Greek mythology about Demeter and Persephone. Demeter’s daughter, Persephone, is kidnapped and taken down to Hell. Demeter literally goes into Hell to rescue her daughter from the abyss. But when she brings her out, Persephone leaves a little of herself behind. Which is why the Greeks believe they have winter and have to suffer the barren season. Because Persephone is the Goddess of Fertility, and some of her is literally left behind in the darkness, it’s like a curse on the Greek people.*

*One of the things that bugged me about the kidnapping stories out there is that when the story ends, the victim and the rescuer are reunited. And then, usually, the music swells and you get the credits. I always thought: “Okay, but what happens the next day, the next week, the next month? I wanted more. I wanted a story where maybe you would get a reunited scene, but then you would have to do terrible things after that. So down to the bottom of the first act I knew those terrible things and what would happen after. But this is a book where the characters go through the proverbial ringer. Bad things happen and the reader thinks at one point: “Okay. Well at least it can’t get any worse.” But then they turn the page and realize it can.*

*That stuff, I wrote really quickly. The final act of the book is what I had to really work for. I wanted an ending that would be logical and work in terms of the universe; I also wanted*

**“I was actually making more money working in a bar and being a delivery driver than I ever made in the writing world.”**

*to challenge the reader but not cheat the reader. I didn’t want anyone to groan or complain. I wanted it to be logical steps to an ending. So, the first 150 pages is like an out of control, runaway train. The last 150 pages, or so, are more me moving the chess pieces around in order to control the story.*

J.R.: The one thing that intrigues me about stories like this is how a writer can put people in these situations that they’ve, of course, never lived in, and be able to express these emotions to such a fantastic magnitude like you did here.

A.M.: *Thank you for that. Actually, I know Lee Child and have interviewed him a couple of times. He has this thing... this system. He sticks to the story no matter what, he says. No matter how drunk he is. (LOL.) He says: I start with the blank page, I write the page or page and a half, and then read it the next day. Then, I am totally surprised with what happens next. I always interrogated him. I said that he must have had SOME kind of outline in his head, even if it wasn’t on paper. But he claims it’s the truth; he writes by the seat of his pants and never plans anything ahead of time.*

*I’ve never done that before. I always have an outline, I know what’s going to happen in the chapters every time I start writing one. With “The Chain,” however, I did not write the outline down. I kept a small plan in my head, but I didn’t have to ‘stick’ to anything. I allowed myself freedom. I found that to be a lot more incredible, but also more emotionally harrowing because there were things that happened that I didn’t realize were going to happen.*

*I would write into the wee hours, go to bed late, wake up the next morning and find myself rushing to the computer to “see” what was going to happen next because I just HAD to know. This one was a lot more draining but, at the same time, a lot more emotionally fulfilling. So, when the book ended, and I ended it with the characters, I think I wrote the last sentence, saved the file, and literally burst into tears. I just cried for about 15 minutes, alone in my room, and felt like an idiot. But it was such an emotional roller-coaster ride and I was not 100% sure about what was going to happen until the very end. I used to think that was a lie when writers said that. You’re the author; a character can’t surprise you. But now I know they weren’t lying because that definitely happened to me with this book. A character would do a surprising thing and I would be taken aback. I was stunned. I suppose a headline that can be leached*



from this is, "Lee Child is not a liar after all!"

J.A.: I have to ask. I heard that before you began "The Chain" you had basically given up on writing altogether. What was the trigger that kept you going?

A.M.: Yeah...I had been writing books and it was a very peculiar situation. I grew up reading a lot of noir: Chandler, Hammett, Thompson—and I loved those books. The only thing I ever wanted to be was a noir writer. (If I could have been born in the 1930's, I would have.)

I was setting my novels in Belfast and it was a great location for noir. Rainy, shadows, a low level civil war taking place with soldiers on the streets, people smoking and drinking heavily all the time. But I soon found out that kind of setting just wasn't selling. Nobody was buying these books. They would come out, get good reviews, win a couple of awards along the way, but the sales figures were nothing. I tried this for years. What's the definition of insanity? Trying the same thing over and over again but yielding the same horrible results. I got broker and broker. I said to the missus: "I give up. I gave it my best shot, but I'm done." I wrote six books and it didn't work out. She was opposed, but we were in dire financial straits.

I'd been working as a teacher before. I had a great job and she had one, too. We had a double income and were doing great, but I lost that when I turned to writing. I wasn't being a responsible parent. I mean, the wife was working so hard and I was this "artist" following some dream. I was getting applauded, but it didn't help. I remember I won the Edgar Award—the summit of my profession—the Oscar, if you will. I remember being so happy, but then got a financial statement at the end of the year and I'd made like \$2,000 dollars. I basically figured I was on some massive ego trip and it was time to stop. So I wrote this blog post that basically said, "I'm sorry, guys. I'm going back to full-time employment. Maybe a couple of years from now I'll come back and write another one." But, basically...I had given up.

J.R.: So, that leads me to a question: You had won the Edgar but it didn't translate into sales. Something that Jeff and I have talked about before. Do you then really care if you get awards anymore?

A.M.: Oh, sure. At the time it was huge to me.

J.R.: Now?

A.M.: It still is great, because you're getting the respect of your peers. But if it's a choice of winning an award or making a living, I will choose the living every day. I've seen what it's like when the money runs out. You know your mantle shelf is full of prizes but you're wondering what you're going to do to pay the rent bill. It's no contest then. Now that I've seen that side of it, I would rather sell books than win prizes any day of the week.

J.R.: Since you gave up and you were basically done, why "The Chain"?

A.M.: Well, we ended up getting evicted from our house. When we were evicted, all our possessions were dumped on the sidewalk. I was looking at my two little daughters who were utterly confused. They had no idea what was happening to us. Our family and friends rallied around us, offered help—everybody was there for us. But I just felt like the worst dad in the world. I had failed my two little girls and my wife and thought I was a real schmuck!

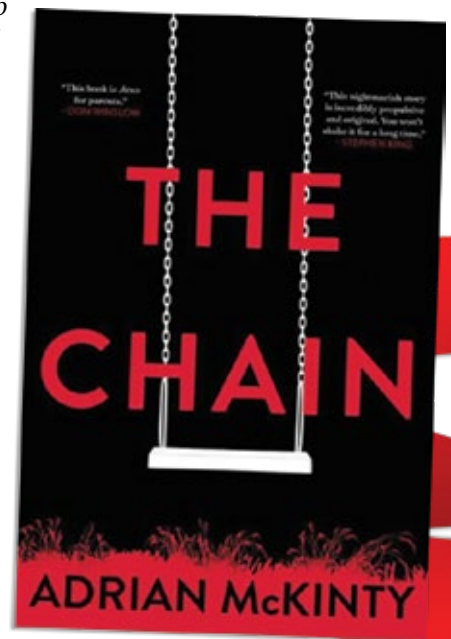
I got a job at a bar and one as an Uber driver. And I was happy. I was bringing in money. I was actually making more money working in a bar and being a delivery driver than I ever made in the writing world. I also had re-attained a little bit of self-respect.

Out of the blue, I get a phone call. I was living in Melbourne, Australia at the time and the call came in from America. It was author Don Winslow. I'd met him once for about five minutes at a conference and I had no idea how he got my number, so I was surprised. He told me that he'd read my blog. I was like: "YOU? You read my stupid blog?" He said that he'd read what I wrote about giving up on writing and asked why. I told him the whole story and he asked if I would mind if he passed along one of my books to an agent friend of his, Shane Salerno.

I said "okay," and a couple of weeks go by. One day, at one o'clock in the morning, I had just returned home from an Uber run. (I had taken a drunk guy to the airport and he'd been sick over the back of the car.) I was home and literally hosing off the car in my driveway at one a.m. when the phone rings. It was Shane.

He introduces himself as Don Winslow's agent and told me that I was super-talented. He started the "agent spiel" about all I needed was a good agent to get this started. I was thinking that the guy was two months too late. I told him that I meant no disrespect, but I was hanging up. It was late and I wanted to get some sleep.

When I get in the house, he calls AGAIN. He states that he understands I'd been writing this series of mysteries, but the audience is narrow because of the geography and time frame. He said it was hard to sell to an American or British



**"I refused again, but then he said that he would wire \$10,000 dollars into my account right then if I would write the book and not put it off."**

audience. He then asked me if I had an "American" story. Now, I had been mulling over "The Chain" for three or four years. But I told him that this was no time to write it because of my financial situation, but that maybe one day I would.

He said: "Pitch me the story! Just pitch me the story." So...I did. He's in his kitchen in Hollywood and I hear him drop something—a jug, I think—and it smashes on the floor. He was excited and told me that I had to write the book right then! I refused again, but then he said that he would wire \$10,000 dollars into my account right then if I would write the book and not put it off.

I said: "No. I'm not taking charity, I have no idea who you are."

He basically told me that it was not charity and I needed to get over the pride thing. He told me it was an advance on the book. I thought he was nuts. I said that he clearly knew nothing about my career because I'd never had a \$10,000 advance in my life. He shrugs it off and says something like, "you will, you will."

So I sat down to write the first chapter and ended up writing the first thirty pages. Which are basically still the original thirty pages in the published book now. They were unedited. He calls back and said he wanted to be my agent, the money was on its way, and "Let's write this!" I basically say, "Whatever, man." And I go to bed. I wake up wondering if I had some crazy dream or nightmare. But I wake to see ten emails from Shane and another five or so from Don. I was a little scared. I thought: "What did I just do?!" So...I ended up writing "The Chain." That's how they hooked me. Like Pacino in *Godfather III* when he said: "Just when I thought I was out...they pull me back in!" LOL.

Truth is, though, you can tell from reading the book that I had an absolute ball. This project was so much fun to do, so emotional, and so over the top.

J.A.: I have to say...we're recording this interview on June 18<sup>th</sup> (and we will be transcribing it for the *Suspense Magazine* fall issue). And, today, there was a huge announcement. You just received a few hours ago a contract with Paramount for the movie rights of "The Chain." A seven-figure deal. Congratulations!

A.M.: Thank you so much. I'm still...flying.

J.A. How did that come together?

A.M.: Well, I mean, I scoffed at Shane about \$10,000 dollars and him telling me at that time the money was only a small fraction of what I would be getting with this book. So this is huge.

But when the writing was finished by last summer, the first house we sent the book to signed it. Of course, you still don't know if it will do any good. But then...they took it to the Frankfurt Book Fair. I've had books there before and done small sales, like French rights for 800 euros, etc. But when they went with "The Chain," I didn't hear anything when they came back. So, I figured they didn't sell any rights whatsoever. But then I got a phone call. A phone call with everybody... which was confusing to me. Six different people were on it who I'd never heard of. Shane begins and starts talking about the foreign rights. And I said, "Oh yeah? How did it go?" I was thinking that this was either going to be really good news or really terrible news.

Shane said that they were able to sell it in a "few" territories. And I said: "How many is that?" It was 35 countries for "The Chain." That's when I began to realize that this book might be something special.

J.R.: Yeah, I think you did better than two grand.

A.M.: LOL. Somewhat. I mean, before, I would sell maybe 300 copies in Belfast and 100 in London—and that would account for my total sales for the year. With this, after they'd printed up the galleys, we had phones ringing off the hooks from production companies. Paramount basically called us last week. Now, I grew up in the 70s and 80s, and when Paramount calls, all you can think of is *The Godfather* connection. I was like a kid. I told Shane I would be so happy to be with the company who made the greatest movie of all time. My agent was like, "Don't say that. Play hard to get, for god's sake."

So we got this news today, only a few hours ago, and it was so exciting for me. Not just for the money, which will be awesome. But also to be part of that Paramount heritage. It makes me excited to be in the same lot as these guys. I mean, I worship them...especially *The Godfather*.

J.R.: It is one of those that, no matter when it's on, you click on the channel and watch it straight through.

A.M.: Exactly. I mean, I've seen it so many times that I actually think I understand Sicilian now. LOL.

J.R.: This is so cool that you found out only a few hours ago. I mean, your wife has probably called up the school and said it's my time to quit.

A.M.: I just told the kids a couple of hours ago, too.



J.R.: And they immediately shouted “Disneyworld!”

J.A.: I’m dying to see who they cast now. There are some amazing roles in this book. I am desperate to see about Rachel and who they pick. Can I ask, is part of your deal that you have a say in stuff like that?

A.M.: *Actually, no. They buy the option and completely own the book for two years.*

J.R.: So, in two years, it has to be in production or the rights revert back?

A.M.: *Exactly. I mean, I hope they ask my opinions about stuff. That would be nice. They’ll hopefully ask me what I think about ‘X’ or ‘Y.’*

J.R.: I have heard it both ways. Some have some input. Some have zero. And I think you can tell by the movie what author got a say. I mean, Clive Cussler did not have a lot of input in *Sahara* in my opinion. And I definitely know that James Patterson couldn’t possibly have had input in *Along Came a Spider*. Because you don’t think that’s the way the writer wanted it to be perceived by the audience.

A.M.: *I agree. But then, other times, you probably don’t want a crazy author on board. Like, I doubt Ridley Scott would have wanted Phil Dick on the set of Blade Runner. I don’t think their personalities would have worked out. So it can work both ways. But I would love to give my opinion. I would also really love it if they could film it in Massachusetts where it’s set in the book. I mean, that area is so interesting and weird, and so important.*

*I did most of my research in the Newport Public Library. There is a guy in the H.P. Lovecraft book, “The Shadow,” who does his research in the same, and calls it the Newburyport Public Library in “The Shadow over Innsmouth.” The whole book takes place in this mythological landscape of Lovecraft and Salem. I suppose a good filmmaker could fake it somewhere else, but in Massachusetts there is that history of weirdness. You know things have been happening there for hundreds of years, which is why I set the book there, and I would love it if they set the film there, too.*

J.R.: So after this huge goal attained, are you feeling the pressure with your next book?

A.M.: *God, no! I feel like the pressure is off. I felt it before, when they were selling hardly any copies a year and I was desperate. So now, this is definitely the opposite. Now I feel relaxed. I want to write at my own pace. And I understand something now: when I decided to quit, I felt relaxed. When I started “The Chain,” I was opposed to doing the work. But then, because I was relaxed, when I sat down at the computer, I*

*felt like I wanted to do it. This will sound almost supernatural, but it felt like the story was told “through” me. When you’re calm, the story can just grab you and tell itself. It’s then that you know everything is hitting on all cylinders. The story is right, the flow is right—far different than being in terror of a deadline, or being kicked into the street. It’s better to work in an environment with no fear.*

*If you look at the old school film directors, they were either governed by love or by fear. The attitude on sets were opposite. Some were hideous, some were understanding, like a director that would ask the grip for their opinion. I believed at one time that the only way I could write was in fear. Now I’m the opposite. I’m at peace with myself.*

J.A.: You found the fun again. I have a social media idea for you. You should do a chain newsletter for this book.

A.M.: *Scare the bejesus out of people?*

J.A.: Exactly. And with all this we’ve talked about, I’m curious. Do you have plans to bring back Sean Duffy and his series at some point?

A.M.: *Actually, yes. I have a new American publisher now: Blackstone. They’re fantastic and they want another Sean Duffy, so I’m writing another for them. I also have a new British publisher, and I am definitely going to do at least two more of those noir books. I just love writing them...the fashion, the foods—everything pops. Now, if people would read them that would be the icing on the cake.*

J.A.: Oh, I think people will discover you with “The Chain,” and go back and read them.

A.M.: *That would be my dream. My life literally changed in three seconds today. TODAY! I’m still tripping on it.*

J.R.: I’m glad we could share this with you. Tell our readers about where they can find you out there in the social media world.

