

Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

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Setting as Character

KAREN HARPER

Verisimilitude in Suspense

SAMUEL MARQUIS

Franze & Lancet Talk Writing
with JON LAND

Behind the Scenes with

CHRISTINE FEEHAN

Ready, Set, Read!

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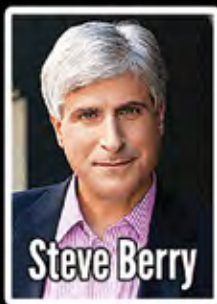
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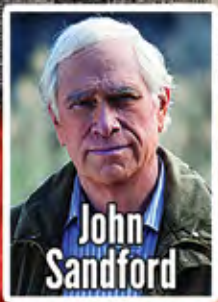
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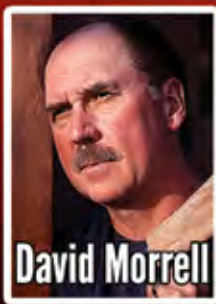


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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to 2017! For the New Year, we thought we'd issue you a little challenge. We came across this challenge and thought it would be fun to share with all of you. It's a great way to expand your reading and hopefully find some new authors to put on your bookshelf. Our magazine strives to help each reader stretch the boundaries of their reading. Some are going to take a little

research, but isn't that part of the fun? Like many people say, the journey can be more entertaining than reaching your destination.

Reading Challenge: *Read a Book That...*

1. You can read in one day.
2. Was published the year you were born.
3. A random stranger suggested to you.
4. Has an animal as the protagonist.
5. Personally relates to you.
6. Was originally published in a foreign language.
7. Has the name of a color in the title.
8. You weaseled out of reading in high school.
9. Was recommended to you by a bookstore clerk.
10. You *think* you will hate.
11. Has an author's first name that's the same as yours.
12. Everyone says is "so much better than the movie."
13. You have already read and loved.
14. Was first published before 1900.
15. Takes place on an island.
16. Was banned at some point.

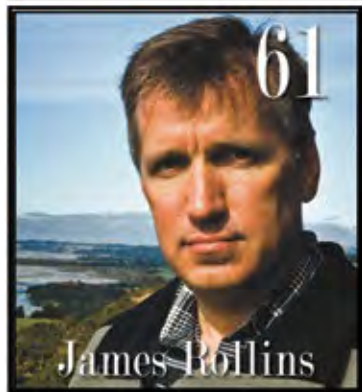
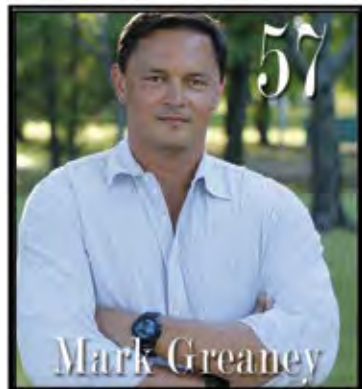
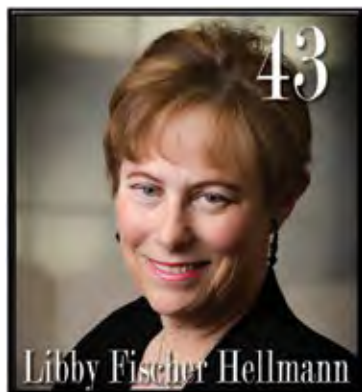
Send us an email to let us know how you plan on tackling this challenge and send us your ideas/recommendations for your fellow readers. We'll share some ideas online. You can always reach us at editor@suspensemagazine.com. Enjoy!

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine ■



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CONTENT

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

January/ February 2017 / Vol. 074

<i>Forensic Files: The Alice in Wonderland Syndrome</i> By D.P. Lyle, MD	3
<i>Setting as Character in Suspense</i> By Karen Harper	4
<i>Verisimilitude in Suspense Novels</i> By Samuel Marquis	6
<i>Ghostwalkers</i> By Christine Feehan	8
<i>Mikel Santiago: From Spain to the Shores of Tremore Beach</i>	10
<i>Out From the Ether & "Under the Knife": Kelly Parsons</i>	12
<i>Inside the Pages: Suspense Magazine Book Reviews</i>	15
<i>Suspense Magazine Movie Reviews</i> By Jeff Ayers	29
<i>The Storyteller: Jon Land's Rules of Fiction</i> By Anthony Franze & Barry Lancet	30
<i>Featured Artist: Alexis Frost</i>	33
<i>Carey Baldwin: Looking to Thrill</i>	38
<i>How to Attract More Followers on Twitter</i> By Lynne Constantine	41
<i>Key to Being Published...And to Developing a Following</i> By Joseph Badal	50
<i>The Miller House</i> By John Raab	52
<i>Deer Sanctuary</i> By Susan Wingate	63
<i>A Message to Aspiring Authors</i> By Janice Badal	70
<i>Excerpt: "Stormfall"</i> By John Hegenberger	72

Forensic Files

Q&A: WHAT DRUGS MIGHT CAUSE SIDE EFFECTS IN MY CHARACTER WITH ALICE IN WONDERLAND SYNDROME?

By D.P. Lyle, MD

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Q: I have a question about Alice in Wonderland Syndrome (AIWS). My character is in his mid-30s. From what I've gathered from reading about this syndrome, it is fairly common with children and with migraine sufferers and it is controllable. However, I want my character to have side effects. In other words, even though the AIWS and his migraines are under control, he is increasingly erratic. Insomnia, impotence, and irritability would all be a bonus. Could he be dosing himself with some type of herb that he doesn't realize would have these side effects when combined with the medication prescribed for AIWS? Or is there a medication for AIWS that might cause these kinds of side effects but be subtle enough in the beginning that the person becomes mentally unstable before he realizes

something is wrong?

~FY Bailey

A: Alice in Wonderland Syndrome is also known as Todd's Syndrome. It is a neurologic condition that leads to disorientation and visual and size perception disturbances (micropsia and macropsia). This means that their perception of size and distance is distorted. Much like Alice after she descended into the rabbit hole and consumed the food and drink she was offered.

AIWS is associated with migraines, tumors, and some psychoactive drugs. It is treated in a similar fashion to standard migraines with various combinations of anticonvulsants, antidepressants, beta blockers, and calcium channel blockers. Both anticonvulsants (Dilantin, the benzodiazepines such as Valium and Xanax, and others) and antidepressants (the SSRIs like Lexapro and Prozac, the MAOIs like Marplan and Nardil, and the tricyclic antidepressants like Elavil and Tofranil, and others) have significant psychological side effects. Side effects such as insomnia, irritability, impotence, confusion, disorientation, delusions, hallucinations, and bizarre behaviors of all types—some aggressive and others depressive. Beta blockers can cause fatigue, sleepiness, and impotence. The calcium channel blockers, in general, have fewer side effects—at least on a psychiatric level.

As for herbs, almost anything that would cause psychiatric effects could have detrimental outcomes in your character. Cannabis, mushrooms, LSD, ecstasy, and other hallucinogens could easily make his symptoms worse and his behavior unpredictable.

Your sufferer could easily be placed on one of the anticonvulsants, one of the antidepressants, or a combination of two of these drugs and develop almost any of the above side effects, in any degree, and in any combination that you want. This should give you a great deal to work with. ■

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

SETTING

AS CHARACTER IN SUSPENSE



By Karen Harper
Press Photo Credit: Jeffrey A. Rycus

In my thirty-year writing career, I have found that most writers start either with plot or character, so I've always been in the minority since I begin with setting. I choose a location I know well or which is compelling to me and build my suspense novel from there.

I was once encouraged to know that P.D. James also began with setting. At a writer's conference in Florida years ago where we were both speakers, she said, "If the place is real, the characters and story should be too." (Besides, what a thrill to meet her. I thought at the time, 'If I just breathe the same air this woman does, it will help me.')

Unique settings can help interest a reader and sell a book. A rich sense of place can enhance and elevate any novel, but especially suspense, mystery and thrillers which can become deeper and special with setting as a threatening character.

Although Amish country has been used for many romantic and religious novels, I found Ohio Amish country, which I know well, to be fertile ground not only for crops but for scary suspense. Those huge barns, the lack of phones and utter darkness at night, the fact the Amish don't particularly like or trust cops or lawyers—perfect for a rural or small town setting for suspense. I've used Appalachia with its unique culture, mountains (where cell phones often don't work) and eccentric characters. Once again, it's dark out there, and law enforcement is often miles away.

My new suspense series is set in South Florida and the Caribbean, which at first sounds sunny, lovely, glamorous and busy. But having lived near the Everglades for thirty winters, I have seen the dark side of the Sunshine State and parts south. The Glades, itself, holds endangered and encroaching wild animals, major crime...

One of the best book signings I ever had was at Ted Smallwood's old store, a historic site near the labyrinthine Ten Thousand Islands in southwest Florida. Once visited by criminals hiding out in the Glades and Seminole Indians, Smallwood's represents the "old" Florida I love. "Drowning Tides," book #2 in my new *South Shores* series, deals with the legend of the Fountain of Youth in eccentric Goodland, Florida, off the beaten tourist path.

Here are several suggestions for making settings so strong that they can actually serve as another character—a dynamic, compelling one in suspense writing.

SETTINGS CAN HAVE A CHARACTER ARC. Like the people in a book, settings can grow and change. One obvious example of this is *The Titanic*. The ship at first is a glamorous, safe haven but ends as a danger and a killer. Another example most would recognize is the southern plantation in *Gone With the Wind*. Tara is a luxurious mansion and estate, which suffers during the Civil War, yet becomes "someone" Scarlet struggles to save at all costs. Dynamic suspense novels have used devastating natural disasters as the enemy to be conquered.