A.M.: *The best places are the Little, Brown and Company site ([www.littlebrown.com](http://www.littlebrown.com)); and the imprint, Mulholland Books ([www.mulhollandbooks.com](http://www.mulhollandbooks.com)). My Twitter page is good and is usually always updated, and my website which is [www.officialadrianmckinty.com](http://www.officialadrianmckinty.com) is a good way to go. If you Google me, the first up will most likely be my blog because I really am a constant blogger.*

J.R.: Adrian, again, it was a true pleasure meeting you and we are so happy for you and your family. We wish you nothing but the best. Now go party like it’s 1999! (LOL.)

A.M.: *Thank you, guys! ■*

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# Daryl Wood Gerber on Writing

## THE CHALLENGE OF WRITING IN TWO GENRES: COZY MYSTERY & SUSPENSE

By Daryl Wood Gerber  
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When I first started out as an author, I focused on writing suspense novels and thrillers. I received a lot of positive feedback for my style, characters, and dialogue, but when it came down to it, agents said they simply couldn't "sell" what I'd written. None seemed to be able to put their finger on *why*. No agent gave me the same critique as another agent had.

Talk about frustrated! After writing six books, I was about ready to quit writing altogether when a friend suggested I try my hand at a cozy mystery. I'd read many. I'd enjoyed them. In the current market, they had "hooks" that often made them easier to sell. Cozies dealt with small town murders featuring amateur sleuths. Solving the whodunit puzzle mattered. Many used humor to tell the tale. Think *Murder, She Wrote* and you've got the idea.

Feeling emboldened, I tried my hand at one and sent it off to an agent I'd met at a conference. She loved it but didn't think she could sell the "theme or hook" that I'd come up with and asked what else I had. I had crafted a few ideas and asked if I could send her a couple of chapters for each of my ideas. Writing another complete book only to be turned down felt too daunting. Surprisingly, she said yes. So I did. Sadly, she didn't think she could sell any of those, either. Like previous agents, she couldn't put her finger on *why*.

By this time, I was not only ready to quit writing, I was ready to pull out my hair and go bald. Create a new look; a new me. I wondered whether wrestling alligators would be easier to do than publishing a book.

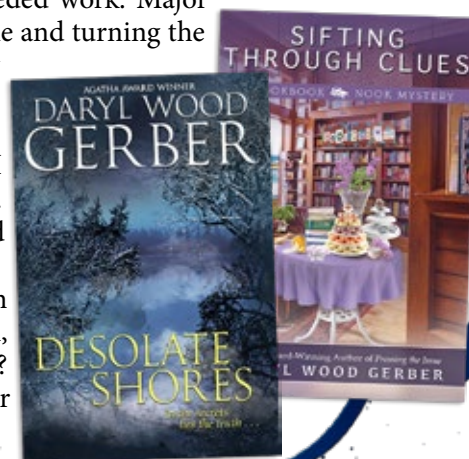
But then, out of the blue, the aforementioned agent wrote me and said a publisher wanted a series about a cheese shop. Did I think I could write that? Yes, of course I could. I used to cater. I was a cook. I ate cheese. I wrote the requisite pages with gusto and I won the contract. As it turned out, I had a knack for writing cozies. My voice fit the genre. That contract set me on a path to write cozy mysteries for many years.

But my heart still yearned to return to my roots and write suspense. I just had to find the right story, the right tone.

So after having worked with excellent editors for my cozies, I pulled out a previous manuscript and took a fresh look while channeling their editorial suggestions. Needless to say, the manuscript needed work. Major work. It needed more *suspense*. In order to keep the reader uncertain of the outcome and turning the pages, I removed multiple viewpoints and narrowed the focus. The reader could only know what the protagonist knew. Next, I kept throwing obstacles at my protagonist. Anything to put her in danger or make her take another action. When I finished the manuscript, I sent it to an independent book editor. With her notes in mind, I rewrote the manuscript at least ten times. On each pass, the book became tighter. More polished. Suspenseful. A year later, it was published and positive reviews flowed in.

So is it a challenge to write in two genres? Yes. I must always keep my audience in mind. What do they expect from this book? A lighthearted whodunit or a suspenseful, can't-put-it-down read? How will I accomplish that? What choice of words will I use? Will I or won't I employ humor? Will the setting matter? Will the names I choose for my characters make a difference? I consider every angle and then I begin.

And then I fret over whether my readers will read across genre...but that's a topic for another day. ■



Agatha Award-winning and nationally bestselling author Daryl Wood Gerber ventures into the world of suspense again with her latest novel, "Desolate Shores." Daryl writes the bestselling culinary cozy mystery, the Cookbook Nook Mysteries, with another cozy series coming in 2020. As Avery Aames, she wrote the Cheese Shop Mysteries. Fun Tidbit: as an actress, Daryl appeared in *Murder, She Wrote*. She has also jumped out of a perfectly good airplane and hitchhiked around Ireland by herself. Learn More at [www.darylwoodgerber.com](http://www.darylwoodgerber.com).

# ENOUGH!

## (Or... Please Stop Over-Writing)



By Dennis Palumbo  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

There's a great moment in the classic film *Key Largo*, when gangster Edward G. Robinson is asked—given the extent of his wealth and power—what he could possibly still want. “More,” he famously answers.

*More.* Kind of the American credo in a nutshell, which isn't as damning as it sounds. The word “more,” when appearing before such other words as, individual rights, artistic freedom and access to information, stands as a proud aspect of the Western experiment. On the downside, “more” has also fueled global climate change, the growing gulf between people's incomes, and an almost obscene preoccupation with material things. When it comes to life in general, “more” is definitely a double-edged sword.

I'd argue that the same holds true with the craft of writing. *More* is not always better. In any novel or short story, an overwritten patch of description can bring the reader's interest to a screeching halt. Endless words of description—whether of place, a character's physical appearance, or in the service of the author's thematic or philosophical interests—can slow the narrative to a crawl.

Or, take monologues. Unless used sparingly, and with a definite intent, a monologue (especially in a film or TV script) can often make the character just seem wordy. Exceptions abound, of course. Such powerhouse screenwriters as Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Serling and Quentin Tarantino come to mind. And even they occasionally fell prey to mere self-indulgence. As did novelists William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, and Henry James. Then again, nobody's perfect.

Overwriting, it's safe to say, is by general agreement a bad thing. Then why do so many writers do it?

Let's be clear: I'm not talking about the normal, expected overwriting that characterizes your first draft. During those explosive, flowing, unfolding bursts of creativity, your inner editor is—I sincerely hope—asleep at the switch until you get the myriad of ideas, incidents, breath-taking narrative leaps and beside-the-point stretches of dialogue, down. The first draft is when you *do* get to describe a character as “grungy, foul-smelling, disheveled,

*More.* Kind of the  
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as damning as it  
sounds.



Overwriting, it's safe to say, is by general agreement a bad thing. Then why do so many writers do it?

FROM TONY HILLERMAN AWARD WINNER

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knuckle-dragging and poorly-dressed." You can even add, "We are repulsed. Taken aback. Aghast. The eye wants to turn away." The more socially-conscious might go even one step further: "A grim reminder of the dismantling of the welfare system's safety net in the past forty years."

No matter. All that hokey gets edited out in later drafts. Or should. Yet, for some writers, it feels like tearing a piece of their skin away to delete any of it. Why? Is it because they think every word is golden? Hardly. *In fact, it's the reverse.*

In my experience with the writer patients in my therapy practice, those who tend to overwrite are usually struggling, whether they know it or not, with issues of self-trust. Either they don't feel entitled to be writing in the first place and thus need a cornucopia of words to try to mask this; or else they feel unsure of their talent and craft. If the latter is the case, these writers try to convince the reader of the legitimacy of the scene being depicted by packing it with adjectives, metaphors and authorial asides. Anything—and everything—to make sure the reader *gets* it.

On the other hand, writers who trust their skills and/or feel entitled to be writing at all have faith in the narrative and emotional power of the single appropriate phrase, the short though vivid description, the seemingly simple line of dialogue freighted with meaningful subtext.

The ancient poet Gensei wrote: "The point in life is to know what's enough." That's the point in writing, as well. Not only does self-trust enable writers to shape their work into its most effective, compelling form, but such writing also has enough "air" in it to allow readers to bring their own experiences to what they're reading, thus increasing the work's relevancy.

In other words, good writing is what is evoked in the spaces between the written lines. Good writers have enough trust in themselves to know that there's something there, and that they've written enough (but just enough) to convey the thought that sparks the echoing thought in the reader's mind. They've portrayed enough of the character's emotional life to resonate with similar aspects of the reader's inner world. A single descriptive word, such as "barren" or "elated" or "remorseless," can bring with it a wealth of associations to thoughts, feelings and images waiting to be stirred into life in the reader's imagination.

How do writers develop self-trust? The way we do in most other aspects of life. By doing. Writing. Risking that our readers will follow us where we're going; believing that what we have to say, or what we've always felt, or what we openly fear or yearn for, will find a recognizable home in the reader's heart. Self-trust, like it or not, is born of risk. As are most worthwhile things.

Ultimately, if you believe that the writer you are is enough, you'll believe that what you're writing is enough, too. ■

Formerly a Hollywood screenwriter (My Favorite Year; Welcome Back, Kotter, etc.), Dennis Palumbo is 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." His series of mystery thrillers (the latest of which, "Head Wounds," was named a "Best of 2018" by SUSPENSE MAGAZINE) features Daniel Rinaldi, a psychologist and trauma expert who consults with the Pittsburgh Police.

For more info, visit [www.dennispalumbo.com](http://www.dennispalumbo.com).



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## *Holiday Hijinks:*

# LESLIE MEIER

## *on “Haunted House Murder” & the Evolution of Lucy Stone/Tinker’s Cove*

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Stephanie Foster

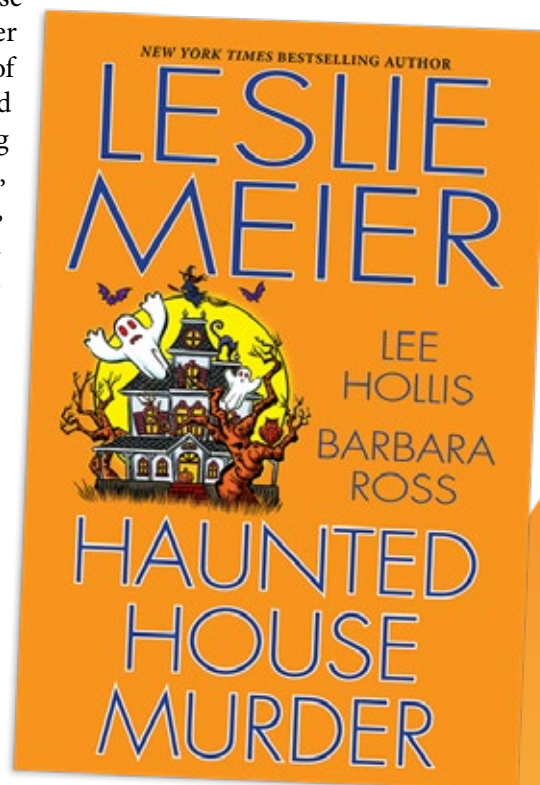


*New York Times* bestselling author Leslie Meier is the proof that no holiday would be complete without some hijinks. After all, she’s now published twenty-five novels and several short stories featuring intrepid reporter/amateur sleuth/domestic diva Lucy Stone, the majority of which have played out against the backdrop of a seasonal celebration or other special occasion. Her newest is the titular novella in “Haunted House Murder,” an anthology that also features fellow writers Lee Hollis and Barbara Ross; it’s the trio’s third such collection following “Egg Nog Murder” (2016) and “Yule Log Murder” (2018).

In “Haunted House Murder,” Lucy—wife, mother of four, and grandmother of one—finds herself embroiled in a mystery surrounding Ty and Heather Moon, newcomers to Tinker’s Cove, Maine who have just moved into a dilapidated home that’s rumored to be haunted. Despite her initial skepticism, the couple’s strange behavior coupled with flashing lights, odd noises, and screams in the dark, lead Lucy to believe

that something’s amiss—a suspicion that grows into dread when her young grandson goes missing, and was last seen entering the Moon’s house.

It’s a story firmly rooted in the ever-evolving personalities and politics that have comprised Tinker’s Cove since Lucy made her debut, first as a salesperson for a mail-order country store (in “Mistletoe Murder”) and later a reporter for the local newspaper, the *Pennysaver*. Lucy’s life largely mirrors the author’s own—well, minus the body count—both personally and professionally. Meier, who spent her early career working for various



newspapers on Cape Cod while raising her children, intended to teach high school English—until a professor encouraged her to submit one of her class submissions for publication. That story was bought by *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and the rest is cozy-centric history.

Now, Leslie Meier reflects on the growth of her beloved series—and offers a glimpse at what's yet to come...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): "Haunted House Murder" is your third collaborative anthology with Lee Hollis and Barbara Ross. What appeals to you about such collections—and how do you think readers benefit from being exposed to three authors for the price of one?

Leslie Meier (L.M.): *Well, being writers we work alone and don't really get to collaborate like painters or performing artists do. Somehow writing isn't a team sport! But I do value the anthologies because they introduce new authors, and give me a chance to give my readers a quick shot of Lucy in the form of a novella to tide them over until the next novel comes out.*

J.B.V.: You contribute the title story. What inspired this particular plot—and how do the seasonal flourishes enhance the underlying mystery?

L.M.: *Well, I actually had quite a different plot but my editor didn't like it, he thought it was too serious. My response was to come up with a more lighthearted story in which nobody actually dies, with a lot of seasonal details and fun. I was interested in the idea that people tend to see others through the lens of their own experience and values. That leads Lucy and most others in town to view newcomers Ty and Heather Moon in a completely erroneous way, which leads to some interesting complications when Lucy's grandson disappears.*

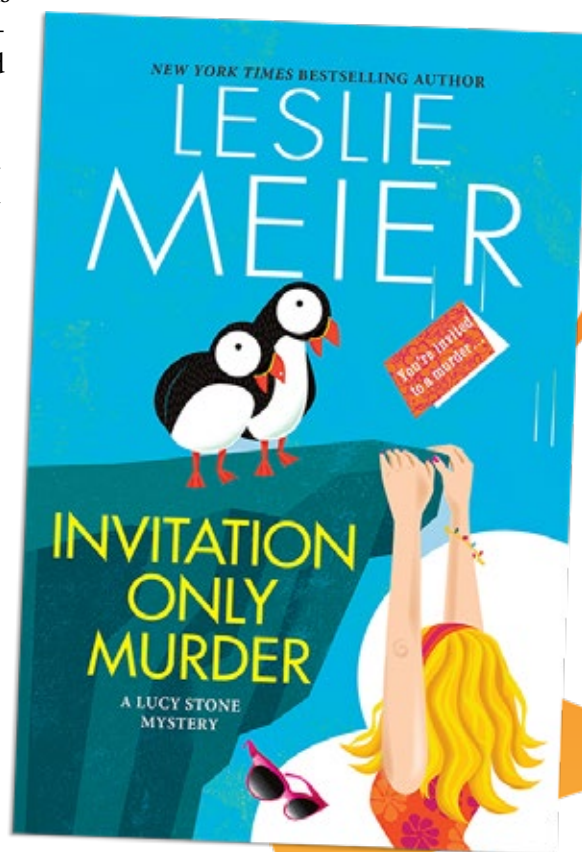
J.B.V.: How do you find the process of writing short stories featuring Lucy Stone to compare to full-length novels? Are there specific challenges and/or creative liberties in doing so?

L.M.: *I love novellas, which are only about 100 pages long. The short length gives me enough room to develop characters, but they really move along because I have to pack a lot in.*

J.B.V.: Speaking of Lucy: She's still going strong after twenty-five books (and a smattering of short stories). To what do you credit her longevity—and how do you feel that her character and circumstances have evolved over time?

L.M.: *I guess readers identify with Lucy, who is very much rooted in her family and town, and deals with the sort of kitchen table problems most people struggle with—maybe she should run for president! In the early books she had a young family and financial problems, and investigating crimes got her out of the house and gave her a way to fulfill herself, to go*

*"I'm human and I live in the world and I feel strongly about standing up for the things I believe in."*





*beyond the confines of motherhood and keeping house. As the kids have grown and Lucy began working as a newspaper reporter she's had more freedom, and a genuine rationale, for investigating. She's a lot more involved in the world, she's traveled to Europe, and she's grown more sophisticated. The advent of smart phones and social media has also impacted the stories...now if I want to build suspense by getting her in a dangerous situation she has to forget her phone, or lose it, or forget to charge it, so she can't just call for help!*

J.B.V.: Lucy has Bill and their ever-growing family to contend with. How does the inherent domestic drama serve to balance out the murder and mayhem? Conversely, how have Lucy's relations also helped to legitimize her sleuthing prowess?

L.M.: *When I started writing, most female sleuths were single women, oftentimes burdened with an issue like alcoholism, grief or romantic problems, but all I knew about writing was to write what I knew and that certainly wasn't me. I was happily married with three kids, and that's what I was interested in when I created Lucy. Sometimes she's gotten involved in an investigation to protect her family, in one of the books Bill was suspected of murder and Lucy had to clear him, other times the family interactions have provided a bit of humor and insight. When she has a conflict with her daughter-in-law, or one of her kids, readers can identify with that situation and it makes her seem more real.*

J.B.V.: Your books are generally classified as cozy mysteries, though you refer to them as “comedies of manners.” Can you elaborate on that distinction? Also, please discuss how you continue to push the confines of the cozy by exploring darker themes that reflect our collective reality?

L.M.: *Well, Lucy lives in a town with a lot of other people, and she's constantly interacting with them as fashions and trends change. Women were coming into the workforce in a big way when I started writing, so Franny Small became an entrepreneur. Real estate values began to soar, so I wrote about that. Conservation became a concern in New England, so I created the Association to Preserve Tinker's Cove. The MeToo movement gave me ideas I used in “Silver Anniversary Murder,” in which Lucy investigates the death of her maid of honor, a woman who endured various forms of abuse in a series of marriages. Racial bias and white supremacy have recently reared their ugly heads, and I tackled those issues in “Turkey Trot Murder,” which got me some rather nasty reviews for being too political. Sorry, but I'm human and I live in the world and I feel strongly about standing up for the things I believe in. I went to Sunday School as a girl, and I still go to church and I believe we should all love our neighbors as ourselves. I really don't think that's a radical political message.*

J.B.V.: Tinker's Cove is a fictitious community that could be reflective of any Small Town, USA. In what ways has place itself become a character within your series—and how does this suburban setting lend itself to the types of stories you want to tell?

L.M.: *Readers seem to favor the books that are set in Tinker's Cove, and really, who wouldn't want to live in such a charming, quaint little seaside town? Everybody knows everybody, nobody bothers to lock their door, and there's a murder every year to which the good townsfolk react by delivering covered dishes to the bereaved! I do love writing about Lucy's friends and neighbors, who some people think are fictionalized versions of my friends and neighbors. Wrong! They're composites—a little bit of this one, a little bit of that one, quite a lot of me. I worked for several years for small town newspapers on Cape Cod and I really got to know the towns I covered and they really did have different attitudes and personalities. Voters in one town were free spenders when it came to school budgets, others were tight-fisted. It was great training for writing my books, and I began to understand how local government influences the lives of citizens, which is a constant theme of mine. Of course, now I'm writing fiction, and back then I had to stick to the facts!*

J.B.V.: Leave us with a teaser: What comes next?

L.M.: *“Invitation Only Murder” is due out in December; it's a mystery set on an island which is something I've always wanted to try. It's a bit of a departure for me, as there's quite a lot of action in the form of explosions and fires which was terrific fun to write. The book I'm currently working on is about a St. Patrick's Day parade, and even though the parade takes place in Maine I'm traveling to Ireland later this month to research Irish culture—it's work, work, work for me!*

We'd like to thank Leslie for sitting down with us. To learn more, follow this very talented author at [www.lesliemeierbooks.com](http://www.lesliemeierbooks.com). ■

Devious Twists & Disturbing Secrets...  
Must Be A New Release From  
**KARIN SLAUGHTER**

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*

Press Photo Credit: Alison Rosa



Karin Slaughter just released her latest book, “The Last Widow,” which is yet another title that is sure to please all thriller fans. Karin’s more than 35 million copies sold across the globe are made up of nineteen novels, including: the *Grant County* and *Will Trent* series, as well as the Edgar-nominated “Cop Town” and the instant *New York Times* bestselling novels, “Pretty Girls” and “The Good Daughter.” In addition, “Cop Town,” “The Good Daughter” and “Pieces of Her” are all currently in development for film and television.

Her most recent, “The Last Widow,” features Sara Linton and Will Trent. A native of Georgia, Karin currently lives in Atlanta. It was great being able to spend some time with her. The interview you’re about to read first played on the Suspense Radio show *Beyond The Cover*, hosted by John Raab and Jeff Ayers.

But first, let’s check out a little snippet of what “The Last Widow” is all about....

***A mysterious kidnapping***

*On a hot summer night, a scientist from the Centers for Disease Control is grabbed by unknown assailants in a shopping center parking lot. The authorities are desperate to save the doctor who has vanished into thin air.*

***A devastating explosion***

*One month later, the serenity of a sunny Sunday afternoon is shattered by the boom of a ground-shaking blast—followed by another seconds later. One of Atlanta’s busiest and most important neighborhoods has been bombed—the location of Emory University, two major hospitals, the FBI headquarters, and the CDC.*

***A diabolical enemy***

*Medical examiner Sara Linton, and her partner Will Trent, an investigator with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, rush to the scene—and into the heart of a deadly conspiracy that threatens to destroy thousands of innocent lives. When the assailants abduct Sara, Will goes undercover to save her and prevent a massacre—putting his own life on the line for the woman and the country he loves.*

John Raab (J.R.): We’re very excited to be talking to Karin Slaughter about her very latest incredible release, “The Last Widow.” This is a brand new book in the *Will Trent* series (#9) and brings Will and Sara Linton together once more for readers to enjoy. However you buy books, buy it right now. Thank you for joining us, Karin. How are you doing today?



Karin Slaughter (K.S.): *I'm doing great. Thank you for having me with you.*

J.R.: It's a pleasure. Let's talk about "The Last Widow." I have to say, you've got a lot of stuff happening in this book. Can you tell readers a little about it?

K.S.: *Well, it's hard to talk about without giving too much away, but I can say...something bad happens, and Will and Sara have to figure out why it was done and whodunit. (LOL.) There's a lot of sex and violence in there, so fans should really like this one.*

J.R.: I have to add: *Poor Atlanta.* I mean...what you did to that city, wow! Did you just go to bed one night and think, "I feel like ransacking the place." And then just woke up and ran with it?

K.S.: *Well, I do live in John Lewis' "rat-infested district," so props to that. (LOL.) I think that—I don't want to say this like I want it to happen, because I don't—but it seems like we're ready for another act of terrorism to shake things up here in America.*

*I try not to rip things from the headlines, but I started thinking about this book more than a few years ago, and I don't think it's giving too much away to say it does start with a huge violent act of domestic terrorism. I don't think it's a surprise to anybody; after all, terrorism is on a lot of peoples' minds. Even the FBI Director consistently states that he's worried about domestic terrorism above everything else and how that threat effects Americans. When I was thinking about this idea, it was four or five years ago, so it was before the election. It was a time when there were lots of stories in the newspapers, and I was watching a lot of Frontlines on TV (I love Frontline on PBS, by the way), and I was thinking: "Holy crap, we're really at this inflection point where white supremacists are feeling energized and mobilized, like they haven't felt since the 1970s?" I was blown away by that.*

J.R.: I do understand. My wife and I are talking all the time about how it feels like we're on the brink of another kind of civil war. How do you feel, though, putting it in a book and showing everyone that it could happen anytime, anywhere? What kind of emotions flooded you with this realization, and penning the ramifications that could come from it?

K.S.: *I think, like a lot of Americans, that it's becoming so commonplace we're not even shocked by a report/incident anymore. In the book, I approach it with a sense of dread, then helplessness, and then all out anger. I mean...we're the greatest country on Earth. We put a man on the moon, yet we can't fix this problem? When we were attacked on 9/11, the next day the President was saying that we were going to fight this; we were not going to let this defeat America. Now, however, we have these senseless school shootings, mass shootings, and people are just throwing up their hands in disgust. I mean, when did we stop solving problems?*

*Terrorism is not effective in the Western World. I can't speak to the Middle East, I'm not there. But we have these things happen here, yet we still have our normal lives. We still attend food and wine festivals, we go to the library, we go to the mall. Same thing in Europe. People still walk around and go about their lives. These horrible things have become temporary interruptions. Even though you're talking about horrible losses of life, and families who lose loved ones, it doesn't change how we live our lives. Which means, you wonder why these people don't understand or see that this is not an effective way to change things.*

*You want to ask: "What on earth are you trying to accomplish?" I*



*say, they're angry. These are young white men who are angry. They become radicalized on the internet; they look at the world and wonder, "Why don't I rule it?" "Why don't I have the American dream?" They have this broad sense of entitlement about what is owed to them, and they get angry. And because we have such loose gun laws, they can find guns and ammunition easily enough and go out and do something about their anger.*

J.R.: That is definitely frightening. I mean, I was raised in the suburbs, so a lot of these things I didn't have to experience until I got older and decided I wanted to pay attention. Like you said before, the story was in your mind for four or five years, so now that you read it, how meaningful is it on the page?

K.S.: *Well, it's meaningful to me any time I have a book come out, because that's my story; that's something I spent years on. It's very important to me that my readers like it. I'm not so much caring about what critics say, but I want to make my actual readers happy. With this, readers were very happy to get back to Will Trent and Sara. The pacing is something I worked carefully on, because I wanted it to read quickly. I have a lot of nuts and bolts at the beginning, and I wanted it to flow seamlessly so that the reader would be drawn in to the story.*

J.R.: I'm glad you said that, about the pacing. I wanted to know if that was a conscious effort because it definitely caught my attention.

K.S.: *Yes, it was, actually. Especially when you're talking about terrorism. I mean, the thing that makes terrorism frightening is that you don't anticipate it's going to happen. No one goes to the grocery store and thinks they're going to be raped that day, either, or get into a car accident on the way home. No one wakes up thinking these things will happen to them.*

*The book opens the way most of mine open, in a completely normal scene. Sara is at her aunt's house and her mom is cooking Sunday dinner. Sara is starving and she's also getting nagged at. Then, we go to Will and see what he's doing and thinking in his normal life. Then, there is an earth-shaking event that happens literally right down the road from them. Readers also get to catch up with Faith, who is at a meeting living her "normal" life. I take great care to make all of their lives seem ordinary before the really horrendous thing happens out of the blue, because that's the way reality is.*

J.R.: Being that you write series fiction, like *Will Trent* and the *Grant County* books, as well as a list of standalones, how do you decide or know when your current plot idea is right for a specific character or series? Is it just because you specifically wanted to get back to Will, so that's why it became his plot, or does the idea dictate what the book will be?

K.S.: *For me, the idea and who tells the story form at the same time. With standalones, like "The Good Daughter" or "Pieces of Her," there is this broad scope of the stories that take them outside of the procedural realm. When it came to "The Good Daughter," I wanted a family of lawyers to tell it; "Pieces of Her" was something where I wanted a mother and daughter telling their story. So, for both, it was the story that dictated how they would be told and that they would not be good in a series.*

*For this one, however, I knew there would be a lot of action and a lot of procedural drive to the plot, which makes it work out well as a Will Trent story. Will is very procedural, and Sara is the Medical Examiner, so this was an opportunity for me to actually put her in the middle of the action, which she very seldom gets. I made it a point early on that Sara would be a real ME, which means she'd never be out in the field chasing the bad guys. After all, an ME does their work, gives the reports, and appears in court; they're not out running around in high heels, carrying a gun, like they are on TV. This was a story where I knew I could do something different with Sara. I could put her in a great amount of personal jeopardy and allow her to do something she's never done before. I mean, she's a doctor, she cares about people. But in this, she's in a position where not only does she not want to help people, she actually wants to hurt them physically.*

J.R.: You think Sara liked that role?



K.S.: *I think she loved it. I mean, except for being in an awful situation, I think she was up to the challenge. When I first wrote her in the Grant County series, I was very conscious of the fact that her life had changed drastically because of a criminal act. The character had been living in Atlanta, she had just gotten a fellowship to do pediatric surgery, which is what she felt her true calling was, but then she was violently raped. Her response was to go home and live a life she hadn't planned for herself, but something that felt safe. And so some bad things happened there, and now she's back in Atlanta living the life she'd envisioned for herself when she was a young girl: she lives in a city, runs a department, helps people, and is really a part of the puzzle-solving—detecting and figuring out crimes and investigations.*

J.R.: Do you ever let the comments on social media about the world creep into your head while writing?

K.S.: *I do read them; I do care. I also think people have opinions and have a right to them, but I am never, ever going to write something because I saw it on Facebook or Instagram. For me, my book is my book; I know exactly what the characters are going to do, how they are going to express themselves, and how the plot works, so I'm never going to be in a position where I read something and say, "Oh, people enjoy this? Well then, I should weave it into my book." I honestly don't think people are good at articulating what they really want. I mean, they want a book that surprises them. They want a good story. But if I give them what they say they want on Facebook, it won't be surprising anymore, or a good story.*

J.R.: True. I think some authors take social media to heart, though. Although, I always say do not upset the crazies by getting into debates, because they're always going to win.

K.S.: *(LOL.) Well, my social media is mostly showing pictures of my cats, so I don't really worry about that kind of stuff.*

J.R.: I tell people that because you never know what's going to set someone off. And if you address various comments, it can become unstoppable and an author may have to shut it all down. I try to remind people, this is about entertainment.

K.S.: *Exactly. I'm not going to blast people about politics, or whatever. I think you can pretty much figure my politics out by what I write. But online is not the forum for me. It works for some, but not for me.*

J.R.: So how is your conference schedule? Do you have a lot of appearances lined up for "The Last Widow"?

K.S.: *I do, actually. I think I'm going to twelve different cities, so I'll be jumping around. I'm also looking forward to it. I'll be going to some stores that I've been going to for a while now, like The Poisoned Pen in Arizona, which will be nice. I'll get to see the 'old' group again that has been showing up ever since I began this career.*

J.R.: Do you get a lot of email questions? Fan interactions that ask things like, what's going on inside your head? Do you answer them, or do you concentrate on the FAQ section of your website that answers a broad range of questions?

K.S.: *Actually, I respond to every email that comes in, but it takes me a really long time to respond. The longest it ever took was six months. I do it when I have free time, like waiting in an airport. I'll go on Goodreads or check in and answer some. It is a bit onerous because I'm published in 40 different languages, so there's a lot of countries to respond to and I do what I can do with Google Translate. But, just know, I will write back.*

J.R.: Most likely readers would rather have another book instead of an email response. I'm surprised you don't have someone look at it for you.

K.S.: *I feel like some things shouldn't be jobbed out. Fifty or sixty percent are standard questions, like: 'What are the books in order?' For those, I have a macro and just press it, so it saves time.*

J.R.: A lot of people do like to go back. Say someone is first finding out about you with this latest, "The Last Widow." Should people go back and read the *Will Trent* series from the beginning, or can they jump right in?