If you've ever been to Mackinac Island in northern Michigan, you may know what a charming place it is in the spring and summer. Yet in the late autumn and winter, when I set a recent novel, "Falling Darkness," the ice isolates the place. The setting



turns threatening. The residents wait until Lake Huron ices over and ride snowmobiles over “an ice bridge” to the mainland. But what if evil comes onto the island? What if someone fleeing danger gets off that ‘path of ice?’ People have plunged into the frigid depths there.

Remember the movie *Fargo*? A sense of place there was more than setting; it was character. Tami Hoag’s breakout novel, “Night Sins,” also used place (and the bone-chilling temperatures) as a threat and enemy as well as a setting. On the other hand, a novel like “The English Patient” used the desert as a character.

DO THE UNEXPECTED WITH A SETTING AS A CHARACTER. No wonder small towns—so charming, so ‘rural Americana’—make great places to set a crime or mystery. We don’t expect evil, as Stephen King knows well. Usually, it’s not the impersonal criminal there; the enemy is often ‘us,’ someone the characters know, which makes the story all the more terrifying.

Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle weighed in on this small town concept, putting the words into Sherlock Holmes’s mouth in the short story *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*: “The lowest and vilest alleys of London do not present a more dreadful record of sin that does the smiling and beautiful countryside.” (“The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes,” 1892.)

So it’s also okay to forget the dark and stormy night that readers might expect. How about a sunny day murder in a tall cornfield where the victim could be so close but unseen? Remember those sunny beaches in *Jaws* with people swimming happily in the ocean? Surprise your reader with a contrast between the calm setting and dreadful reality.

LET A UNIQUE SETTING YOU REALLY KNOW OR LOVE WORK FOR YOU. Don’t hesitate to use something you haven’t seen before—or do your own take on it. I have always been astounded at the story of Tony Hillerman’s early work once getting a rejection which advised him that the police procedure background was good but could he do away with the Navajo stuff. What? How unique, brilliant and compelling is his ‘Navajo stuff’! It helped to make him the great writer he was. Places matter; compelling settings can help to sell a novel to a publisher and to a reader. ■

Karen Harper is the New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author of romantic suspense and historical novels. A native Ohioan, Karen is a former high school English teacher and English-and-writing instructor at the Ohio State University. (Go Bucks!) The Harpers are avid Ohio State football fans, but they have a serious side too. They were on the 10-year committee which revamped the main library on campus. The Ohio State Library houses her author collection in Rare Books and Manuscripts.

The Harpers love to travel, and Karen often uses her favorite places as settings for her novels. She’s recently written books set in Edwardian England and South Florida, the latter where she lived for 30 winters. Her latest trilogy is The South Shores Novels, with forensic psychologist Claire Britten and criminal lawyer Nick Markwood. Her most recent historical is “The Royal Nanny.” These bring her published books to over 60 in a 34-year writing career.

Karen belongs to several writer’s organizations, including International Thriller Writers, Mystery Writers of America, Romance Writers of America, Sisters in Crime and The Historical Novel Society. She appreciates hearing from readers on her website at www.KarenHarperAuthor.com and www.facebook.com/KarenHarperAuthor—and she answers!

VERISIMILITUDE IN SUSPENSE NOVELS: IT'S ALL IN THE PACING AND CHARACTERS



By Samuel Marquis

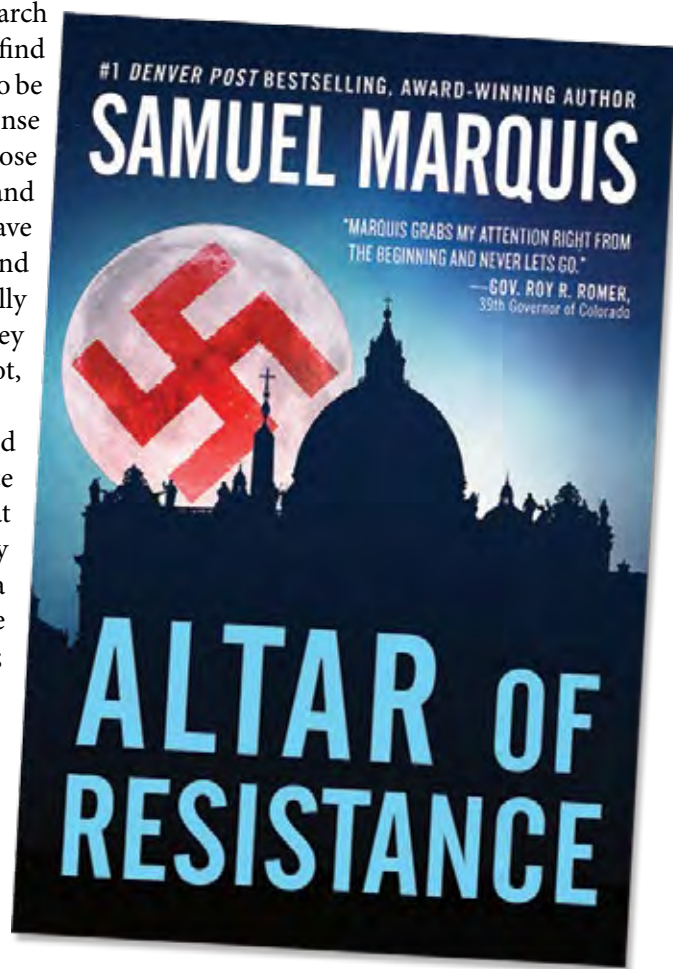
Press Photo Credit: Jeffrey A. Rycus

The hawkers of the “How-To-Be-The-Next-Mega-Bestselling-Author” books would have us believe that one of the most common mistakes suspense authors make, particularly neophytes, is to overload their books with technical/historical details because they cannot resist the temptation to show off their research skills. Actually, I find just the opposite to be true. Many suspense novels, often those by major brand name authors, have too little detail and are technically wanting; or they

simply contain too much detail without actually advancing the plot, or providing characters that captivate us.

The objective, of course, is to immerse the reader in a new and exciting world while still propelling the plot along at a furious pace and making the reader feel as though the details are not details at all, but at the very heart of the characters and setting in which they live. The key to consistently achieving this goal is to maintain a brisk pace with ample external events; to create characters that are both memorable and lovable (or at least intriguingly despicable); and, to construct a literary world that is absolutely authentic. If the overall pace is fast enough, and the reader loves your characters and is able to empathize with them—believe what they believe, or is at least able to understand them in a deep way—she/he will love your book, even though immersed in a world of complex scientific or historical jargon. It all lies in the pacing and character development.

As a professional hydrogeologist, expert witness in the



environmental science industry, and author of both technical and historical thrillers, I tend to pack a lot of scientific and historical details into my novels. When I write, I want readers to be fully immersed in the environmental-speak of fracking, earthquakes, or cancer clusters; the WWII-speak of spies, soldiers, and government officials; or, the intelligence- and law-enforcement-speak of the CIA, FBI, and foreign intelligence services. Plus, I'm just a quantitative nerd at heart and just can't help myself. With an M.S. in Geology, and having served as a scientific expert witness on numerous groundwater contamination cases, I opt for more technical details rather than less, and I tend to seek out authors that demonstrate a similar level of verisimilitude. But the only way we nerds can get away with such literary iconoclasm is to maintain a frenetic pace with numerous twists, turns, and external events, and to create characters that matter to readers.

All of my thrillers are highly technical and present a large number of details regarding environmental science, espionage, historical events, and international intelligence and law enforcement. Thankfully, for most readers and even most book reviewers this is not a problem, for the simple reason that I have, for the most part, sustained a crisp pace and created characters that are believable and memorable.

So how do you know where to draw the line? My view is that you can't please everyone and that your detailed research, no matter how much you scale it back, will be too much for some portion of your readership. To me, the more egregious sin is to fail to demonstrate your mastery of the technical aspects of your story while at the same time maintaining an explosive pace and sustained dramatic tension.

As WWII suspense writer Alan Furst says, "You must not bore the reader, whatever else you do."

This thriller writer wholeheartedly agrees. But you don't have to give up on the details and sacrifice authenticity to do it. The best thrillers, even the highly technical ones, owe their success to great pacing and unforgettable characters. ■

Samuel Marquis is a bestselling, award-winning suspense author. He works by day as a VP-Principal Hydrogeologist with an environmental firm in Boulder, Colorado, and by night as the spinner of the Joe Higheagle Environmental Sleuth series, the Nick Lassiter International Espionage series, and a World War Two Trilogy. His thrillers have been #1 Denver Post bestsellers, received multiple national book awards (Foreword Reviews' Book of the Year, USA Best Book, Beverly Hills, and Next Generation Indie), and garnered glowing reviews from #1 bestseller James Patterson, Kirkus, and Foreword Reviews (5 Stars). His website is www.samuelmarquisbooks.com. For publicity inquiries, please contact Chelsea Apple at chelsea@jkscommunications.com.

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**SUSPENSE
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GHOSTWALKERS:

*Action, Adventure, Romantic Suspense, Military Thriller
with a Touch of Paranormal*



By Christine Feehan
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

I'VE ALWAYS WRITTEN STORIES. Even as a child I would make up stories and write them down, reading them to my siblings or anyone else willing to listen. When I started writing novels, I wrote them for myself. I've always loved suspense stories, so I started there writing about cowboys. That didn't really work for me so I tried a few other things, but ultimately I settled on military suspense. I'm a huge supporter of our military and have always seen them as true heroes, so writing about military heroes felt natural to me. I wrote about two couples in particular, Ryland & Lily and then Mack & Jaimie. These weren't the Ghostwalkers I write now, but the characters were so strong in my mind I made up several stories about them that would never see the light of day.

In the later 1990's my friend Kathie encouraged me to write for publication. I'd not considered it. I had no idea how to go about submitting and, without Kathie, I likely never would have. But, by this time I'd lost my son and writing was a way of coping with that loss. Calvert and I had played Dungeons & Dragons for years. He loved fantasy stories and part of me felt better writing the stories I thought Calvert would love, and so I started writing my *Carpathian* novels.

Vampires and vampire hunters, mages and, yes, even dragons. The series was eventually picked up, and as of my last *Carpathian* novel I've written 30 in that series to-date, many of them hitting #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Once the *Carpathian* series had an established readership I wanted to add some variety to my writing. It was easy to turn back to those characters who'd spoke so loudly to me prior to the *Carpathian* series. But, now I had more experience



and an idea that had been lurking in my mind for several years. An idea about military men who were psychically enhanced.

I always knew there would be four teams and all four branches of the military would be represented. The first team was introduced in the very first *Ghostwalker* book entitled “Shadow Game” in which I brought back characters Ryland and Lily. Our villain was the evil, but brilliant scientist Doctor Whitney, who went on to do genetic experiments on orphaned girls to turn them into assassins for the government.

The teams were spread out across the country and these brave men and women used their psychic gifts to succeed at missions and save lives. Currently, Team Four resides in Louisiana, living back in the bayou for privacy. I’ve made several research tours of New Orleans, the bayou, NASA Stennis Center and the backwater marshes leading to the covert military training areas of Stennis. I got as close as I could to the military training facility and I could imagine how my characters would get there, what that trip would be like and how the bayou could play a role in the stories.

“Power Game,” which released in January, is my 13th *Ghostwalker* novel and it introduces a new villain, one even more powerful and dangerous than the evil Dr. Whitney. This novel ties up some loose ends and then ups the ante for our Ghostwalkers on many levels, so it’s actually a good place to start if you don’t want to go back and read the other books. Of course, for the origin story of the Ghostwalkers you have to go back to Team One, but how it started is just one of many adventures. ■

To learn more about Christine, visit her website at www.christinefeehan.com. You can view the trailer for “Power Game” at <https://youtu.be/u4vbMV8TPuo>.

Christine Feehan is a #1 New York Times bestselling author fifteen times over with her portfolio including over 50 published novels, including six series; Leopard Series, Dark Series, Ghostwalker Series, Drake Sisters Series, the Sisters of the Heart Series, and her new Shadow Series. Five of her series have hit the #1 spot on the New York Times bestselling list as well. Her debut novel “Dark Prince” received 3 of the 9 Paranormal Excellence Awards in Romantic Literature (PEARL) in 1999. Since then she has been published by various publishing houses including Leisure Books, Pocket Books, and currently is writing for Berkley/Jove. She also has earned 7 more PEARL awards since “Dark Prince.”



POWER GAME

By Christine Feehan

This tale of mystical, paranormal romance by Christine Feehan takes off like a bullet escaping the barrel of a gun. Terrorists have kidnapped hostages, who are members of a United Nations joint security force stationed in Indonesia. This tragedy brings back a true “supersoldier” by the name of Zeke Fortunes. This is the original “Ghost Walker” who owns talents that no one has ever seen before.

Zeke leads the rescue team because he’s prepared for just about anything. Except...a woman by the name of Bellisia who is a genetically engineered super spy. Her abilities and talents almost match Zeke’s step-for-step. Instead of seeing each other as enemies, however, in a world filled with death, treachery, and just plain sleaze, Zeke and Bellisia find what has been missing in their own lives in each other. In other words, even super beings have a heart.

When it comes to Bellisia, she is a dominant force in the world; vicious but faithful, readers watch as she jumps easily into the battle, yet has the ability to remain likeable throughout.

Not wanting to give too much away on this one, readers will find this to be a terrific read, doing pride and justice to the *Ghostwalker* series that author Christine Feehan has grown into, yet another, bestselling compilation of works.

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



MIKEL SANTIAGO

From Spain to the Shores of Tremore Beach

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Sergio Cuevas

It's always great to stretch beyond the borders of the United States to find authors who write wonderful books. Mikel Santiago comes to us from Portugalete, Spain. He devoted his youth to play in a Rock 'n' Roll band and only later started writing and publishing short tales on the web. One of his shorts (*Historia de un crimen perfecto*) made it to the Barnes & Noble Bestseller Spanish Titles in the U.S.

Mikel has lived in Ireland and the Netherlands for almost a decade. Now he combines his life as a writer with a rock band and his passion for software development.

The great part of books, movies, music or art? They have no real barriers. Great stories can come from anywhere and Mikel has penned a haunting tale in "The Last Night at Tremore Beach."

We hope you'll enjoy our exclusive interview with Mikel.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): "The Last Night at Tremore Beach" is your first novel—can you tell readers what it was like to sit down and create such an amazing work?

Mikel Santiago (M.S.): *I've been writing short stories for a long time, so starting my first novel was somewhat like climbing your first "big" mountain. I put two years of my life into it, while living between Ireland and the Netherlands (and*

there is a lot of that "expat" life portrayed by the characters of Judie and Peter Harper). But it was a fantastic experience. Once I set up that beach in Donegal, and placed my characters in those houses, everything started working in my mind and the scenes came naturally week after week.

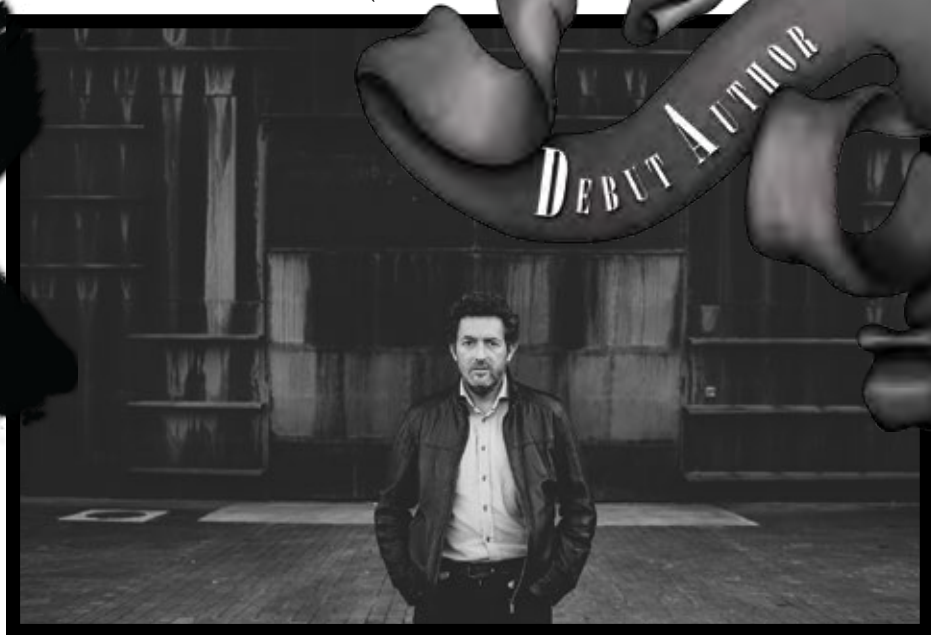
S. MAG.: What did it feel like when you learned that it had become a Top Ten international bestseller?

M.S.: *Well, is a moment of levitation when you go from being a self-published author to a published one? Imagine that plus selling movie rights and twelve translations. I remember I was living in Amsterdam when all this news started coming through, and my girlfriend and I would joke about it being a huge prank from our Spanish friends. "It's not really happening, Mikel." But it was.*

S. MAG.: Can you tell readers a bit about the storyline/plot of the book?

M.S.: *Peter Harper is a gifted musician whose career and personal life are in trouble. In an attempt to unblock himself he travels to northwest Ireland and rents a remote cottage on beautiful, windswept Tremore Beach. His only neighbors for miles around are a retired American couple, Leo and Marie Kogan, who sense his difficulties and take him under their wing. But there's something strange about the pair that he can't quite figure out. One night, during a storm, Peter suffers an accident and starts having some nightmares about the Kogans. This is only the beginning of some premonitory dreams that will involve his family and a very special friend, Judie, that he made in the small town close to Tremore Beach.*

S. MAG.: Being both a musician and an author, is there a particular personal "favorite" of the two? Which would that be, and why?



M.S.: Music was my first passion. When I was in my 20s, I was totally devoted to my band. So let's say, from a chronological perspective, it came first. The writing, at least the more serious writing, came when I was already 30 and has been my most successful job to date. So what to choose? I think I learned many things as a musician that, every day, influence me in my writing. Rhythm, travels, friends, and good stories. But nowadays I am more a writer than I am a musician, even though I still play.

S. MAG.: Could you share with us information on your music and musical background?

M.S.: I started many pop-rock bands in my hometown, Bilbao, and then in Dublin and Amsterdam, my two other "adopted cities." I like blues music mostly, and I play guitar and I also sing. Some people say I sound like Mick Jagger, so that's why I won my Mikel Sant-Jagger nickname among friends. Even though I did write a few songs back in the day, nowadays I only do covers in bars in my city. It's a good excuse to have fun!

S. MAG.: Living in Spain—not to mention spending time in both Ireland and the Netherlands—you have certainly been surrounded by stunning locales throughout your lifetime. Is there one in particular that inspires you the most? Can you tell us a bit about each one that affected you to the point where they "added" to the novel and/or music you were creating?

M.S.: Well, I come from the Basque Country, a region located in the north of the Spanish Peninsula, very close to the French border. We have an Atlantic coast there, rough and beautiful, very similar to southwest Ireland (Cork or Clare) but with milder weather. There is a big connection between Ireland and the Basques, so I felt at home living up there, though I have to admit that the coast in Donegal is way more dramatic and violent, and that was what led me to write *Tremore Beach* in that setting. Everything started with a little trip to a small town in the north. We spent some days in a cottage in Donegal, with a hurricane hitting the coast outside, and visited the town pub and listened to very good stories. Enough to inspire anybody! But Amsterdam has its importance in everything I do. I got a good flexible job that allowed me to finish my novel! So the Dutch influence is also present in the book.