K.S.: *Actually, as a standalone, "The Last Widow" works really well. If you've never read any in the series, this is a good place to start and you will completely understand it. It catches you up. One of the great things I learned while getting more books under my belt, so to speak, is that readers don't need to know every single detail that happened to Will and Sara in order to enjoy the next book. But for the people who have read them all, I also add things so that they'll be able to learn something new.*

J.R.: Is there anything else besides pacing that you specifically wanted to focus on, like dialogue or emotional interaction scenes, when you sat down to write this book?

K.S.: *No, not really. That is actually the stuff that comes natural to me. It was more the opening handful of chapters dealing with a bunch of time shifts that were a challenge. Readers get the same event from three different perspectives, so that was the real technical challenge for me, knowing how each character will give their perspective. Then, doing the same thing at the end—three different characters, giving three different perspectives, in three different time periods. But the emotional interactions and dialogue are already in my head when I write.*

J.R.: Are you into a specific TV show or book series right now? Something streaming that you're bingeing on, perhaps?

K.S.: *Yes and no. I just finished a recent series, but I felt annoyed with it because the episodes are shorter now. I try to watch them when I'm on the treadmill, which I try to do an hour-and-a-half a day. So now it's hard with the shows being forty minutes. I need them to be more like fifty-something minutes so I can watch a couple. But that's my only complaint. I'm looking forward to a Netflix show coming up, though. It has got Katee Sackhoff in it; she was in *Battlestar Galactica* playing Starbuck, and the show looks good. Also, *Orange Is the New Black* is in its last season and I hear it's really, really great.*

J.R.: Yes, when it comes to that show, my daughters and wife basically tell me to leave them alone. It's no problem, because as long as there's sports, I'm good.

K.S.: *I am aware the day I come back college football starts, so I'm trying to get all my binge watching in now. I have to say, the show *Fleabag* is pretty awesome. You have to give it three episodes, but it is totally worth it.*

J.R.: Karin, I want to thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure talking to you. I loved "The Last Widow" and would like to know what comes next?

K.S.: *It's another Will and Sara, actually. I'm excited, because it will be the 10<sup>th</sup> Will Trent and my own 20<sup>th</sup> book.*

J.R.: Two milestones. Congratulations!

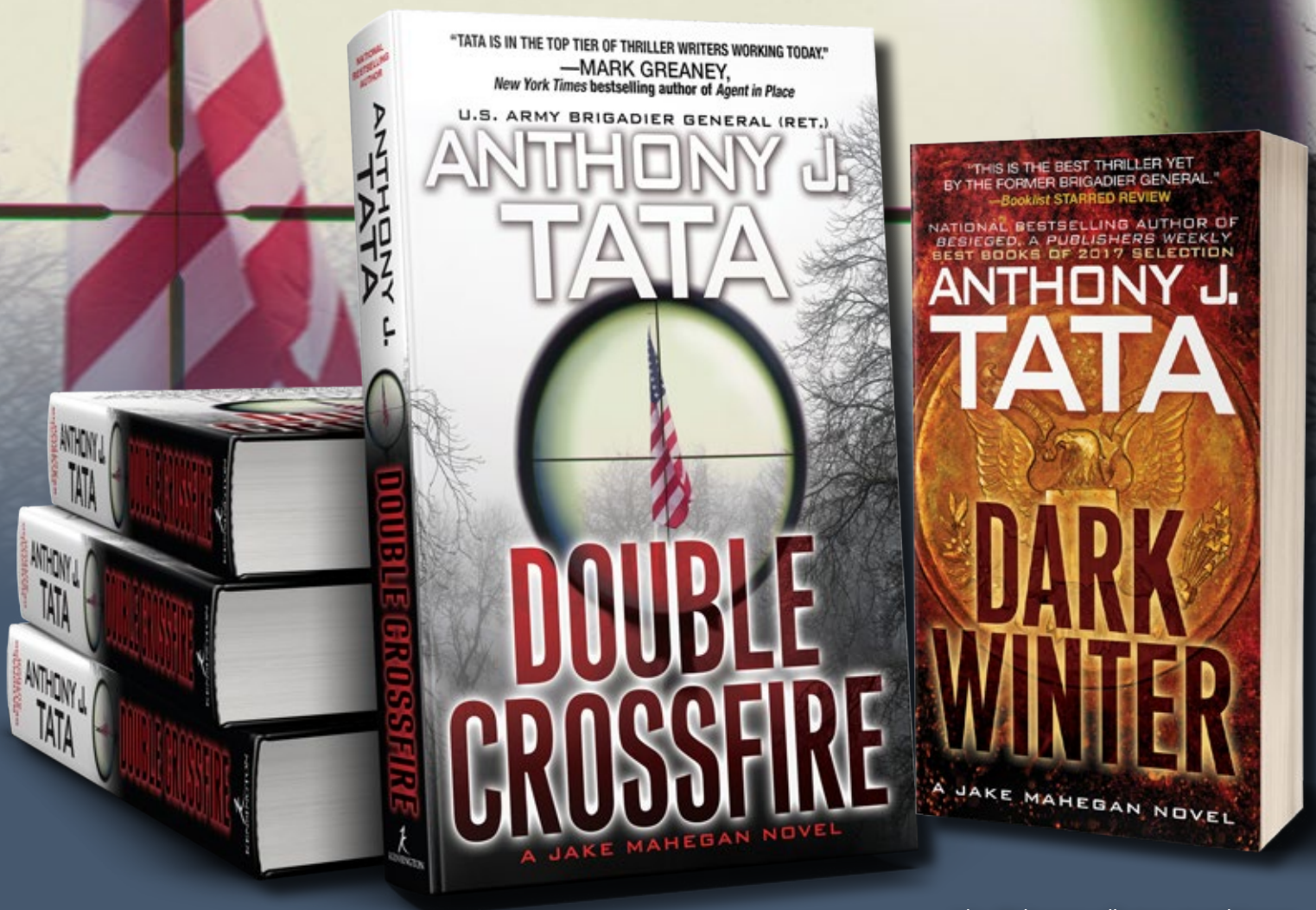
We would like to thank Karin for taking the time to speak with us. Again, if you want to listen to the interview, search Suspense Radio on Spotify or iTunes. For more information on Karin, check out her website at [www.karinslaughter.com](http://www.karinslaughter.com). ■



“RETIRED U.S. ARMY  
BRIGADIER GENERAL TATA  
BRINGS BACK JAKE MAHEGAN  
FOR ANOTHER REALISTIC,

## **high-stakes military adventure.**

A VERY READABLE AND  
CONTEMPORARY MILITARY  
ACTION STORY.”—*Kirkus Reviews*



Can Delta Force veteran Jake Mahegan **shut down a brutally executed plot** to overthrow our government—from within?

Jake Mahegan will stop at nothing to **save America from terrorists and hackers**, out to bring the world to its knees.

# Exploring the Genius of **DOUGLAS PRESTON & LINCOLN CHILD**

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Deborah Feingold



DOUGLAS PRESTON AND LINCOLN CHILD ARE A RARE BREED IN WRITING. Very rarely do you see a combo as successful as this, but I guess when the writing is *that* good, you can see why they're a team. Their latest book, "Old Bones," is the first in a new series starring a familiar character, Nora Kelly. It's great that we were able to spend some time with these two, and you will be able to read that interview below, but first let's take a quick look inside their latest book...

*Nora Kelly, a young curator at the Santa Fe Institute of Archaeology, is approached by historian Clive Benton with a once-in-a-lifetime proposal: to lead a team in search of the so-called "Lost Camp" of the tragic Donner Party. This was a group of pioneers who earned a terrible place in American history when they became snow-bound in the California mountains in 1847, their fate unknown until the first skeletonized survivors stumbled out of the wilderness, raving about starvation, murder and cannibalism.*

*Benton tells Kelly he has stumbled upon an amazing find: the long-sought diary of one of the victims, which has an enigmatic description of the Lost Camp.*

*Nora agrees to lead an expedition to locate and excavate it in order to reveal its long-buried secrets.*

*Once in the mountains, however, they learn that discovering the camp is only the first step in a mounting journey of fear. For as they uncover old bones, they expose the real truth of what happened, one that is far more shocking and bizarre than mere cannibalism. And when those ancient horrors lead to present-day violence on a grand scale, rookie FBI agent Corrie Swanson is assigned the case...only to find that her first investigation might very well be her last.*

John Raab (J.R.): My co-host, Jeff Ayers, and I are very excited about having the great writing team of Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child with us today, speaking about their latest book, "Old Bones," which is the first in a new series. Thank you for joining us, gentlemen. Let us just dive right in. Why don't you tell us about "Old Bones" and how the idea first came about?

Douglas Preston (D.P.): *It's actually the first book featuring Nora Kelly, a character who has been in a number of Pendergast books. She first appeared in "Cabinet of Curiosities," where she was an archaeologist working at The Museum of Natural History. Pendergast consulted her when he encountered a mysterious burial ground of thirty-six people in Manhattan. After that book, we realized that we loved this character. She is just a great woman. Authors do sometimes fall in love with fictitious people, and both Lincoln and I said that we had to write a series featuring her. Maybe Linc can talk a bit about the plot of the book.*

Lincoln Child (L.C.): *Well...we've written about 175 books together. Probably more like 35, but it sure feels like 175. Strong female characters have emerged over time from our books, and at least three have had long lasting roles. One was Nora Kelly.*



And one was Corrie Swanson, who readers have seen develop from a troubled high school Goth in Kansas into a budding FBI agent. While this is a Nora Kelly book (and series), because she's had more screen time, so to speak, in the Pendergast novels, we wanted to differentiate this series from the FBI books of Pendergast and we thought these two women would make a great team. Not an official team, of course. But, we thought having an archaeologist work with a budding FBI agent with a background in physical anthropology would be cool. We could have fun and show two strong, interesting women headlining a series. And that was our original thinking behind "Old Bones."

As for the actual plot, we wanted something that would utilize Nora's archaeological expertise and could also "rope in" Corrie Swanson because of murder, mayhem, and something that would test her forensic knowledge. Doug had the brilliant idea of tying the story to the Donner Party, which you probably heard of. It's the infamous wagon train that took the "short cut" to California and ended up stranded in the Sierra Nevada's during the worst winter imaginable. By the time spring came, search parties arrived and found most of the people were dead, and some had been eaten by the others. We talked about this and, of course, this is the most gruesome tragedy which makes for great thriller material. We were able to find particular elements that brought it into the present in a shocking way. It was a great vehicle for Nora and Corrie both, and that's how the idea came together.

Jeff Ayers (J.A.): I am thrilled you brought back both women, and I am excited about the series. I am curious, though, as to why you wanted a new one with two other series already going? Does this mean three books a year for your readers?

D.P.: Nope. I wish we could do what Jim Patterson is able to do, but we can't. We always want to keep our books fresh. There's always that danger, if you have a series of books using the same characters, of falling into a rut. We've noticed that authors sometimes do this. The character tires and maybe the writer gets tired, as well. We need to stay interested and engaged.

We had this idea with Nora, who is a terrific archaeologist, to somehow have the archaeology intersect with crime in some way, in order to bring Corrie in. Corrie has now graduated from the John. J. College of Criminal Justice; she's worked in law enforcement; graduated the FBI Academy, and is now a freshly minted FBI agent working in the Albuquerque office in her probationary period. This is the first two years when the new agent has a ghost; a mentor looking over their shoulder for two years while the rookie learns the ropes.

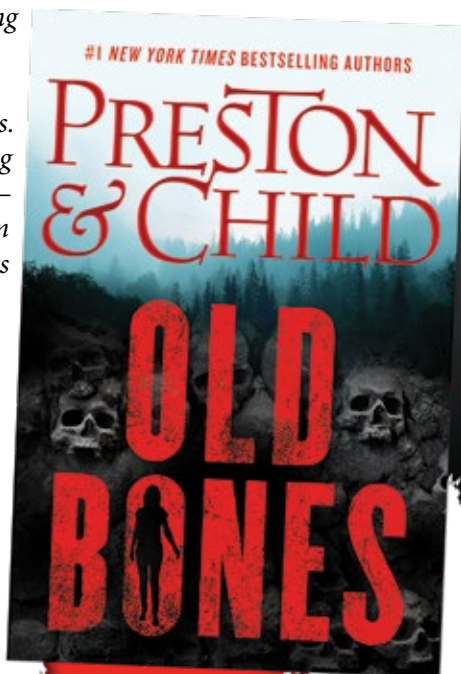
In this tale, Nora is directing the dig in the Sierra Nevada's and there is a crime committed. So Corrie, while investigating a series of crimes, ends up connecting them with what's going on up at that dig in the mountains. These women don't like each other at first; not at all. Corrie is demanding; she's learning how to be an agent and work with people, etc., so sparks fly at the beginning. But in the end, they learn how to respect each other.

L.C.: Another reason for starting up a new series was that our second series, with Gideon Crew, was coming to an end from natural causes that involved Gideon, himself. People loved the series, and we hated to see it end, but we found a great way for the books to go out. We felt it was time to listen to the readers who wanted to see more of Nora and Corrie. It seemed like a great time to change horses. This brand new series, like Doug said, is one way of keeping fresh and engaged with our characters, and for our audience. It's the virtual equivalent of me sneaking into Doug's office and lighting a match between his toes while he's sleeping. (LOL.)

D.P.: Yes, Linc can keep things interesting...but not in a good way. Here's what Linc does. He'll send me chapters he's written, and embedded within the chapters is something hideous that if I don't catch it, it would be a true embarrassment if it was published—like a double entendre. I have to say some of the horrible things I've written have gotten past him and do end up appearing in the book. Thankfully, for some reason our readers never seem to see them, which is good.

J.A.: How do you structure your novels together?

D.P.: Generally we sit down—not with each other, because we live 2,000 miles apart, and we don't want to get too close because we may come to blows. We have an idea, discuss it, argue about it, get excited about it, then get disgusted with it, and this process eventually yields a plot. You know, there's a big distance between an idea and a plot. Then we write up a narrative, and then we break it into chapters; we each take half, and then we write them and swap pages. I then have to rewrite Linc's leaden, dull prose which is hard work. Linc completely ruins my Shakespearian-level prose, which is also



hideous for me, so we have to argue about it. (Ah...I'm just kidding about that). But the end result is, I think, a prose style that is seamless. One where you cannot tell who has written what pages. I think it is also better than when we write on our own, because we challenge each other to be better.

J.A.: Any response to that, Lincoln?

L.C.: (Sigh.) No. I've heard that particular unfounded canard so many times that my own 'old bones' no longer wish to rise to the bait.

D.P.: Our partnership is a bit like a bad marriage.

J.A.: But with good results.

L.C.: Yeah, but the sex is terrible. (LOL.)

D.P.: Yes, the sex is terrible, and we're always sniping at each other. He's in Florida and I'm in New Mexico. When we do get together, we don't work. We sit around, Linc breaks open a bottle of single-malt scotch, and we talk about what fine fellows we are and no work gets done. So, we have to be apart.

J.R.: When you got the idea and looked back at the Donner Party, did you go in with preconceived beliefs? And did they change as you dug in and figured out more about the history of it all?

L.C.: The interesting thing about this book is that Doug knows so much about that part of the country already. He can take those 1,000-mile horseback rides, and can conjure up and get a grip of that area. He also knows a lot about the history of the Donner Party, and we both know about the archaeological factors. So, in terms of the history and location, that picture we paint is the easier part of getting the story right. It's putting together the pieces of the puzzle that takes a lot longer.

Steve Jobs had a famous quote that went something like, you can never connect the dots forward, you can only look backwards to see how they were connected, and that's what it's like with a novel. You want the reader, in the end, to look back and say: "Wow, that's really the only way this story could have unfolded." Now, of course, there are actually many more inferior ways it could have ended. But we always hope that we've created the ideal ending for the story. That may require tweaking the storyline a little (changing where the bodies were buried, things like that), so it's the logistics of mixing that time period with the present day, more so than the details of the area, location, etc., that's harder to write. We want this puzzle to be one that gives our readers the best read possible.