S. MAG.: You began your writing career with a novella, *History of a Perfect Crime*. What first brought that to the page? Was there a specific point in time where writing became a second "love" for you?

M.S.: I always loved writing but I did it in a more private way. During my teenage years I wrote many diaries and poems only for my private and melancholy usage. But at some point

I started reading more, and that made me hungry to write things that were as good as the ones I was reading. I started traveling around Europe and I remember one day sitting on a south Italian beach and reading a thriller by Dean Koontz, and I thought, "I want to write a story like this. Can I?" Well...from then on it was a long journey, but that was my first "manifesto."

S. MAG.: Will you be holding any signings/events in America at some point in the future where fans can meet and catch up with you?

M.S.: I'd love to be there with you guys, but I still don't have clear dates scheduled. In the meantime, please visit my website at www.mikelsantiago.info and leave a message. I will be more than happy to answer or just chat with you! You can also follow me on Facebook (@mikel.santiago.official), Twitter (@mikelsantiago), and Instagram (@mikel.santiago.escritor), and receive updates about "The Last Night at Tremore Beach" when you become a fan on <http://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Mikel-Santiago/483773229>.

S. MAG.: Do you, personally, have a musician or writer that you wish to meet one day? If so, who would that be, and why?

M.S.: Well, let's say I wouldn't mind meeting Stephen King one day. I've read most of his books, interviews, and essays, and he has been a great inspiration and motivation in my life as a writer. As a musician, of course, I would like to be invited on stage by Keith Richards. Why not?

S. MAG.: What is next for Mikel Santiago that readers/listeners should keep an eye out for?

M.S.: I already published my second novel in Spain and some European countries. And I am finishing my third as we speak, so I really hope these will be translated into English very soon.

We would like to thank Mikel for spending a little time with us. For more information about Mikel and his work visit his website at: <http://mikelsantiago.info>. ■





OUT FROM THE ETHER & “UNDER THE KNIFE” *Kelly Parsons*

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publisher

Author Kelly Parsons has just released his latest book “Under the Knife.” Kelly is a surgeon and professor at the University of California San Diego. His first book “Doing Harm” was praised by #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Harlan Coben, saying that the book was compelling, gripping and terrifying.

Kelly brings his expertise into his books, giving the reader a real sense of being *in* the book. With his latest, Kelly is asking the reader this question: “Wouldn’t you want to kill the surgeon who killed your wife?” A question like that brings in a ton of emotion. Let’s look inside and

then you’ll find our exclusive interview with Kelly below.

Biotechnology tycoon Morgan Finney is highly intelligent but shy and emotionally fragile. When his beloved wife Jenny dies of complications during a surgery led by Dr. Rita Wu, Finney’s grief turns to rage. He vows to kill Rita just as he believes she killed his wife.

But first he will systematically destroy her life. He will take what is precious to her just as she did to him. Aided by a mysterious man, Finney uses advanced medical technology to ruin Rita’s reputation and bring her to the brink of madness. Alone, fighting for her sanity and life, Rita reaches out to her former lover, Dr. Spencer Cameron, for help. Together they must fight to uncover Finney’s horrific intentions and race to stop him before it’s too late.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): You have many events/festivals scheduled for 2017 already. Are you an author who loves speaking to the fans about the characters you write? Do you have a special/funny moment you will always remember that occurred at an event/signing?

Kelly Parsons (K.P.): Absolutely! I’m extremely grateful to the fans. I’m delighted to spend time with them—it’s the least I can do to express my heartfelt gratitude. At a book event a few years ago, I sat on a panel moderated by a book critic who had reviewed “Doing Harm.” I thought the review was honest, fair, and actually quite favorable. But one of the audience members who’d read both “Doing Harm” and the review came to the microphone and scolded the reviewer for not praising it enough!

S. MAG.: Having a name like Stephen King say that you have written the “best damn medical thriller (he’s) read in 25 years” (which he did say in regards to your title, “Doing Harm”) must be quite a thrill. What was it like to read that? Is there one author you look up to and/or whose work excites you that you would love to sit down and speak with?

K.P.: In a word: indescribable! I admire so many different authors, from so many different genres, that we wouldn’t have space to name them all here.

S. MAG.: Your follow-up to “Doing Harm”—the new “Under the Knife”—was released February 7. Can you tell readers a bit about the storyline and what made you move forward with specific characters?

K.P.: *“Under the Knife” is essentially a story of revenge and redemption. When I first sketched the outline, I was surprised when four distinct points of view emerged: one for each of the main characters. So I decided to structure the book in chapters that alternate from one character’s perspective to another. I think my favorite characters are the villains. Each of them nurses complex motivations and hidden agendas.*

S. MAG.: Do you see a future series blooming from these two tales?

K.P.: *Not at this time. But each book ends with the potential for me to revisit the (surviving) characters. I’ve also been developing a few ideas for prequels.*

S. MAG.: Being a faculty member of UC San Diego, the medical realm is already a large part of your world. What made you choose to write medical thrillers? Was there a specific moment where you felt the writing “bug” bite?

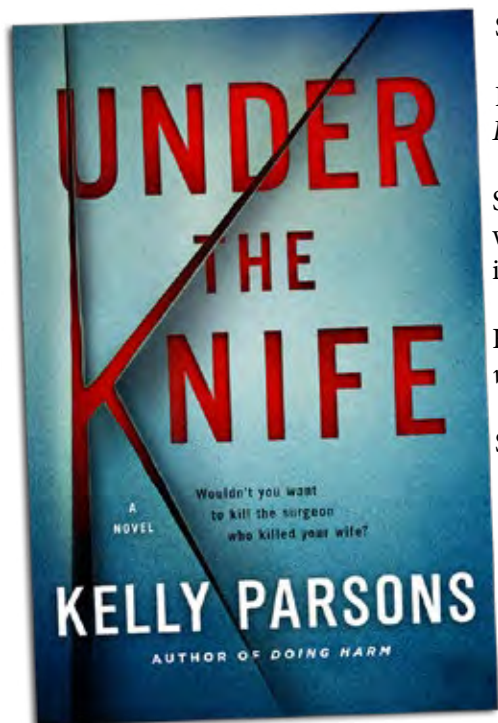
K.P.: *I can’t honestly say I chose to write medical thrillers—the stories on the page are the ones that simply popped out of my head. I also like to think of my books more broadly as “dilemma” thrillers: stories that make readers ask themselves, “What would I do in that situation?” I’ve been writing creatively ever since I was in grade school. Near the end of my medical training, I began to compile notes I’d kept over the years about my hospital experiences. Those notes formed the foundation for “Doing Harm.”*

S. MAG.: Along those same lines, are there real cases that you believe will (or already have) transcended into the world of fiction? Are any of your characters based on real people that work with you in the field?

K.P.: *While none of the events in “Doing Harm” or “Under the Knife” are based on real life, I worked hard to depict the medical elements—particularly the surgeries—as realistically as possible. None of my characters are based on real people. But some of my characters are amalgams of personalities I’ve encountered in the medical field over the past twenty years.*

S. MAG.: Now working on your third novel, can you give readers a “sneak peek” at what they might be seeing?

K.P.: *My third novel focuses on a group of ordinary people who, through advanced medical technology, have been given extraordinary abilities...but at a terrible price.*



S. MAG.: Is there another genre you wish to delve into at some point?

K.P.: *Possibly science fiction. I’ve always been a big fan of that genre. For now, though, I love writing thrillers.*

S. MAG.: Living in sunny Southern California must be amazing—especially when winter is knocking on doors across the country. Does the area help to invigorate and inspire you in any way?

K.P.: *It does, yes. I love spending time outdoors exercising—it helps me grapple with writer’s block!*

S. MAG.: What does a ‘day in the life’ of Kelly Parsons, author, entail?

K.P.: *I usually like to wake up early, while the house is still quiet, and write for at least an hour before going to work. Aside from that, I try to squeeze in writing whenever I can: nights, weekends, and vacations.*

We would like to thank Kelly for speaking with us. To find out more information on Kelly and his work visit his website at www.kellyparsonsbk.com. ■

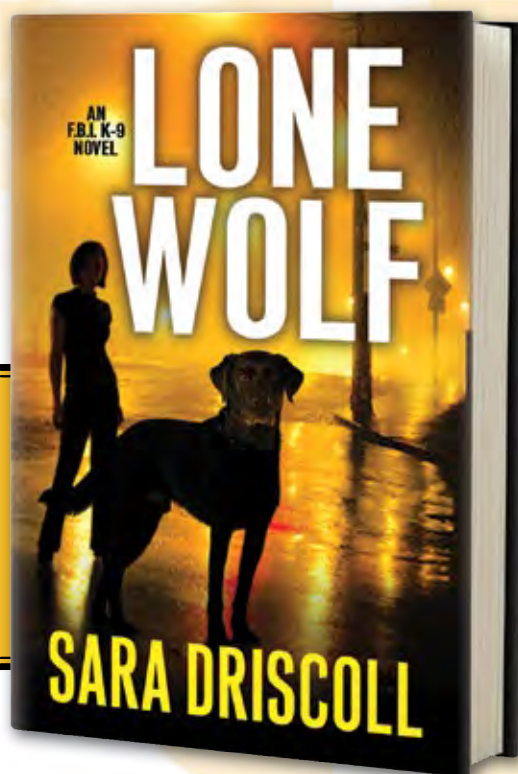


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SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

HOME SWEET HOME

By April Smith

They say good things come in great packages. Well...if the cover of this one doesn't scare you and make you want to jump right in and get started, than you're not paying attention.