J.A.: I'm curious: Why do you both favor the series format as opposed to writing standalones?

D.P.: Actually, it's not a calculated thing. I think the series with Nora is pretty much all standalone novels, but at the same time, there is a greater reward to reading the books in order than just reading a standalone. We are already working on the next story in the series. We came up with the greatest idea. I can't tell you what it is because that's the spoiler, but it combines a lot of our interests: New Mexico, the wilderness, buried treasure, the Nuclear Age—it's a fascinating mixture of the old and the new. It starts out with a crime where Corrie needs the help of an archaeologist to excavate a skeleton to see if the person was murdered, so Nora does the excavation and the mystery begins.

When it comes to the Donner Party, however, I was always fascinated with that for years. I mean, the whole idea of those people going out in the wilderness, and half eating the other half to survive while snowed in, is amazing. In fact, they have excavated two Donner camps and have been able to piece together this data. They've found bones that have been gnawed down to nothing, and that evidence of their intense desperation really stuck with me. So when we conceived this novel, we came up with a third Donner Camp, which is really the only way we "changed" history. Nora finds it, begins excavating, and comes across what she expected to find: those bones. But then...they find a lot more. If you could find something worse than cannibalism, we were able to find it. Linc really found it, though. He's the really sick, twisted mind.

L.C.: Thank you for that, Doug. If I could, though, I would like to yank this conversation back to the initial question, before he meandered off. (LOL.)

In answer to your serious question, when it came to our first book, "Relic," Pendergast was just one of many characters on a



*“Linc and I have a mortal fear of falling into a rut and starting to write the same books over and over, using some sort of boring formula. So we are always striving to be different and surprise the reader.”*

large canvas. We put him in there because we originally had two cops who were highly similar to NYC cops, and our editor didn't like that. I didn't like that. Doug grudgingly changed one to Pendergast, whom we both loved, and added to him a lot of things we would both like to say and do. We didn't perceive him at that time to have any more of a role in anything because, at that time, it was a standalone. We didn't even know it would get published. But then we did another and another. We did standalones and struggled for a few years. I even did a book signing in Chicago where the audience consisted of me, the bookstore manager, and a security guard.

But then we did another Pendergast, “The Cabinet of Curiosities,” and that really seemed to gel with our readers. Doug and I realized we'd missed him too, and began writing more and more about Pendergast. People began to ask more about his family. We would make small references in other books about his crazy old aunt, and this locked room that would never be unsealed, etc., so we decided to write more books about Pendergast's own life. People wanted more. As for writing series, they're all over the place. If you look at the landscape of thrillers right now, they're everywhere. Everywhere you look there's a “Joe Blow” novel by so and so. I think it's the fact that people like characters they can read again and again. I like it, too. The background work is done; the writer has invested time creating him or her; the foundation is strong; and, there's a lot that benefits both the writer and the reader.

J.R.: The one thing you did in the past was the short story. And with the ability, now, for eBooks to do that little “bridge” thing, little novellas written in between books that sort of link them together, have you guys thought about doing something like that? Like maybe writing a novella between books to add more dimension to the characters, or lead into a new plot?

D.P.: Actually, we are doing something unusual right now. We wrote a short story starring Pendergast that takes place in New Orleans, where he's from. It's a long, long short story, and it's illustrated. The plot is really creepy and it is sort of connected material because it is “leading” or leaves the reader “anticipating” a future novel. Here's the interesting thing. We are giving this away to only our newsletter subscribers and no one else. To our most loyal readers. With this newsletter, we want to provide further entertainment to our readers, not just promote ourselves. I'm excited about it because the story is great and the illustrations are fabulous. We're putting it in eBook form and just giving it away to those great fans.

L.C.: It seemed like a good idea to reward our faithful readers. Are our worlds going to intersect on an Amazon eBook, though? Well, when it came to Gideon and Pendergast, we were very careful that they did not intersect, with the exception of one character that appeared in both series. With Nora and Corrie, both know Pendergast, but the funny thing is that the women do not know that they are both friends with the man.

D.P.: However, in each novel in the Nora and Corrie series, Pendergast will make an appearance. You will always see him, even if it's only in one chapter.

J.A.: I'm wondering, in terms of all the kids you had together, what has been the hardest thing to tackle?

L.C.: The kids? We have yet to have kids.

D.P.: Yeah, Linc is barren. (LOL.) What was the question again?

J.A.: I was actually referring to those 35 books. What has been the hardest thing to tackle in writing those stories?

D.P.: The middle of the book is always the most difficult for me. In most all novels, we have pretty good and exciting openings, and the endings are always cool. People seem to feel that we end really well, with the great flourish of action, suspense, fear, and terror. But the middle is where we really have to work. You have to keep the pacing, the suspense rolling, and the reader wanting to turn the pages to see what happens next. You also want the characters to develop and make them into “real” people. I know

where, in some instances, we've gotten three quarters into a book, chopped it up, and began again. We did that more in the early days, though.

L.C.: There are certain parts we almost always have difficulty with. We've written so many books and our readers definitely know the details. We have a tough time making sure we add enough clues into the story so the reader can follow it through, instead of just finding out "whodunit" on the last page. We write the ending and it's always satisfying, but we have to make sure it's different every time. Pendergast can't have the same thing happen again...he can't be this hurt, or unfazed, or unscarred, etc. It can't be mechanical.

We also have to decide if any animal will die. It's okay with the people, but God forbid if one mosquito gets slapped, because we'll hear about it. And the title. There are times we will go back and forth with a publisher for a month or more to get the title just right. We've written so many, we have to stay on our toes. I'll say, "Let's do this." Doug will say, "No. We did that back in book 'X.'" So, the most important thing is to make the next one fresh. The reader needs to be rewarded. We don't want to write the same book over and over with a different title. We don't do that.

D.P.: Linc and I have a mortal fear of falling into a rut and starting to write the same books over and over, using some sort of boring formula. So we are always striving to be different and surprise the reader. I mean, that's the best thing about thrillers. The twists; where the reader is jerked in a different direction. It can't be predictable.

L.C.: Well, some writers are pretty good at writing the same formula over and over. But Doug and I want to write books that we would want to read ourselves. Thankfully, our partnership has helped us not to get in a rut. And luckily, our writing team has sort of tilted over into the solo novels we occasionally write, because we remember the lessons we learn while working together.

J.R.: You talked earlier about twists. I want to twist this a bit by asking about Amanda Knox, who was just in the news again. Doug, you and she have a connection. Can you talk about that?

D.P.: Yes, I actually wrote a book called the "Monster of Florence," which is a true story about a serial killer who murdered young lovers in the Tuscan Hills in Italy. When I was researching that story, I was hauled in before the police. I was interrogated and accused of being an accessory to murder. The police did not like what I was doing, apparently, and the chief prosecutor in the case was a fellow by the name of Giuliano Mignini. He later became the prosecutor in the Amanda Knox case, and he's a really bad and corrupt prosecutor. I ended up entering into the defense of Amanda Knox who was essentially being framed for murder by the police. And there were reasons why they were doing that to her; it wasn't random. So I came to her defense. Since that time, since she was released from prison, we've become friends. She's doing some interesting work these days.

J.A.: Sorry, but the reasons why she was being framed, were they doing that to help themselves? Was she being framed to benefit them or the prosecutor?

D.P.: Yes, actually it was for his benefit. It's a bit of a complicated story, but the prosecutor was under indictment at the time for abuse of his office. So when the Knox case came along, he was desperate to save himself. When it all came down, he looked at it as if it was the case that would save his career. He and the police chief, the investigators, and several judges that were involved in the case all went to school together. They were all buddies. They came up with this way to save him and enhance their own careers. Amanda and her Italian boyfriend were the collateral damage of their plan.

J.R.: Where's the best place people can go to get more information on your books and upcoming events?

D.P.: You can go to our website at [www.prestonchild.com](http://www.prestonchild.com). You can find out all that stuff and, if you want sign up for the newsletter, you'll receive the free Pendergast illustrated short story. Believe me, it's a good one. We also send out twelve newsletters a year, so we're not going to bombard you with stuff five times a day.

L.C.: We also have a Facebook page. Doug is very good at responding to people, much better at it than I am.

We would like to thank Doug Preston and Lincoln Child for taking the time to talk with us. We had a blast, and I'm sure you liked it also. Don't forget, you can listen to this interview on Suspense Radio: just subscribe on iTunes or search us on Spotify. For more information on Preston and Child, visit their website, [www.prestonchild.com](http://www.prestonchild.com). ■



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# DAVID BALDACCI

## on His New Journey Into the 1940s

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*  
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With the title, “One Good Deed,” David Baldacci brings to life yet another unforgettable character. Aloysius Archer is a former WWII soldier who has not only put his life on the line for his country, but has also had to forfeit three years of his life by being locked up for a crime he didn’t commit.

When he’s released in 1949, the veteran is sent to Poca City on parole. Unfortunately, the small town is anything but serene. In one night, he finds himself with a job: to collect a debt owed to Hank Pittleman, a powerful local businessman. What seems easy at first turns into a nightmare, and Archer must deal with solving a murder before he finds himself, once again, falsely accused.

David Baldacci has a longstanding, highly-respected career as a writer. Beginning with the release of “Absolute Power” in 1996—a book that not only was a *New York Times* bestseller, but also went on to become a blockbuster hit movie starring Gene Hackman and Clint Eastwood—Baldacci has gone on for years creating some of the best books the world has ever read.

Co-hosts John Raab and Jeff Ayers of *Beyond the Cover* sat down with this great author recently, and asked the questions all readers and fans want to know...

John Raab (J.R.): Thank you for joining us, David. How are you doing today?

David Baldacci (D.B.): *I’m doing great, guys, and it’s great being here with you.*

J.R.: Let us start by talking about your latest title, which was sort of a diversion for you from past books, “One Good Deed.”

D.B.: *Well, in my mind it started out as a short story that one day, perhaps, would be published as an eBook. I was out on tour—a long road through a number of cities—and I needed something to do when I got back to the hotels at night because I’m not much of a sleeper. So, that’s where it started.*

*I set it in the 1940s, which is an era that I’m a huge fan of, in fact. I’m a lover of Marlowe and Chandler, and I know that it was a great time for storytelling. While I was writing it, the book just morphed. I was writing page after page after page every*



night, and then in two to three months I had like, 400 pages done. It was no short story anymore. The publisher was astonished, especially when I told him that I didn't even know I was writing any of this.

I have to say, though, I loved describing everything. I just really got into making it so atmospheric by describing the fashion, the cigarettes, the cars, the guns... I really had to invest time and make readers feel like they were actually back in the 1940s, so it was a pleasure writing it. I watch a lot of TV and movies from that era. My favorite movies, in fact, are Chinatown and The Big Sleep, so this is kind of like those two meet each other. It definitely took off, but it wasn't planned. It wasn't going to be a novel until it ended up being one.

Jeff Ayers (J.A.): What, exactly, turned it into the novel?

D.B.: I think it was my protagonist, Aloysius Archer. I knew early on that there was a lot more about him than I thought there would be at first. I was going to give a quick explanation at the onset; you know, like who he was, why he was there in this little town, etc. Then something would happen, be solved, and then maybe I'd do another short story later. But I really saw more in him in the first chapter. I started thinking about him; really thinking about him. I got into the guy's head. I mean, he fights in WWII for years, then comes home and gets thrown in jail on a trumped-up charge, which causes him to lose another three years. And seeing as that the life expectancy back then was far shorter than it is now, this made it so the guy literally had already lost almost half of his life and hadn't really done anything. I wondered what that feeling would be like.

Chapter 2 became even more complicated, then on to Chapter 3, and all of a sudden I had this big idea of what I wanted this book to be. This was not just a "crime caper," it's also about a guy who has been smacked down twice and has had to get back up and go on. So even though the elements of crime caper/mystery are in there, it became a whole lot more.

J.A.: Do you have any plans on revisiting him again, now that this is a book and not a short story?

D.B.: I do. He was just a really intriguing person. Someone I've never really written about before, so he jumps off the page for me. When I sent it out, we received a two-book deal. The man said he'd read it in one night and loved the guy. It was fresh, original, and they wanted to see this guy again. So...I'm working on it.

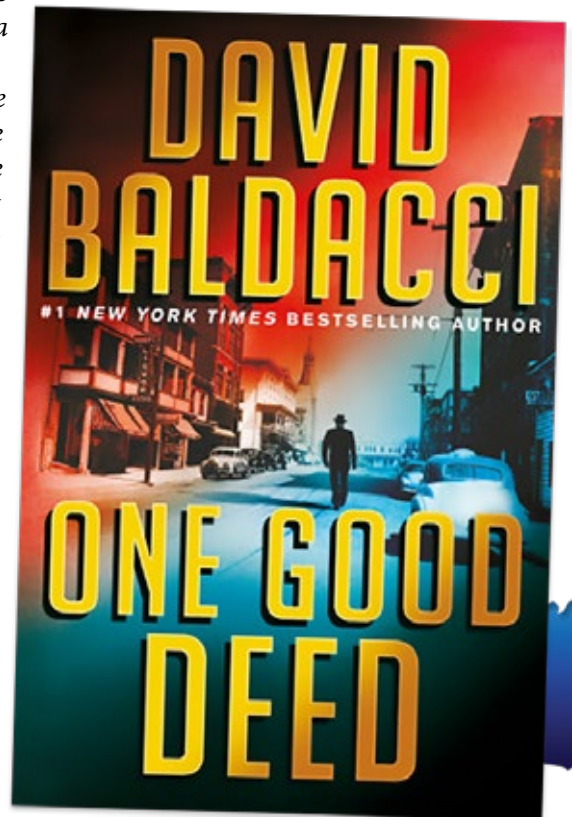
J.A.: You have a recurring theme when it comes to small towns in your novels. What is so appealing about them?

D.B.: In some ways, they're like a canary in a gold mine; a microcosm of the U.S. Even those that, unlike the cities, are not culturally diverse, can tell us a lot about what's happening in the country.

I see a lot of parallels with the late 40s and today. After WWII, the economy was getting back on its feet. Almost like it's trying to do today. The bigger urban areas were strong with talent and firepower, and that's where people wanted to go; that's where people are going today. They wanted to get paid, the jobs were plentiful, and you heard this tremendous sucking sound as a lot of these small towns were being emptied out. They wanted to get the hell out.

After WWII, people were back; those who survived. People were getting married, going to the West for the big opportunities, the East for the opportunities—the same thing is happening today. It's like a metaphorical laboratory for me that, in the 1940s, people looked out at the future and saw this monumental change coming. They knew they were going to go from this agricultural/farm/small town country to a different type of society, and that's exactly what happened. Today, I think it's happening even more. You look at the world, going from small places to big places, and the urban areas are growing. Take a state like Texas, for instance. Areas like Houston, Dallas, and Austin are booming. I think 80% of the GDP for the entire State of Texas comes from these places.

So, for me, it really is a microcosm of the period. For me, it allows me to set my author telescope or magnifying glass on top of these places, take the roofs off, and see what's happening inside. It would be hard to do that in



an area with 12 million people, but in the small towns it's easier. Small towns remind me of Faulkner's story, "The Wild Palms," where he talked about his "postage stamp of native soil" in Mississippi. That location was a myth, but it was also like a touchstone for the rest of the world, showing them 'from little things come great things' which is why I love examining these small towns.

J.R.: One thing I always find refreshing is when a book is set outside the technological age. Nowadays, it's almost like the author has more ease because of all these extra conveniences the characters can use. So, I have to ask, how difficult is it to write out of this era?