It is 1985 and Jo Kusek is returning to Rapid City, South Dakota after twenty years. The daughter of a couple by the name of Cal and Betsy Kusek, Jo is only returning to see her brother and his young son who were left in critical condition after a tragic home invasion that took the life of Lance's wife. Once there, Jo finds herself immersed in a strange situation that involves family skeletons stumbling out of the closet.

It was in 1950 that an optimistic and perhaps naïve couple, Cal and Betsy Kusek, waved goodbye to the Big Apple and settled on a cattle ranch in South Dakota, running right into some fanatics during the frenzied time of the McCarthy era.

Cal, a Yale educated lawyer and former WWII fighter pilot, and Betsy, a nurse who had belonged to the Communist Party when she was a teenager, initially moved to Rapid City with their two children because Cal's Army buddy, Scotty, lived there. After buying a small ranch, Cal started to develop a political career. Unfortunately, Cal was a dedicated Democrat in a purely Republican area which meant his career was not working out all that well.

As he continued to fight, a seat opened in the State Assembly and Cal jumped at the chance, ending up serving three terms. Sadly, things turn bad when Betsy is investigated by the FBI for being a Communist and the entire town turns against the Kusek family.

Why would that have anything to do with a murder 35 years later? You'll have to read this fantastic suspense and find out!

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



DEATH OF A GHOST

By M.C. Beaton

This fabulous story by M.C. Beaton featuring Police Sergeant Hamish Macbeth is, as usual, a real gem.

Hamish hears some information about a haunted castle located not too far away. He begins with the assumption that the strange noises and moving lights being reported by the villagers, are just being made by some local teens smoking pot, or worse. To calm the rumors, Hamish chooses to spend the night, along with Policeman Charlie Carson for back-up, at the seemingly haunted castle. Things go quite well at first. In fact, nothing suggests haunting or foul play until... Charlie takes a header through the floor and comes face to face with a very old, dead corpse.

As Hamish was looking around, he sees Charlie fall into the cellar. Along with his very shocked policeman, Hamish stares at the body propped up against the wall. What's worse, however, is that while they are waiting for back-up the two men decide to go for some food. When they return, the body is nowhere to be found. It's certainly apparent that something is not quite right inside the castle, but is it a ghostly demon playing games; or is there a murderer who will do anything to hide his crime?

This is a fast-paced story that includes tricks and plotlines galore. From murder to drugs to romance, Beaton provides many new characters while also bringing back some old favorites. Hamish, as always, is a riveting character that sees many things the others cannot, and when the bodies start piling up, Hamish's talents bring everything to a shocking, thrilling close.

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

CHAOS

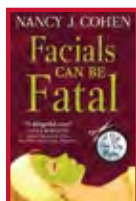
By Patricia Cornwell

Cornwell's fans will welcome the latest *Kay Scarpetta* mystery. It starts with a public spat between the ever prickly Scarpetta and Bryce, her Chief of Staff, the day before she's to give an address at Harvard. Another complication is her apprehension about her sister, Dorothy, flying in to be in the audience. She has no idea why her sister is coming since she hasn't been to Cambridge to see her in eight years. Maybe she wants, at long last, to be friends?

Scarpetta is stunned to find out someone called nine-one-one about her dust up with Bryce. That, and other oddities, lead Pete Marino, a Cambridge police investigator, to believe that someone is out to get her. When a young woman she has had a couple of passing encounters with ends up dead, she's called to the scene to investigate. The area is having an intense heat wave. The decision is made to enclose the area of the park where the mysterious young woman met her death, which is also mysterious, and most of the action of the book takes place inside this chaotic crime scene, stifling hot and full of the stench of death. Her spectacularly mismatched FBI husband is involved in the case, causing another layer of tension. Then there's the fact that Pete Marino may be wanting to become involved with her sister, a thought that horrifies Scarpetta.

Following the twists of the cyber hacking, and delving into the death of the young woman, will give Cornwell fans another great read with their favorite neurotic medical examiner. Have fun!

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Death on the Trek" ■



FACIALS CAN BE FATAL

By Nancy J. Cohen

During the mad time that is referred to as the "holiday season," the last thing that Marla Vail, owner of the Cut 'N Dye salon needs is exactly what happens in her place of business. One of her clients, while in the middle of her facial, breathed her last breath. This is not, as you can tell, the best endorsement for a spa; and to top that off, the corpse was a regular at the salon and truly good for business.

But Marla Vail's horrific luck doesn't end there. To make matters even worse, at the fashion show where Marla's stylists are working, another body is found and a fancy headpiece is stolen.

With the help of her husband, Dalton, Marla is sure that she will be able to salvage her reputation as they begin to track down probable suspects. But as bodies start piling up, Marla and her husband race to find clues as to who is doing the killings, and how on earth they could be related. There are a number of suspects to choose from: a greedy land developer, a dress designer whose husband has links to the mob, a mortician who might be making money by selling human hair, and so many more.

Add to all this wonder the fact that Marla and Dalton are able to solve a mystery that includes pirates of the past and shipwrecks off the Florida coast, and readers will be standing in line to get on this series as fast as possible.

Marla and Dalton work extremely well together and are a whole lot of fun to read. This is one book in a series, yes, but is also a fantastic standalone for anyone who might not have met this couple before.

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

A PINCH OF POISON

By Alyssa Maxwell

When Lady Phoebe Renshaw, granddaughter of the Earl of Wroxly, and her maid, Eva, volunteer to organize a collection drive and charity luncheon to benefit survivors of World War I at her alma mater, the exclusive Haverleigh School for Young Ladies, it seems like an appropriate activity for a young woman of her station. To involve the students in the event preparation, Lady Phoebe encourages them to participate in cooking and baking for the event. After all, good deeds build good character, and good character is a cornerstone of the Haverleigh School tradition.

All is well until dessert is served and the school's headmistress, Henrietta Finch, collapses and dies after eating a Madeira cake prepared for her by one of the students. And when the local police conclude that Miss Finch was the victim of cyanide poisoning, the Board of Trustees decides it's no longer safe for the students to remain, and closes Haverleigh until the mystery of Miss Finch's death is solved. Good gracious.

At first glance, it appears the poisoning is the accidental result of a cleaning product used by one of the school's maids. The maid tearfully protests that she is innocent, and Lady Phoebe, with the able assistance of Eva, intercedes on the girl's behalf. The more questions the sleuthing pair ask, the more suspects appear, including; the school's assistant headmistress, the school nurse, who was slow to provide emergency medical assistance to the dying headmistress, and the school gardener, a young man of limited mental capacity who has a mysterious tie to the dead woman. When the gardener is arrested, Lady Phoebe and Eva must step up their game and find a diabolical murderer before another victim dies.

"A Pinch of Poison" is a well-crafted historical mystery which continues the tradition so ably pioneered by "Upstairs, Downstairs" and, later, "Downton Abbey," with just the right amount of romance added to create a delightful story.

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

DEAD & BREAKFAST

By Kate Kingsbury

Melanie West and her grandmother, Liza Harris, have been working day and night to open up a B&B on the Oregon coast. But it becomes clear that this particular Inn already has some permanent residents; there's a ghost inside and a skeleton in the closet.

The women have been trying to get the large, haunted house ready for their grand opening. While working one day, taking the old wallpaper down, they find a hidden room complete with a long-dead occupant. The local law, Officer Ben Carter, listens to their frustrations when it comes to getting the business up and running, but now that a body has been found they must halt work until the case that they stumbled onto can be investigated. Problem is, the law doesn't seem to be in any hurry seeing as the skeleton in the closet isn't going anywhere. Therefore, the women decide to help themselves by doing a little investigating on their own.

The skeleton turns out to be Angela Morelli, the previous owner who was known to have vanished with a lover, leaving her disabled husband to find her. After Angela's husband died, his son was chomping at the bit to sell as quickly as he could. Enter: Melanie and Grandma opening up "The Merry Ghost Inn" and trying to spruce it up as much as the police will allow.

Meeting with the wealthy Sullivan family who had the business before the Morelli's, along with several men who might just have been Angela's lover, Melanie and Grandma try to turn over every stone. But when another woman who looks like Melanie is killed, the two women kick start their investigation into high gear.

From the characters all the way to the cool name of the Inn, this book has it all. A mystery you will not unravel, this is one of those rare cozies that do justice and pride to that awesome *Murder She Wrote* type of perfection.

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



DARK FISSURES

By Matt Coyle

This third *Rick Cahill* dark thriller opened with him disgraced, and pulled over. Again. Cahill is an ex-cop, a hard-boiled character with a melty-soft center, especially for his dog, Midnight.

He left the La Jolla Police Department in California under a cloud and Police Chief Tony Moretti has it in for him. Since he has to drive through La Jolla regularly to access his mailbox, Moretti has plenty of chances to target and harass him. Cahill was never charged with his wife's murder, but he wasn't cleared, either. He's implicated in another twisted series of events that happened before the start of this book, but they follow him.

He's on the verge of losing his house when a beautiful woman drops a case into his lap. They meet at Muldoon's Steakhouse, the place he calls his office, and Brianne Colton tells him she wants her husband's supposed suicide investigated. They were separated, but he died in their house and was discovered by their son when he came home from school. Colton doesn't think that's what her husband would have done.

The more Cahill looks into it, the more he agrees with her. Up to a point. Some strange things are going on with the band Colton plays in and he's not sure of her. When he learns the man's cell phone is missing, he knows he's on the right track. He must face some of the members of the police force he's been ousted from in order to get the details. If you like tight, fast, dark thrillers, you'll do well to follow Coyle into the dark fissure that runs through Cahill's soul.