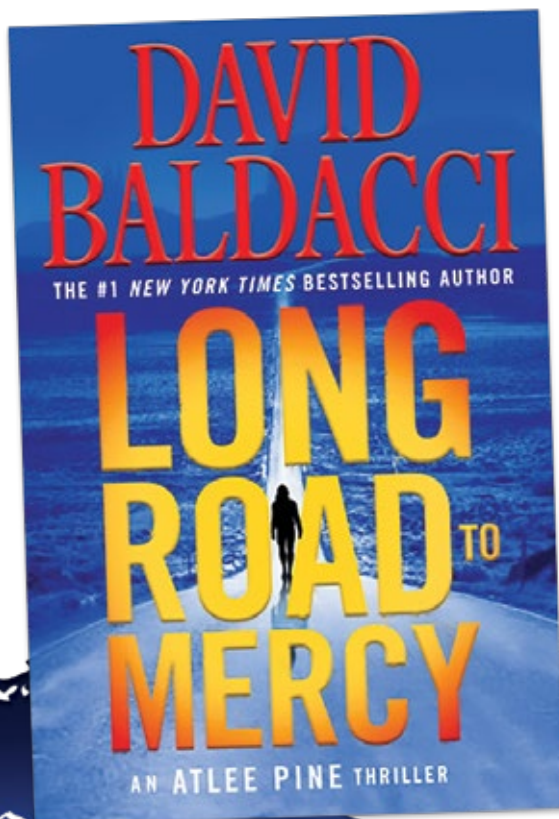
D.B.: I really had to have a complete mind reset. One of my favorite authors was Sue Grafton—a phenomenal writer that I miss today as much as the day she passed. I envied her, because when her beloved character, Kinsey Millhone, had to track someone down, she had more work to do. Just to make a call, she had to go to the local gas station and put the quarter in the payphone. Sue could do all this wonderfully. It's hard to write a plausible thriller anymore, where a crime occurs and I try to say that there were no witnesses. I mean, even in a mid-sized city there's video evidence of it all. If I tried, readers would say: "Are you an idiot? There are a hundred cameras on that block. Not to mention, everyone is carrying a cell and would take a recording of it." So there's zero shot anymore of no one seeing a thing. Information is instantaneous. I can't have my hero running around trying to find a way to communicate when there's a cell phone in every pocket.

I had to get all that out of my mind and put myself into the shoes of a guy who, obviously, didn't have access to a cell in the 40s. He had to hitch rides everywhere; there was no internet; he had to fly by the seat of his pants and talk to people without the ability to ask Google something. I had to get back to the essentials, when humans actually spoke to humans face-to-face, which is not a bad thing. But I had to sort of perform an obliviation charm from Harry Potter on my tech memory, because I couldn't use any of it.

J.A.: I'm going to ask you to go back in time to that amazing book, "Absolute Power." I've heard different versions of this, but was it first a screenplay before becoming a book?

D.B.: Actually, no. The one book for me that became a book after the screenplay was written was, "Wish You Well." That was actually a screenplay but it wasn't working with the director or studio out there, so I pulled it back. I knew it was going to be very different from what I'd written. With "Absolute Power," it was originally titled "Executive Power" but we couldn't use that because a movie was coming out called "Executive Decision," so it was changed. But it was a novel from the get-go.

Up to that time, however, I had been writing screenplays and short stories. I had gotten a number of rejections, but I never had a novel rejected because "Absolute Power" was the first one to come out.



J.A.: I have to say my personal favorite is "Wish You Well." That book is amazing, as well as the film version. I loved "The Christmas Train," too. I was bummed when they canceled your *King and Maxwell* TV series after one season.

D.B.: Me too. The ratings had nothing to do with it, though. The ratings were strong and we were the top TV show that year, but there was some problem with the network or something. But...look, Hollywood makes Vegas look safe. (LOL.)

So when I'm in the process out there and have stuff going on, I never get excited until I see the finished product on the screen.

J.A.: Speaking of...is there anything in the pipeline?

D.B.: A couple of things. I sold an option for the Amos Decker series to Village Roadshow Studio for a television series, so we're excited about that. There's also something we're working on (not based on books) that will be a spy series with a female protagonist. I can't tell you the name, but they have a very prominent actress who signed on to the role, and that's really exciting. It will probably be a limited series cable show.



*In addition, we already have a number of people out there who want to read “One Good Deed.” When Hollywood does do films like this, they usually do them incredibly well. And with this book there are a lot of ‘meaty’ roles for both men and women. People talk to us all the time, we option stuff, but it’s a long way to see it on screen.*

J.R.: You’ve done both: Do you prefer series or standalones?

*D.B.: I think at the beginning of my career I preferred the standalone, because the book was done, out of the way, on to a fresh idea, etc. But as I got further along in my career, I liked the series better. It gave me additional chances to expand on the characters and see their evolutionary arc grow far better than in one book. I think that’s why you see me concentrate on series’ now, because I’ve become more invested in my characters the older I get. I see the characters and know that they’re worth more than just one book. So I plan my novels now ahead of time to be a series.*

J.A.: Most of your series’ seem to end after 5 or 6; is that a conscious decision?

*D.B.: It’s more of a gut thing. Sometimes it’s the fact that I’ve thought of another character I want to explore. I mean, I had “The Camel Club,” “King and Maxwell”...all were going, and you have these slots that you need to place them in as a writer. My slots are spring and fall currently; for a while, I had one series in the spring and one in the fall. But then I had this new idea of Amos Decker that blew me away.*

*My excitement level began to fall off the rails for the others with Decker, and I sort of left all the other series’ in the dust for a bit. So I had to make a decision. I write by myself because I don’t play well with others (LOL), so it’s not like I can go off and write 5 or 6 by myself at any given time. Therefore, I had to pick my moments and the path I wanted to go down.*

*Excitement for an author is critical. If you’re not excited about the next project, you won’t engage the reader. I’ve done this a long time and the last thing I want to do is fall into complacency; or formula writing, where I’m writing the same book over and over again. By having these new characters and series’, I get to reinvent myself over and over again, which is not a bad thing in the creative process.*

J.A.: Which actually leads me to my next question. You consistently write great book after great book; I mean, you have to be one of the fastest writers I’ve ever seen. How do you write so fast and yet continue to deliver that high quality every time?

*D.B.: I actually write in big blocks. I don’t count words, pages, etc. And I don’t write every day. But when I do, I write until my tank is empty. So there may be a day I write no pages and a day I write well over thirty. I’m completely invested on those days and don’t stop.*

*In addition, my agent, Mitch Hoffman, will tell you I’m the “fastest rewriter in the West.” Whereas other writers expect to get their manuscript back to the publisher/agent in four months, I get it back in four days. When I get the edits—the comments and letters—something will click in my head. Mitch will make a comment about something happening on page 30, which I will address, but that also makes me think. I suddenly know that I have something I need to change or make better on page 412. I do it because all of a sudden my mind becomes that computer...every word, every character, every detail is in my mind and I can just tear through it. I love that part of the process; I am always excited when I anticipate receiving comments back, because it’s my chance to go back and turn it into something really special.*

J.R.: I remember interviewing you about eight years ago. It was then that you said you kept a pad of paper by the bed so that when you had an idea, you would wake up and write it down immediately. Still do that?

*D.B.: Oh, yes. My wife actually got me these notebooks with huge pages. I’d been working on the new book for spring with Amos Decker, and I came into my office on a Sunday (when no one was there, so it was really nice) and filled up page after page with thoughts, plot points, chapters, themes running through the book to research, etc. So, yes, I always have notebooks on hand. My wife actually bought them at a used bookstore in Richmond, VA when she was traveling there. Seeing as that I would need more, she scanned the barcode on the back of these things and found out that Books-A-Million sold them. So she ordered like, six more of them for me.*

*It may sound trivial, but pens and paper are special for me. I tell people: “I think better in cursive.” So when I’m writing things down on paper, there’s more acuity with my mind. The key thing about that system, though, is you might think it’s a cool idea and you wake up and head to the keyboard and start typing like crazy. That’s one thing that’s changed for me. I used to do that, write for hours, and then along the way hit a wall and realize I wasn’t that excited about it. Now, I let an idea marinate before I leap*

on it. I need to know that it has enough meat on the bone to carry it through four hundred pages. So now I think about an idea a thousand ways from Sunday to see if it has enough for the long haul.

J.A.: I think I was a doctor in my previous life because I can't even read my own writing. Has there ever been a book where you started writing and it wasn't working for your agent or publisher?

D.B.: Yes, actually. It only happened one time for me. It was called "Last Man Standing" and it was a testosterone-fueled story about a sniper on the FBI's elite rescue team. It was long and complicated, and I had written about 50,000 words; it was going to be a fall book. Things, unfortunately, were happening in my extended family. And being that I had been a former lawyer, I was drawn in. I think that situation really negatively affected the book. I gave it to my wife, editor, publisher, and all of them said that there was something off with the book. They said: "It's not you. What is this?"

Like I said before, I take editorial comments very seriously. In fact, I talk about this a lot in a whole section I did for *masterclass.com*; how important it is that you take constructive criticism well. You should always give people respect because all they're doing is what you're trying to do—get the book to be the best it can be. So I listened, and everyone was saying the same thing.

I went back to my office one day and I cut 35,000 words from the manuscript; I just slashed it to pieces. I had only 15,000 words left, and only two months to finish. I got my head straight and wrote another 140,000 words. I know it sounds ridiculous, but it happened. I turned it in and it was definitely the book I should have written in the first place. I remember getting a starred review in *Publishers Weekly* and I thought that would be impossible, seeing as that I wrote it in like seven weeks.

It was born out of frustration and anger with myself because I hadn't gotten it right the first time. I'd let outside influences dictate how I was writing, which is something you should never let happen. You should let the story unfold as it should. On the other side of the equation, sometimes those emotions can really fuel a creative spirit, so I went into overdrive. So...it happened once, but I hope it never happens again.

J.A.: Of all the wonderful characters you've created, is there one you like the most?

D.B.: It's almost like you want to say the current one because it's the new, fresh thing. But, I would have to go back to "Wish You Well." The characters in that novel meant a lot to me; more so, than just writing a story. Oz, the younger brother, I related to personally. And Diamond, in many ways, I related to as well. So if I had to pick a favorite, it would come from that book.

From the thriller series' it would be difficult. As a default answer, I would say Amos Decker, because he's so different and fairly new in my arsenal. But I do have to say this new one, Aloysius Archer, has quite a pull for me.

I had a long drive yesterday: I had a business meeting in Pennsylvania which was three hours down and three hours back. I was listening to the CDs in my car because they'd sent me the audio book. An actor who'd never read one of my books on tape was reading it, and the time went so fast because I was mesmerized by it. When you listen to a book, you hear an entirely different performance. I mean, I knew everything that was going to happen, but it was a pleasure to hear it actually "performed."

With Archer, I like him. He's got style, some rough edges, and a good heart. Sometimes his moral compass is off, but he gets it back to where it needs to be. He's just a guy out there trying to survive in tough times which, of course, applies to a lot of us.

J.R.: David, what's the best place where people could find out more about you?

D.B.: Well, I have one of those website things (LOL) at [www.davidbaldacci.com](http://www.davidbaldacci.com). It will also link you to things like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. I understand that these things are popular; I hear that Facebook is some really big thing out there. (LOL.)

I will be interested to read about the history of internet technology in say...twenty years from now. I want to see how it turns out. Is it going to come down to a good thing or a bad thing? What we're seeing right now are things that no one even anticipated ten years ago, so it will be interesting to see what the next two decades bring. I suppose human beings can take any good thing and make it into a bad one.

J.R.: And now you have a new book.

D.B.: Exactly!

To listen to the interview, and hear all the other authors who have shared time with *Beyond the Cover*, head to [www.launchpaddm.com/episode/Beyond-The-Cover-with-special-guest-1-NYT-Bestseller-David-Baldacci](http://www.launchpaddm.com/episode/Beyond-The-Cover-with-special-guest-1-NYT-Bestseller-David-Baldacci). ■

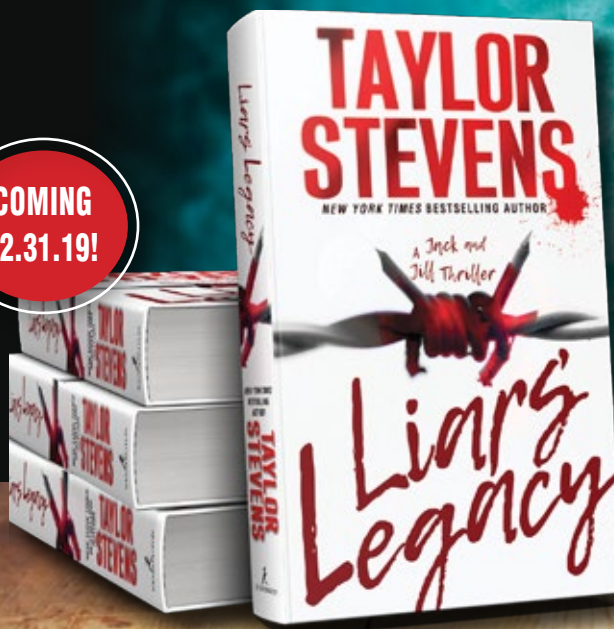


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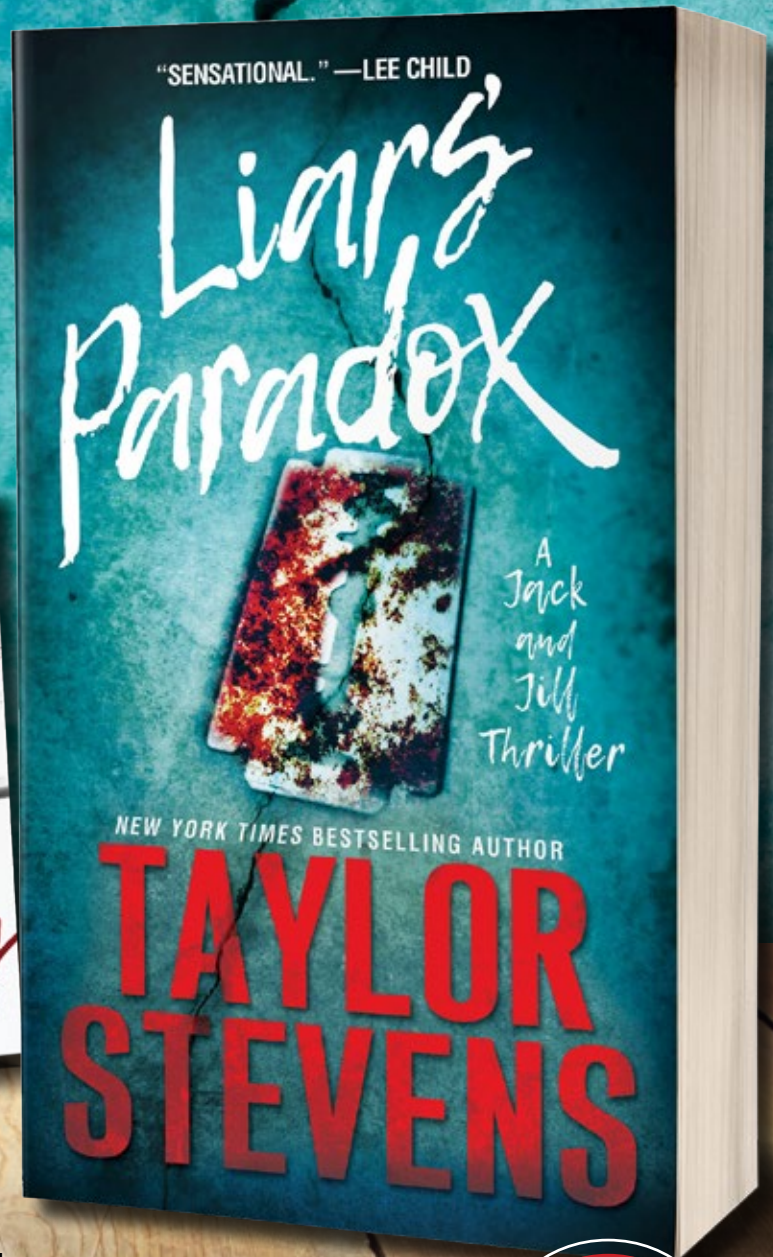
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# Iris Johansen

## LAYS DOWN A “SMOKESCREEN”

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Louis Tonsmeire



**B**estselling author Iris Johansen is back with her thirty-sixth book in the uber-popular *Eve Duncan* series, called “Smokescreen.”

Johansen began writing after her children left home for college. She first achieved success in the early 1980’s writing category romances. In 1991, Johansen began writing suspense/historical romance novels, starting with the publication of “The Wind Dancer.” In 1996, Johansen switched genres, turning to crime fiction, which has brought her great success. She has written seventeen consecutive *New York Times* bestsellers as of November 2006.

We are pleased to sit down and have a conversation with Iris. We know it’s been a while, and it was so nice to catch up. You can check out that interview below, but first let’s see through the mist and check out “Smokescreen.”

*A journalist shows up on Eve Duncan’s doorstep with a plea for help. Jill Cassidy has just come from a small African village with a heart wrenching story: half the villagers—many of them children—have been killed in a horrific attack by guerilla soldiers, the bodies burned beyond recognition. Now, the families desperately need Eve’s help to get closure and begin to heal.*

*But when Eve arrives in the remote jungle, she begins to suspect that Jill’s plea may have been a cover story for a deeper, more sinister plot. Isolated and unsure who she can trust, Eve finds herself stranded in an unstable country where violence threatens to break out again at any moment and with only her own instincts to rely on if she hopes to get home to her family alive . . .*

*Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Let us begin with your brand new book, “Smokescreen.” Could you give readers a “sneak preview” of the title and what they can expect?*

*Iris Johansen (I.J.): I absolutely love the title “Smokescreen” because it represents exactly what the book is meant to be. It’s*



a mystery and adventure that takes place in the jungles of Africa where Eve Duncan has been asked to work on the forensic reconstruction of the tragic deaths of twenty-seven murdered school children. Being Eve, she can't resist helping to bring closure to the parents left behind in the wake of that massacre. But once she goes to Maldara and becomes involved in the humanitarian work, she suddenly discovers nothing is what it seems. Wherever she turns she's blocked by lies and smokescreens, and what she doesn't know could prove deadly to her and the people she cares about.

S. MAG.: Could you share with us the reasons why you decided to “bring” your amazing character, forensic sculptor Eve Duncan, into a stand-alone novel like “Smokescreen” and team up with Grand Central to publish the title?

I.J.: *The principal reason I brought Eve to “Smokescreen” was that I thought it was time she came back on the scene in something fresh and new that would remind everyone who Eve really is. Yes, I know everyone loves Eve, and I agree. She’s my family, and all the characters in her world that you email me you also love are my family, too. It’s like a universe, with Eve in the center. But Eve is a real person, with a family and friends and her beloved Joe, so she often takes a step down because that’s what family members do. That’s fine, but I wanted to see her brilliant skill as a forensic sculptor again. I wanted her to take chances and discover strange and wonderful things. I wanted her to meet new people and decide to trust or fear them. By all means, let her remain the Eve we know and love, but let her step into the spotlight and shine.*

S. MAG.: Being a #1 New York Times bestselling author of more than 30 consecutive bestsellers, is there ever a time when the new “ideas” are hard to get for the next novel? Can you offer some advice to those who are, perhaps, stuck in a moment in time where they cannot come up with the next character, or path for their characters to take?

I.J.: *Most of the time I have too many ideas for the next book. I get a kernel of an idea and then just start writing. Or the characters start telling the story, which is the way it usually works. If you know the characters and they come alive for you, that’s the best asset any writer can have. Every writer is different, but I continue writing even if I don’t know what’s going to happen on the next page. It usually comes to me before the current page is finished. If it doesn’t, I might skip to another character or scene and work on that until a motivation becomes clearer in my mind. But I never stop writing because I’m fretting about how to continue. I just keep working and remember that rewriting can sometimes turn out better than the original.*

S. MAG.: You have had experience with the TV world when it comes to your books (the Lifetime movie *The Killing Game* being an example). Can you tell us a bit about your overall experience bringing one of your beloved characters to the screen? Is it something you will be doing again in the near future?

I.J.: *Books and movies are incredibly different as anyone will tell you who has seen their characters come to life before their eyes. Is it exciting? You bet it is. Also bewildering and exasperating when you see all the talented people who are handling (and changing) your precious manuscript. Your first reaction is usually “but that’s not how it should be.” Which could be something as little as a change of hair color or the name of a dog. But the art forms are different, and you come to realize and appreciate that as time goes on. I’ve been very*

***“If you know the characters and they come alive for you, that’s the best asset any writer can have.”***



*fortunate to have had wonderful actors and filmmakers who have been relatively gentle with my work. I couldn't have been happier. There's no question that I'll want to repeat the experience. It's totally fascinating. Who can resist the lure of watching an Eve Duncan or a Kendra Michaels come to life?*

S. MAG.: Along those same lines, if you could choose one of your characters or books to be placed on the big screen, which would that be and why?

I.J.: *One of the Kendra Michael's books has been optioned recently, and she'd be a wonderful choice. A woman who was born blind, regained her sight at twenty, and became an investigator who relies on her senses, not anything paranormal, to solve crimes. Plus, I love all the people in her world.*

S. MAG.: Is there a certain genre you would like to delve into one day that you haven't tried as of yet?

I.J.: *Perhaps science fiction. Though I've had sci-fi elements in many of my books, I've never really explored it.*

S. MAG.: We would love to have some insight into an Iris Johansen "work day." Can you tell us a bit about the area you write in; where you get your best ideas from; if you simply shut the door to an office and escape into a different realm for a while; turn on background music, etc.?

I.J.: *I love my office. The desk is a wonderful cocoon with all my research books and treasures I've collected over the years. I have a terrific curved window overlooking my front garden and fountain. I deliberately created that cocoon so that I couldn't look out at that beautiful view unless I got up from my desk and went around to sit on the window seat. That way I wouldn't be tempted to stop working and gaze out at it...a little enforced discipline. But when I've finished for the day, then I can sit and have my reward and listen to the sound of the fountain. I also listen to music nonstop while I'm working, everything from John Williams to Josh Groban to Queen. I get my ideas from everywhere on the planet: TV documentaries, National Geographic, movies, conversation, whatever intrigues me at the time. Sometimes it's even from one of those research books on my desk. Oh, and I usually have a dog lying on the paisley carpet beside my desk, unless I'm being too boring for him to tolerate and he wanders off.*

*And there you have it. That's what you'd see on any work day if you happened to stop by to see me.*

S. MAG.: Being that you're such a popular author, how do you feel about the interaction with fans? Do you like (or feel comfortable with) the world of social media? If you had to give one pro and one con when speaking on the social media world, what would they be?

I.J.: *I love interacting with fans but I'm fairly shy and don't do many autograph signings. Social media confuses me a little since I'm a very private person, and I'm such a workaholic that I don't believe I could keep up with it. I do admire those who are adept at using it. I just try to get out an occasional message and concentrate on writing books.*

S. MAG.: Are there book events that your fans can see you at?

I.J.: *I might be going to Tucson Festival early next year.*

S. MAG.: To conclude, we must know, what comes next?

I.J.: *After "Smokescreen," there is another new Kendra Michaels book coming out in January, called "Hindsight." That's the collaboration with my son, Roy, and I loved this one. It features a crazy dog called Harley and tells a little about Kendra's life as a child when she was blind. It was funny and poignant at the same time.*

*After that, in early summer, "The Persuasion" will be on the stands. Do you know how many emails I get about Seth Caleb? Almost as many as I get about Eve Duncan. I agree, he's very sexy, very complicated, and mysterious. Put him with Jane MacGuire, Eve's adopted daughter, and there are always fireworks. For years I've been getting requests for another book about Jane MacGuire and Seth Caleb, and here it is. But you'll also find Eve and Joe and a slam-bang story I promise will satisfy you.*

We would like to thank Iris for talking with us. For more information about Iris and all her books, visit her website at [www.irisjohansen.com](http://www.irisjohansen.com). ■



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# APARTMENT GAMES

By Elijah Hubbard

GERALD CLOSED HIS EYES OUT OF HABIT AND LISTENED. Twelve stories below, the sounds of snarled traffic were clear. Outside his paint chipped front door, the shuffle of steps and jangling keys played a steady tune. A pause...then a door opened. Someone was in too much of a rush to wait for the elevator to creak wearily skyward. Better to hurry down the concrete steps. *Click, click, click.* The footsteps grew distant, then faded entirely.

It was morning. Not a crack of dawn, up with the chickens morning. Nor was it a casual brunch, mimosa-sipping morning either. This was the *get your ass out of bed, you're gonna be late for your shift, and you know Mr. Dennison ain't in the mood* kind. Gerald listened to the bustle moving steadily away from where he sat. A threadbare bathrobe fell loosely around his spindly frame. He raised a thin china cup of black coffee to his lips and sipped slowly, like a man with all the time in the world.

Gerald knew this wasn't true. His hourglass had run for the better part of a century. *Can't be much longer now*, he thought. *Old geezer like me, still kicking around. Never thought I'd outlast Gloria.* This thought gave him a familiar pang that Gerald filed away with all the others.

The morning passed and Gerald heard a knock on his door around noon. He shuffled towards the sound, hands slightly outstretched, brushing the walls gently as he moved. His hands stopped at the heavy deadbolt.

Ignoring the peep hole, Gerald said, "Who is it?"

A gruff voice returned, "You know who it is, you old fart. Open up before I take this door off its hinges."

Gerald chuckled softly while undoing the chain lock and two deadbolts. He stepped back and opened the door. A powerful wash of scent rolled in like a wave. Thick, musky sweat mixed with the sharp tang of mustard (*hot dog for lunch*) and a deeper, sweeter undertone (*probably onions with dinner last night*). Over it all, a top note of cheap drugstore cologne, heavy and spicy. *He must apply hourly*, thought Gerald, wrinkling his nose instinctively at the assault.

Gerald made a welcoming gesture into his apartment and said, "Come on then. I don't need a busted door on top of having to live underneath you and your mule stomping."

The man tried to sound hurt. "Gerry! You know I'm light as a dancer in these boots."

He made a brief attempt at a little soft shoe, and the clumsy scuffing sounds made Gerald grin.

"I'm sure you look as dumb as you sound, Don."

Don stopped his jig and let out a deep belly laugh of good natured self-deprecation. "It's a shame you can't see it. It'd take your breath away."

Gerald waved a hand in front of his nose, as if warding something off. "It wouldn't be the sight of you that takes my breath away." Don sniffed emphatically, as if he were noticing his own scent for the first time. "Besides, I can imagine you pretty well



in my mind's eye. And I wasn't always blind, you know. I remember what pigs looked like on the farm."

"You're a real sonofabitch, Gerry. I don't know why I bother. Anyway, you ready to get your ass kicked again?" Don walked past Gerald to the kitchen. There was a dull thud as he laid down the board he always brought. Gerald heard Don flip the board and remove the checker pieces held down by elastic bands. The board and pieces banged again as the board flipped back. Then the sharp snap of plastic discs being slapped into place. *God, you could pour a cup of coffee loudly, couldn't you?*

"Pick a hand," Don said, holding out both closed fists in front of the blind man.

"How do I know they're not both red?"

Don snorted. "You don't. Just assume I'm not a giant asshole."

*Well, if the shoe fits*, Gerald thought. Don was friendly enough, but he certainly wasn't thinking about his downstairs neighbor this past weekend. Or any weekend it seemed. Gerald assumed Don put down a case of tallboys as a preliminary bout before moving on to the main event of drunken shouting matches with his wife. He was old, but his ears were still sharp: the blind man's blessing. The jealous accusations and beer soaked recriminations were muffled, but the wet meat slap of a balled up fist that inevitably came in round seven was clear as a bell. Gerald would lie awake, unable to drift off, unable to get back to his dreams. Unable to get back to Gloria.

Sleep was elusive for an old man like him. He could no longer count on a day's hard labor to bring him to sleep's door. He no longer had the weariness of a young father, all work and kids and late night grasps at Gloria's body, pushing unconsciousness back a short while before collapsing into it, a man sinking into a warm pool. No, at seventy-six, the pool receded at his touch. The morning after one of Don and Maggie's rows he'd sit bleary-eyed at his kitchen table, drinking cup after cup of dark brooding coffee, feeling the blood pound at his temples. Upstairs, nothing but silence from the still sleeping couple.

Gerald reached out a hand and tapped Don's left fist.

"Red. Looks like I go first." Gerald could hear Don's grin.

Their first game went quickly, as always. Neither talked very much. Don would describe each move with coordinates, like he was playing Battleship. "C2 moving over to D3." Gerald would occasionally reach out and touch the pieces and empty spaces to reinforce his mental image of the game.

Don played aggressively. He made his moves without much thought, but he had the instinctual cunning of a thousand such games played since childhood. The simplicity of 'move, hop, king-me!' appealed to the man. *None of that sissy chess bullshit*, he'd say, as he pushed another black disc deeper towards Gerald.

Gerald envisioned the board. Rows of red and black were covered by his rapidly depleting forces. The clumsy mule-stompers advanced steadily upon him. He could tell that he wasn't going to win this match, but he was fairly certain he could make Don bleed a bit before his inevitable victory. He drew Don's pieces into traps, feigning weakness, sacrificing a few of his own pieces to claim one of the enemy's forward scouts, denying them kingship at steep cost. Gerald knew that Don didn't just want to win, he wanted to dominate. That meant kings. Lots of them. Charging across the board like cavalry in a sea of fleeing infantry.

*Not this time*, thought Gerald. He closed off another attempt, removing the piece from the board.

It was over soon, Gerald's pieces either removed or trapped into immobility. He listened to the chair creak as Don leaned back, satisfied.

"Like I said: Grade-A ass kicking right there. I should be arrested for elder abuse."

Gerald snorted, but gritted his teeth. He didn't care about losing a game of checkers, but Don could be an insensitive oaf. Every piece evicted from the board felt a little more personal than usual. *That's right, you old fuck, off my board. No lallygagging about, sleeping on the job. Move along!*

Last night had been especially bad. Gloria didn't always come to Gerald as he slept. He wished he knew how to summon her, what magic words to say to guarantee his late wife's appearance. Sometimes, Gloria was young, barely eighteen, still a farm girl waiting to be his bride. Lately she had been older, just under forty. Time had started to take little nips off her edges, but she was still beautiful, and her smile was a radiant warmth.

She had come last night, for the first time in weeks. In his dream, Gerald was younger too, and he'd wrapped Gloria in his arms. The warmth of her body pressed against his was intoxicating. How long had it been since he'd last held her like this? Staring into her smiling face, he'd begun to hear a distant noise. *Boom, boom, boom*. Confusion spread over Gloria's face and she began looking around for the source of the sound. She struggled, clearly perturbed. *No, Gloria, ignore it, just something that happens*, he'd said. But the noise had gotten louder, closer. And now it carried voices along with the thumps.

*Boom, boom, you sonofa-, boom, boom, I bet you wish you could just leave doncha, boom, boom, are you fuckin' kidding me, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BITCH!*

"Hey, you reset the board this time."