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

THE GHOSTS OF MISTY HOLLOW

By Sue Ann Jaffarian

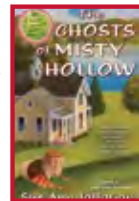
Emma Whitecastle, a very talented medium, and her fiancé Phil, have traveled to Misty Hollow in Massachusetts to visit Gino Costello, a crime writer who is working on his latest book. Gino is a friend of Emma's and is having some problems with various paranormal scenes in his latest creation, so he's asked Emma for her help.

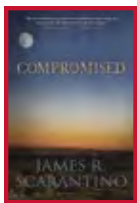
As they get to the old farmhouse where Gino is staying, Emma notices a porch filled with ghosts. This particular property was once owned by the Brown family who dealt with many disasters. When Emma is contacted by the Browns, she is asked to help them locate the spirits of their children who have disappeared. At first, only one is able to appear, a young man named Blaine who died on the property while repairing the roof on the family's barn. Blaine has no idea what happened to his brother and sister who went missing when they were very young, but he, too, wants puzzles solved so that he and other members of his already deceased family can bring closure and finally cross over to the other side.

Gino has more problems than just ghosts. His wife, Vanessa, leaves after they have an argument, which has been happening more and more, and Gino's assistant, LeRoy, is also among the missing. To top it all off, Gino finds out that a soon-to-be published book has been copied from a book of his that had, up until now, remained unpublished.

For first time readers to this series, you'll meet the character, Granny Apples, who is a very lively ghost that takes no prisoners when she talks with Emma. This is one cozy series where every single character is guaranteed to entertain and the mystery never lets you down.

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





COMPROMISED

By James R. Scarantino

The very good news is that Detective Denise Aragon has come up with a witness who can easily (if she will do so) connect Judge Judy Diaz and her lover, scoundrel attorney Marcy Thornton, to a crime. They apparently attended a more than wild party that left an underage schoolgirl dead. The bad news is that Lily Montclair, the witness, is not much of a witness and trying to get a statement from her is just like trying to win the lottery. What Lily will say is that 'she really didn't see that much, but if Detective Aragon doesn't protect her there won't be much of her left to protect.'

Detective Aragon, who has quite a reputation for finding bad guys, is affected by the case and the witness. Aragon's significant other, FBI Agent Thomas Rivera, is actually associating with the enemy, and her brother and sister-in-law aren't really happy about keeping Lily at their ranch in God's country in order to protect Aragon's witness. Add to that the fact that her investigation has upset the Silva twins, whose salvage operation has them practically ruling the seedy side of the city. The only thing that keeps Detective Aragon from going crazy is watching the resentment and incompetence of the bad guys build as they begin to go after each other just to get richer than their cohorts.

A perfect read. Blackmail, assassination—you name it, it happens. Detective Aragon continues to try and make her hometown of Santa Fe, New Mexico fit for humans to live in, but there is a lot of work left to do. So after enjoying this fantastic tale, readers will be hungry for the next installment!

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

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

By Jenn McKinlay

It seemed like a good idea at the time. Lindsey Norris, director of the public library in the cozy Connecticut shoreline town of Briar Creek, has decided that the library should hold its first ever overdue book amnesty day. Not everyone on the staff is on board with this idea, however. Topping the list of naysayers is the always curmudgeonly Ms. Cole, an old school librarian who has been on the staff for decades. Her co-workers have secretly nicknamed her "the lemon" because of the sour look she always has on her face. On Amnesty Day, Ms. Cole arrives for work dressed head-to-toe in black, as if she's going to a funeral. Her choice of attire turns out to be more appropriate than she expected.

The small library staff is soon overwhelmed with the amount of overdue books that come pouring in. But they soldier on, checking in book after overdue book, everyone vying to win a free pizza from Marco's Pizzeria, the prize Lindsey is offering to the librarian who finds the book that has been out of circulation the longest. But no one expects to find a copy of "The Catcher in the Rye" that was borrowed twenty years ago. Determined to discover who checked out the book, which is in surprisingly good condition after all these years, Lindsey turns to Ms. Cole and her impressive collection of old records and overdue notices. Ms. Cole is shocked and visibly upset when she discovers the book was checked out by Candice Whitely, a popular local high school English teacher, who was found murdered later that same afternoon. Her murder was never solved. Who has had the book for the last twenty years? And why return it now? Could the book be a link to solving the mystery of the teacher's tragic death?

"Better Late Than Never" is a real page-turner with true-to-life characters and a variety of plot twists that I never saw coming.

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

THE SHIMMERING ROAD

By Hester Young

For those who love "spooky," you will be thrilled that Hester Young and her amazing heroine are back. This book is a new chapter in the life of Charlotte "Charlie" Cates who was first heard from in "The Gates of Evangeline."

When this book opens, Charlie is about to have a baby and lives in Texas with Noah Palmer, who was also presented in the first book. Charlie is a woman with a gift—a supernatural power that allows her to connect to both future events and past events through her dreams. Lately, however, Charlie has been troubled by nightmares of a pregnant woman who is shot in a shower. She has no idea what this could mean, but when she receives a call that her mother, who has been absent her entire life, and a half-sister she was not even aware existed, have been found killed in Arizona, Charlie's heart begins to race.

It turns out that these dreams Charlie has been having are somehow connected to a niece Charlie has that is speaking to her about the murders while she's asleep. There are some unanswered questions that have to do with her mother's life in Tucson, and as Charlie, Noah and their unborn baby travel to Arizona, these questions turn frightening.

As they find themselves sinking deeper into a treacherous state of affairs, the family crosses the border of Mexico. Relatives seem to appear out of the woodwork and the danger grows larger when Charlie and Noah reach the poverty-stricken border town of Nogales.

Although a standalone story, it would be even better for the reader to go back in time and learn all about Charlie and her talent for the incredible "unknown."

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



HER NIGHTLY EMBRACE

By Adi Tantimedh

"Her Nightly Embrace" by author Adi Tantimedh is really a collection of four connected short stories that tell the reader all about Ravi Singh and the Golden Sentinels Private Investigation and Security Company. The cases that they take on are just a little peculiar, but the money is good and they are hugely successful at taking on the extraordinary and solving crimes.

Book 1 of the Ravi PI series begins four interlinked stories about a high school teacher who is also an unlicensed private investigator working for a London agency. In this, *Her Nightly Embrace*, supermodel Louise Fowler visits her boyfriend Rupert Holcomb, Conservative Member of Parliament, an average of one night a week for a little love making. That would bother the up-and-coming politician if caught, as Holcomb is being groomed for bigger and better things, and because of his future he has decided to "bury" her.

Roger Golden, owner of the Golden Sentinels Private Investigations Agency, sends his newest detective, Ravi Chandra Singh, out on the case. Not only are secrets unearthed but skeletons come tumbling out of closets.

A talk show host named Delia McCarthy hires Golden Sentinels to find out who is trashing her new book and her personal life online in the chapters entitled, *War of the Sock Puppets*.

Then, on a more traditional assignment called, *The Hideaway Bride*, Shazia Ibrahim runs away from home to escape an arranged marriage with an arms dealer's playboy son.

Last, but certainly not least, *The Leaky Banker* focuses on an investment banker who overcomes his fear of heights long enough to jump out of his own office window.

Before the end of this book you can begin to see why Ravi, who has a very confused home life, begins to compare himself to a god he regularly sees in stressful times called Kali. Even if this sounds a bit intricate, try it—it will surprise you!

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

A DECLINE IN PROPHETS

By Sulari Gentill

Rowland Sinclair and his friends are returning from abroad and heading home to Sydney, Australia, on the passenger ship *RMS Aquitania*. The year is 1932, and the journey over the water is filled with danger, especially to Rowland as he's found himself again and again pulled into matters that slander his family name. Worse yet, among the passengers on this beautiful ship is a merciless killer.

Rowland is loaded with money so he treated his artist friends; a poet, a sculptor, and a painter to first-class cabins. Joining them on the passenger list are members of the Theosophical Society, who are mixing it up with prophets and bishops when, of course, the worst happens. There is a murder aboard.

With the society a little on the liberal side, and an Irish Catholic Bishop and his friends on the conservative side of the coin, it's easy to understand that these two groups do not get along, much to the dismay of the captain as the dead bodies begin to pile up.

Rowland becomes a suspect in the first death, but is cleared before the ship docks in Australia. Unfortunately, the murderer doesn't stop when the trip ends. More crimes occur off the ship in Sydney, and even in some of the most magnificent and elaborate houses in the area. Rowland finds himself ensconced in a twisted plan where he may just be the only clear mind that can solve and stop it all.

Author Sulari Gentill not only writes a fantastic mystery, but she offers up very interesting historical tidbits that readers will love to learn. It wouldn't be off the mark to say that if the great Agatha Christie read a Rowland Sinclair mystery, she would most definitely applaud.

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



UNDER THE KNIFE

By Kelly Parsons

For those who fell head-over-heels in love with the high-action suspense delivered in the title, "Doing Harm," you will be doubly thrilled by this one.

At the beginning of this story we are introduced to Morgan Finney, a biotechnology maven who has just buried his wife. His wife, however, didn't have to meet her maker; there was actually some kind of mistake made that Finney is blaming on the doctor: Dr. Rita Wu.

Mr. Finney's wife, Jenny, was the only person who seemed to get along with him and he depended on her for everything. Now, having lost his wife to what he believes was outright negligence, he has decided that Dr. Wu should be gone too.

Picking a small notebook out of his pocket, he writes the words: "Dr. Rita Wu. I'm going to kill her." That is his vow, but he also makes a promise to himself that he will make the doctor suffer as badly as Jenny did.

He begins to work on his plan: before he kills the woman, he wants to ruin her life, her career and anything else he can think of. Finding aid in a very mysterious man named Sebastian, Finney uses every bit of medical technology there is on the planet to torture Rita. He ruins her reputation and literally brings her to the edge of madness. Rita, alone and fighting for her life, also receives help—a former lover who will work day and night to expose Finney's intentions before the doctor meets the same fate as Jenny.

This tops the charts in both suspense and horror, in my mind. It doesn't "scare" you at first, but the plot definitely sneaks up on you when you least expect it. Kelly Parsons has hit yet another home run.

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

THE RISING

By Heather Graham and Jon Land

Here's my quandary: how do I review a book that defies expectations and genre? How do I review a book by two of my favorite authors whose collaboration is so good and seamless, I would swear it was written by one person? Well, I'm about to try...

"The Rising," the remarkable debut collaboration from the minds and imaginations of Heather Graham and Jon Land is not what you have come to know from either of them. Yes, it's a thriller, and yes, it involves the supernatural, but it is a species all its own. "The Rising" is part thriller, part YA, part sci-fi, and part supernatural, but it is all heart. Human relationships are at the core of this juggernaut; how they mold us and how they hold us when all seems lost.

In "The Rising," we meet Alex Chin, adopted son of Chinese immigrants and high school football superstar. He is the guy other guys want to be and all the girls want to be with. We also meet Samantha (Sam) Dixon, Alex's classmate and tutor; the girl whose beauty is overlooked due to her intellectual brilliance. The girl who secretly wishes she was more than just Alex's tutor.

During a football game, Alex gets hit hard and is taken to the local hospital where his CT scan is not just inconclusive, it's *unusual*.

As the plot progresses, Alex and Sam find his parents dead and discover that Alex is not entirely human. On the run from people and things that want her dead and him captured, they meet up with *the guardian*, the one who has been watching Alex since his "birth."

Together, Alex and Sam will discover the truth behind Earth's purpose, take you on an adventure beyond your imagination, leave you breathless, and have you begging for the next installment of this amazing epic.

Somewhere in the heavens, Rod Serling is looking down and applauding Heather Graham and Jon Land. Reviewed by J.M. LeDuc, author of "Painted Beauty," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



EVERYTHING YOU WANT ME TO BE

By Mindy Mejia

An excellent book full of surprises, fans will be thrilled to find that this is one tale that falls into that very slim category of rare 'one-day' reads.

Twists and turns occur in this young woman's life. Hattie Hoffman, a small town girl who's a senior in high school, has played the part of 'perfect' girl all her life.

Hattie is a great student, the daughter any parent would rave about, (the one who makes others in the small town look really bad), and a fantastic citizen. Unfortunately, on opening night of the school play, Hattie is murdered. This sudden horrific catastrophe goes through her small town like a tornado, hurting a great many as they pray for her lost soul.

Del Goodman, Sheriff and a friend of Hattie's family, resolves to find her killer. But trying to solve this murder brings about more questions than answers as to why she was singled out to visit the grave early. The path of the investigation also focuses on Hattie's talent on the stage. Apparently she was an incredible actress and far beyond the skill level of any other teen at the school. Her story, however, is told by three people with three very different points of view: Sheriff Del, Hattie, and the new English instructor whose marriage is coming to an end. And as doors open exposing the small town and the secrets of its people, the story of Hattie's last year is filled with gasps of shock.

Not wanting to upset the apple cart, I left out a ton of information. All I can say is: Be prepared to not be able to put this one down. Each main character's views are very convincing and readers will be enthralled by Mindy Mejia's excellent writing. I am anxious to see another title from this lady in (hopefully) the very near future.

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



FATAL

By John Lescroart

After reading this one, you'll wonder why author Lescroart's picture is not printed beside the definition of "spellbinding" in the dictionary. "Fatal" is all about surprises and the dangerous cost of a one-night-stand to a happily married couple.

Kate Jameson loves her life. At the age of forty-four she thanks God that she is married to such a great guy (Ron) and blessed with two beautiful children, living in a lovely home in San Francisco. However, things are about to change drastically when Kate and Ron go to a dinner party and meet another pair, Peter and Jill Ash. The couples talk a bit and exchange a few friendly words, but that night, when they've retired to bed, Kate is suddenly overcome with a longing for Peter that she can't explain. She even confesses the oddity to her best friend Beth Tully—a San Francisco police detective—stating that she suddenly has this obsession for a married man she just met.

Sadly, what began as an innocent crush develops into a very risky idea, as Kate's fascination for Peter culminates in an intense encounter. Now that they've been together once, however, Kate is confident that her life can go back to normal. Nothing, of course, is that easy.

Not long after their very brief affair, a masked man pushes into a café where Kate is sitting with a friend and starts firing an assault weapon into the crowd. This tragedy is just the first in a series of horrific events that will unveil to Kate just how serious her choice was and how her one-night-stand is going to change her life forever. When Peter's body washes up on a beach and Beth is placed on the case, life suddenly goes from bad to worse.

Readers will love the constant action of "Fatal" and wonder with each moment just who is going to pay for one night of sin.

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

ICED UNDER

By Barbara Ross

Winter has arrived with a vengeance in the coastal town of Busman's Harbor, Maine, and Julia Snowden is suffering from a major case of the winter blahs. Her family business, Snowden Family Clambakes, is closed until late spring, and her on-again, off-again (this time definitely on-again) boyfriend has left to help friends deliver a sailboat to Key West, Florida. Even Gus, Julia and Chris's landlord and part-time boss in the restaurant they share, has closed the restaurant for a month and left with his wife for warmer places. So Julia's glad when her mom calls and invites her to lunch, and readily agrees to stop at the post office and pick up her mother's mail on the way.

Along with assorted circulars and bills, the mail includes a mysterious package with no return address, containing an antique diamond necklace. The necklace was nicknamed The Black Widow because of its huge center stone, a rare black diamond, and disappeared from Julia's mother's family almost 100 years ago. The only clue to the identity of the sender is a handwritten note inside the box, "For Windsholme," the name of the old mansion on the family's private island where they run the clambake business. When Julia takes the necklace to a local jeweler for a quick appraisal, she's shocked to learn that the necklace is worth more than \$2 million.

At her mother's urging, Julia begins a search to find out more about the mysterious necklace, beginning her research at the Busman's Harbor Historical Society. Her search eventually leads her to Back Bay, Boston, where she meets relatives neither she nor her mother ever knew existed.

The surprises keep coming as Barbara Ross spins a fascinating tale of long-ago family arguments, secrets, betrayals, and unrequited love. "Iced Under" is the latest in the *Maine Clambake* mysteries, a series that just keeps getting better! I can't wait for the next one.

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



LITTLE HEAVEN

By Nick Cutter

For all horror fans, this is the latest—maybe *greatest*—novel to come from the mind of the frightening Nick Cutter to date.

As the story begins, we follow three folks who are mostly motivated by money. These folks are mercenaries who have been hired by a woman to check in on her nephew who just might have been kidnapped and taken to a place called Little Heaven—an area located in the backwoods of New Mexico. Here is where they will all face terrible evil that has come home to roost.

So intricate this journey will be. And when all characters are developed, they all become interesting flawed humans, with only one claiming that categorical mercenary title who readers know all too well.

As a whole lot of the narrative takes place in the wilds of New Mexico, the isolation and fear builds. There are monsters in them thar hills; monsters that are pure evil bringing the natural and supernatural together on the same plane.

Portraying images, as always, that stay in your mind and stop calm, peaceful sleep from coming, Nick Cutter has made a new horror that is more than colorful and absolutely perfect for the big screen on Halloween. Madness, Hell personified—all of this goes on under the huge shadow of Black Rock, a monolith that New Mexico claims.

As for the trio the reader begins with, they will soon find out that "bad" may be in their description as far as personality is concerned, but in a way readers will root for them to survive. Put the lights on in the house, because this one will scare the heck out of you!

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



THE FOOL'S TRUTH

By Loretta H. Marion

"The Fool's Truth" is an interesting page-turner—a mystery with just the right splash of romance that keeps the action and thrills going until the very end. Taking the reader on a detour to the backwoods of Maine, a million shadowy secrets come to light.

Cordelia Richmond is a woman on the run. Deciding to escape from her abusive husband, she has taken her toddler daughter away with her in order to keep them both alive with the help of her old friend, Ramon Alvarez.

Cord's escape, however, is brought to a sudden stop when she breaks down in Murphy, Maine. There, she has car trouble and has to spend time in limbo while waiting for help to arrive. This detour quickly turns into a nightmare when she and her daughter find themselves stranded on an isolated farm, along with a peculiar woman who starts to take an odd interest in her daughter. Even more complications crop up when the local sheriff in town, as well as a nosy reporter, get in to Cord's business. Both of these people have their own agendas for hanging out in Murphy and neither of those is good. Soon, Cordelia begins to regret the lies she told to the one person who might just be looking for her...if only he could find out which direction she went.

This is definitely one of those fast-paced, intricate reads that no reviewer wants to give away too much information about for fear of ruining the plot. Let us just say that the number of mysterious paths these characters walk will keep any suspense lover intrigued. Never a dull moment, it almost feels as if the reader is right by Cord's side as she escapes from one devil just to find herself lost among many.

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

PROS AND CONS

By Amanda Flower

Violet Waverly is the new co-owner of Charming Books located in Cascade Springs, New York. Violet's grandmother, Daisy, is her partner and teaches her how to be a very real "Caretaker of the Shop."

The two of them have been busy getting ready for the Cascade Springs Food and Wine Festival. As book lovers, they are very excited about the 'Poe'-try reading where the works of Poe will be delivered by speakers (the "Red Inkers") in period costume.

When the day arrives, things are going swimmingly when Violet goes in search for the next speaker, Anastasia Faber, who had asked to change into her costume in Violet's apartment. But as Violet enters the kitchen leading to the back stairs, Anastasia is actually blocking her way; her body is at the bottom of the stairs dead as a doornail, and Violet immediately calls Police Chief David Rainwater to come ASAP.