Gerald jerked back to reality, startled. His thoughts dissolved, just as Gloria's form had dissolved in his arms. She and the dream had slid away, and he was left alone in bed, listening to Don accuse Maggie of wanting to fuck the postman (*doubtful*), and Maggie accuse Don of being an alcoholic (*definitely*).

Gerald cocked his head towards Don and thought, *you dumb sonofabitch, you took my Gloria away from me. Again.* But what he said was, "Sure."

Gerald reached for the piles of discs. Red always to the left of the board, black always to the right. He consulted his mental image of the game and began moving pieces back to where they belonged.

The chair creaked and groaned under Don's large frame as he stood. A grunt escaped his lips as he doubtless stretched his back. Gerald knew Don did a lot of different things for work as a contractor: installing tile, building custom closets, demoing outdated kitchens. They all involved lifting, carrying, and hauling. *Gotta keep the muscles loose, Don would say. Too tight and something gets pulled, I'm off the job site and not getting paid.*

Don moved to the counter. He picked up the coffee carafe and shook it from side to side, sloshing its contents. "This coffee fresh, Gerry?"

Gerald waved a spare hand as he moved pieces with the other. "Fresh enough for you."

Don poured himself a cup, gave another twist of his back, and sat back down. The board was neatly remade. Loser stayed with red.

"Alright, you old fuck, ready to lose again?" Don said it good-naturedly, but it rang with the arrogant tones of a bully. Gerald could imagine Don as a kid, probably bigger than most of the other children. Perhaps a little slower than they academically, and certainly harboring a temper. Wearing long sleeved shirts to cover up the dark, purple finger marks on his forearms. Perhaps sporting the occasional black eye (*I fell down, must've hit a rock*). Gerald assumed Don had learned drinking and anger from his father's example, and learned to pass on what he knew from his father's fists. He must've been king of the schoolyard, ruling through fear and intimidation. Gerald doubted he had changed much as an adult.

*But what kind of woman wants a man like that?* Gerald thought.

Gerald had encountered Maggie a few times in their building. Her voice was small, and seemed stuck at an age much younger than her own. He couldn't see the bruises, but Gerald could hear them. Her words were blue-green and tender, wincing around the edges. She always moved on quickly, like a small animal scurrying to the safety of its burrow. *But she won't leave, Gerald thought. She'll stay on. They'll keep fighting and screaming forever.*

Gerald waited silently for Don to make his first move.

"C6 to D7," Don said.

Gerald considered a moment, then made up his mind. He slid a hand out and countered with a mirror image.

"There was something I meant to ask you about," Gerald said.

Don slid another piece with a scrape. "C2 to D1. What's that?"

"How did you manage to get the landlord to work on your pipes? I've been asking for years, but I can't get the time of day. You've been here barely a year, and you somehow convinced him to fix it."

Don's voice sounded confused. "What are you talking about? You know the landlord doesn't fix shit around here."

Gerald paused as if thinking deeply. The plumbing was a constant issue in this building. The pipes didn't outright leak, but there were always pressure problems. The water was rarely hot for more than a brief window in the morning. Presumably, a hundred years of clogs were impeding the water in a hundred different places. Every new tenant complained within a week to the landlord. Every new tenant also learned that the landlord had no intention of fixing anything that wasn't gushing. *That's rent control for you,* thought Gerald darkly.

"But you've had work going on at your apartment for weeks. Seems like every other day I hear a maintenance guy in the afternoon," Gerald stated.

"Wait, what?"

"I may be blind, but I hear it, for sure. First, I hear the elevator go past this floor. Then it opens upstairs. Someone gets out. I hear the door upstairs open. A little while later, work sounds. Then after an hour or so, same thing in reverse."

Don suddenly sounded deeply suspicious. "What do you mean, work sounds?"



"You know," Gerald said, moving a piece. "Sounds like someone's banging on a pipe or wall or something."

There was a frozen silence. Then a sharp intake of breath. Gerald turned towards Don. "What's wrong?"

"A fucking banging sound? Every afternoon. While I'm at work. Is that right?"

"Hey, calm down, Don. Just some maintenance work, right?"

Don pulled something from the front pocket of his work shirt. It made a light scuffing sound.

"Hey, Gerry, you got the main office number for the building?"

Gerald, who hadn't used his old rolodex since he'd gone blind, recited the number from memory. He heard the dial tones of Don's cell phone. There was a long pause.

"Hullo? This is Don Freely in apartment 1411. Have you all been doing any work on my pipes?"

Don waited, while presumably the person on the other end checked the records. He was breathing a little heavily now.

"Yeah, I'm still here. Uh-huh. Nobody? You sure? Not in the last six months even? Okay. Thanks."

There was a moment of disconcerting quiet.

"That fuckin' bitch."

"Don?"

Don stood abruptly and began moving rapidly back and forth, like a boxer stretching his legs out before the bell, the old floorboards beneath him creaking and whining under his weight. The kitchen was a small space, making Don turn at quick, regular intervals.

"That goddamn fuckin' bitch!"

Gerald stood up, shakily. "Get a hold of yourself, Don. Maybe you're reading this all wrong. That office is full of half-wits. They probably don't know which apartment the maintenance guys are in. I'm sure it's just pipe work."

"Oh, sure. The pipes. Just working on the pipes. Or maybe," Don said, whipping back around to face Gerald. "Maybe someone's laying pipe on my wife. You know the fuckin' landlord doesn't fix shit. And if he suddenly had a change of goddamn heart, I woulda heard about it. No, no, ain't no landlord. Tell me, Gerry, what else you hear when all this thumpin' and bumpin' is going on, huh?"

"Don, I—"

"Tell me, Gerry, you old fuck! What do you hear?"

Quietly, Gerald said, "I hear heavy breathing, like somebody is working hard. The occasional grunt."

With quick movement, Don swept the table clear of game board, coffee cups, and dead pieces. They clattered against the wall, checkers flying like shrapnel. The two coffee cups broke with a tinkling crack, and Gerald was suddenly glad he was wearing his house slippers. "I fuckin' knew it! Maggie's been cheating on me for weeks, or God knows how long, and this is the first I hear about it, huh, Gerry?"

"Jesus, Don, you're wrecking my kitchen!" Gerald felt the front of his robe, which was now splattered with coffee. "I didn't know anything like that was going on. I still don't. I just figured it was maintenance, finally getting off their ass."

"Goddammit, Gerry, don't be so fuckin' stupid. Oh, that bitch. Oh, goddamn, that fuckin' bitch." He started out of the kitchen and began pacing towards the door, doubling back, working himself up. "I'm not gonna stand for this. I'm not gonna be made a fool of. Not by that bitch. Not by Maggie, not by anyone."

Gerald felt his way to a cabinet, and retrieved a tall glass bottle and a coffee cup. He pulled the stopper out of the bottle and poured into the cup, listening to the splash and counting *one, one thousand, two, one thousand, three, one thousand*. Holding the cup in front of him like a ward, Gerald crept out of the kitchen, feeling along the edge of the wall. Don was pacing and snorting like an enraged bull.

"Don, here, drink this. You need something to calm your nerves." Gerald shakily held out the cup of whiskey. Don grabbed it roughly out of his hand, and downed it with a quick slurping sound.

"Get me another one."

Gerald did. Soon, Don had stopped thrashing around the room. In fact, to Gerald's astonishment, he was nearly silent.

"Don, don't do anything stupid. You don't know what happened. Even if she was," Gerald paused delicately. "*Fucking around*, well, a lot of couples work through that."

Gerald waited for a response, but the moment stretched tensely in the stillness. When Don finally spoke, his voice was quiet and dangerous, like a warning hiss of steam escaping from a nearly bursting pipe.

"Fuckin' around? Yeah, we're gonna work through that."

Don turned, opened the door, and slammed it behind him.

Gerald sat down and closed his eyes. He heard the heavy footsteps stalk toward the elevator. Then the insistent finger jabbing repeatedly at the button. The pacing steps in front of the elevator. A curt *goddammit* and the steps continued on down the hall to the stairs. A heavy door pushed open. Echoes on the stairs as large work boots slapped them repeatedly. Another heavy door opening one floor up. The boots again, moving down the hall at menacing speed. A fumbled key in the lock, a scraping metal sound, then a door being slammed first open, then shut.

Boots pounded against Gerald's ceiling. A woman's voice, questioning. A man's inarticulate shouting. Both voices rising now. A shouted accusation followed by an angry denial. Then a thunderclap of an open palm hammered across a cheek. A scream, then voices at the same time: *how could you, have you been drinking, are you fuckin' drunk? And, you fuckin' bitch, you fuckin' bitch.*

Heavy footsteps, moving away from the crying woman now, but staying in the room. Going to a closet? Muffled, rustling noises. Then a scream from behind the sounds. *No, no, Donnie, please, no, stop. I didn't do it, believe me, Donnie, stop, no, no, no—*

Gerald had heard this teleplay once before. The march to the closet. The rummaging. The shouting. *You want it, huh? You want me to do it, is that right?* Maggie's begging. The light, clicking metal sound of a hammer being drawn back, then lowered, then drawn back, and then finally, mercifully lowered. The wailing sounds of a creature under incredible tension finally being released.

*Oh, you shouldn't have stayed, you shouldn't have stayed, you shouldn't have—*

A gunshot. Gerald jolted and his heart leapt convulsively, throwing itself against his ribs. He clutched absently at his chest as if to still it. The sharp percussive crack faded in his ears and was replaced by a terrified screaming.

Three more shots. Maggie's scream abruptly cut off. In the silence, Gerald listened to the beating in his chest. It was pounding, a frightened animal. He was an old man after all. He let out a long, pent up breath and began counting slowly to thirty. *One, one thousand, two, one thousand, three, one thousand.* He got to eight.

A final gunshot. Then the sound of something heavy falling to the floor. Something that doubtless wore real mule-stomper work boots.

Gerald opened his eyes and, as usual, saw nothing. He let out a long sigh. It was done.

HE'D PLAYED A LOT OF CHECKERS OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS AFTER BEFRIENDING DON IN THE HALLWAY ONE MORNING. They'd ridden down the creaky, slow elevator together. Don had chatted about his work and asked how long had Gerald been in the building. Gerald had told him thirty-five years.

Don had said, "You got me beat by about thirty-four and a half. But we like it here so far. Me and Maggie are trying for a new start here. Maybe try to have a kid or something."

"Kids are a lot of work. And noisy too," Gerald had said. "But, they do have their perks. Someone to tell your stories to. Someone to play games with."

"Yeah. Always loved games when I was a kid. Used to play checkers with my dad when he wasn't busy working or drinking. Say, you like checkers, Gerry, was it?"

"Yeah. Gerald. I like checkers. Why don't you come on by sometime and play a game or two with an old man? Bring a board, I don't think I have one since my kids left."

"What about your . . .?" Don had asked.

"Oh, my blindness? I have a pretty good mind's eye. You tell me where you move, and I'll keep track of it in my head."

"Oh. That's impressive. Yeah, I'll stop by sometime. Maybe over lunch next week. See you, Gerry."

Gerald had waved goodbye, waited in the lobby until Don had left, then pushed the button for the elevator. He'd only come down to meet Don, after all. He wanted to meet the man who kept him up half the night every weekend. He needed to hear for himself the voice of his own personal insomnia for the past six months. He needed to know who it was that was taking Gloria (*my Gloria*) away from him.

*So you want to play checkers, Don?* Gerald had thought. *I'm not very good at checkers, but I'm real good at other games. I think I'll play one of those. Don't worry. You don't need to learn the rules. But I'm going to get my Gloria back.*

Gerald had ridden the elevator back up to his apartment, sat down at his table, and poured his third cup of coffee. He had sat bleary-eyed from another sleepless night and considered his next move. ■



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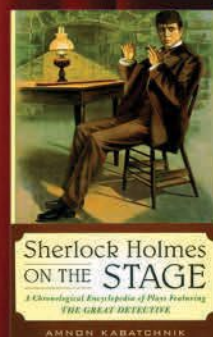
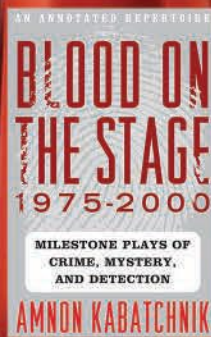
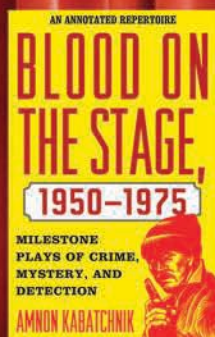
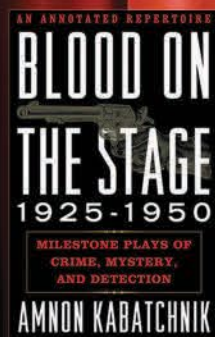
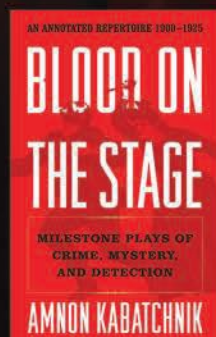
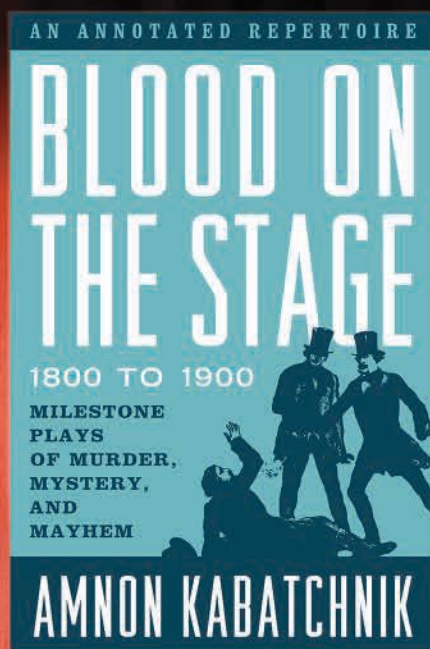
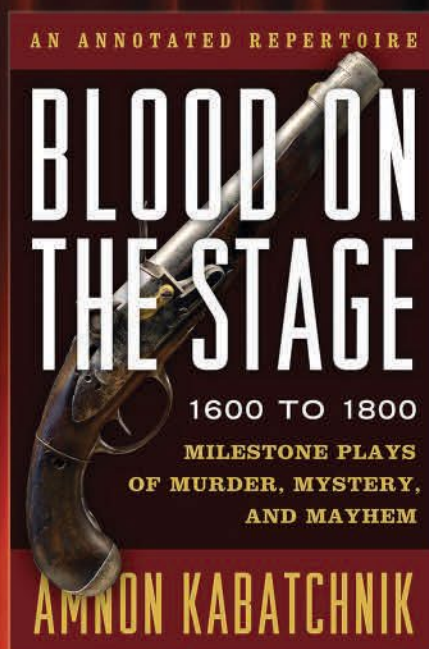
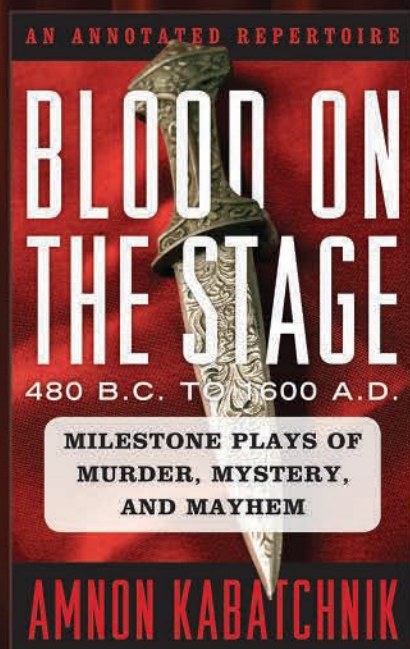
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