As things unfold, it seems that Anastasia was not the most popular person in the village, rude and condescending to others on a daily basis. Violet has decided to help by doing her own investigating. After all, she thinks it's only fitting considering Anastasia was found at the bottom of her staircase. Violet doesn't really know the woman well, but she does uncover the fact that Anastasia was hiding a secret while also digging up dirt on other Red Inker members. As a deeper, darker mystery comes to light, Violet enlists her trusty cat, Emerson, and the shop's pet crow, Faulkner, to help her find Anastasia's killer and put him/her behind bars for good.

A complex mystery that will make you smile, readers will love this truly magical bookshop with flying books, and animals that are far more talented than you could possibly imagine. Best part? The killer is quite a surprise! Once you read one of these *Magical Bookshop Mysteries*, you'll be hooked for life.

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

EVERY DARK CORNER

By Karen Rose

This is the third book in the amazing *Cincinnati* series by author Karen Rose, and picks up right where the last novel ended.

When we last took this journey, a group of human traffickers were exposed and most of them killed. Citizens are thrilled to get rid of these people and enjoy the safer streets of Cincinnati. But, unfortunately, the thrill doesn't last long. The FBI is trying desperately to find out who, exactly, is behind the entire thing, knowing that if this person disappears into the woodwork the case will never be over.

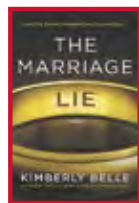
Special Agents Kate Coppola and Griffin "Decker" Davenport are the team tracking a man called "The Professor." The path has been hard, but they're serious when it comes to bringing him to justice. Decker is just now waking up from a medically-induced coma after an attempt was made on his life. Decker played an undercover role in the human trafficking case, and is focused on finding a way to uncover the real mastermind. Oddly enough, what these agents don't know is that they're about to get help from an unlikely source.

When we first meet Mallory Martin she's out grocery shopping, hurrying to get home. Mallory and her baby sister, Macy, have had a rough time in life and it isn't over. Sold by their mother for drugs, they're still being held against their will. Now eighteen, Mallory no longer takes part in various activities, but she's still a slave, to a man who may just be one of the most sought after criminals of all time.

As the body count starts to rise, it seems that "The Professor" is always one step ahead. When Mallory's story comes to light and pieces of the puzzle start to join together, the FBI must race to save children while taking a true villain out once and for all.

This series just keeps getting better. Karen Rose continues to dial-up suspense every time she puts her fingers on the keyboard.

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



THE MARRIAGE LIE

By Kimberly Belle

I started reading this while I was in the Atlanta area, by happy coincidence. Will and Iris have been married for just over seven years, but Iris *itches* only for Will. She considers their relationship still thrilling. Instead of "I love you," they tell each other, "You are my favorite person on the planet."

A year ago they bought their dream house in Inman Park, an expensive and historic district in Atlanta, even though the price means it will remain mostly unfurnished for a few years. All goes well and their lives hum along—hers as a counselor at a private school, his as a software engineer—until Will, who is supposed to be on a business trip to Orlando, is reported dead from a plane that crashed on its way to Seattle. Iris goes through the mourning process, starting with denial. That starts to end when she finds that the conference Will was headed for didn't exist. Then she learns that he actually bought tickets to both Orlando and Seattle. Anger, the next stage of grief, bubbles to the surface. She redirects it at Liberty Air, the airline whose plane crashed.

Her twin brother Dave moves in to help her through this. Iris, Dave, and their tough dad meet with a representative from the airline, Ann Margaret Myers. When Myers offers Iris a settlement, her anger explodes and she rips up the check.

When she begins to uncover secret after secret that her husband had kept from her, she begins to have trouble mourning him, realizing she didn't know who he was. As she discovers more about him, her shock increases and the dark past reaches out to snare her.

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Death on the Trek" ■

KILLING THYME

By Leslie Budewitz

This book is the third "meeting" for readers with Pepper Reece, the main character of the *Spice Shop Mysteries*. As the owner/proprietor of The Spice Shop located in Pike Place Market, Seattle, Pepper is running a booming business. Of course, as with all things in life—just when everything looks incredible, that's when a murder takes place and Pepper and her best friend find themselves smack dab in the middle of it.

It's bad enough that her mother is coming for a visit, but Pepper is also striving to get a rave review from a food critic who is about as nice to chefs and owners as the Grinch was to Whoville (at the beginning of the movie, of course).

After her mom, Lena, arrives, they spend a day at the Market looking over various artists' handiwork and spot a newcomer who specializes in pottery. Lena recognizes the potter as an old friend, Bonnie Clay, who actually disappeared many years ago. Much to Pepper's surprise, Bonnie and Lena have connections from their younger days, and when Bonnie shows up murdered only days later, Pepper wants nothing more than to uncover the truth and find the killer before blame is placed on her own mother.

If you haven't read about Pike Place Market and Pepper before, you've got to jump onboard ASAP. The Spice Shop, Pepper's fun-loving and strong-minded character, and a mysterious plot that calls for an all-day/sit-down read, makes these Pepper books a real cozy treat. What's an added extra is that more details are brought forth about Pepper's past, her family and friends, and more, opening the door for many mysteries in this series to come.

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

SOUTHERN GOTHIC

By Dale Wiley

Right off the bat readers will love the fact that the Table of Contents for this amazing work of suspense fiction is: Part One, Heaven; Part Two, Purgatory; Part Three, Hell. Talk about getting the imagination up and going and the pulse racing.

Meredith Harper is the owner of the coolest, most popular book store in Savannah called, The Southern Gothic. She is also a writer and has just completed her first novel, "Red Ribbon." Unfortunately, her novel may never be published because no company seems to want it.

Not to worry, however, her latest obsession has come in the form of another bestselling writer, a man who supposedly vanished ages ago, by the name of Michael Black. Meredith has created an online forum for Black's friends and enemies alike (*Black's Legacy*) where readers can talk about all the mysteries surrounding his disappearance; one in particular being the fact that Black is under a cloud of suspicion, being the main suspect in his girlfriend's murder.

One fine day, Meredith gets some alarming calls that seem to be coming from her own home phone number. She and her shop assistant go to check her residence but find nothing but a strange 'red ribbon.' Suddenly, Black appears in her home; he has rewritten and improved Meredith's book. She is extremely grateful to him for editing her novel, which now has a buyer, to be published under Meredith's name. The book quickly becomes a bestseller, but Black's conduct gets stranger and stranger. When Meredith tries to break ties with him, he says he will tell everyone that he is the true author of the book and she is, basically, a fraud.

So who is Michael Black? Did Meredith make a deal with the Devil? Let us just say that author Dale Wiley keeps readers on the edge of their seats throughout. Starting off 2017 with this book in hand promises to make for a fantastic and entertaining year!

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



THE ELUSIVE ELIXIR

By Gigi Pandian

"The Elusive Elixir" is the third in a quirky, incredible series called, *An Accidental Alchemist Mystery*.

The accidental alchemist is Zoe Faust, hundreds of years old and living in plain sight in Portland, Oregon. She is about to try and save her gargoyle friend, Dorian, who just happens to be a three-and-a-half-foot gargoyle chef. But cooking is not his only skill, Dorian also believes that he's what you would call a detective, like Agatha Christie's beloved Poirot.

Dorian needs saving because he's slowly turning to stone, and it's up to Zoe and her alchemical secrets to save him. Zoe goes to Paris to find help for Dorian before it's too late. So from Portland to Paris and back again, Zoe searches for unknown facts that she must have. Unfortunately, a cold case dating back to 1942 takes her in a completely different direction.

Dorian strives to find his own magical cure-all, while Zoe is off on her hunt. But when Zoe returns home, she finds that a dangerous fellow has followed her, placing her, Dorian, and all of her friends in grave danger. Trying to save Dorian, trying to protect her friends and trying to keep all these secrets from her new boyfriend, Max, truly exhausts poor Zoe. She really cares for Max who may just be her one and only chance at love, seeing as that she's tried for romance with no luck for many a century.

Although you do not need to read the first two in this series to absolutely enjoy this book, it would help the reader to follow along and see where certain characters first began. Besides, after reading this one you will lunge for the library in order to get the first two anyway. The characters are immensely unique and the writing is A+, so you won't want to miss a word. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ▪

BLOOD MOON

By John David Bethel

The headlines we read in today's newspapers often eclipse the horrors writers dream up in modern suspense or thriller novels, so to find the most horrific storyline one often needs to find the book that is labeled 'based on a true story.' Bethel has done just that in "Blood Moon." Taking the true-life drama that Marc Schiller endured, he has ripped a story for our enjoyment directly from the headlines.

Describing the kidnapping, torture, extortion and murder plots that a group of money-hungry despots engaged in during the mid 90's in Miami, and turning it into a suspense story, Bethel describes the atrocities that one man had to endure as he takes us through the tribulations of Recidio Suarez. A successful businessman and workaholic, Suarez had built a mini-empire, was a self-made millionaire, and had just moved his family into their dream home. Coming from humble Cuban beginnings, he sacrificed his personal life to give his family what he saw as the American Dream.

When a disgruntled business partner saw a way to get what he figured he deserved, respect and money, he spins a yarn to a group of despicable desperados, headed up by an ex-con, who readily join in the plot to take Suarez's hard-earned wealth and spread it amongst themselves—and they stop at nothing to make it happen. With stomach-curdling efficiency they bring down Suarez and he barely escapes with his sanity, let alone his life.

But the story doesn't end there. Once away from his captors Suarez has difficulty persuading the police that a crime has even taken place. In fact, it takes a second victim and a scorned wife to bring the justice that we are anticipating. Bethel has written a page turner that will leave you wondering about the depravity of humans for the sake of blood money.

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

THE CHOCOLATE BUNNY BROUHAHA

By JoAnna Carl

As this tale begins, winter is on the backend and the small, fun shop of Ten-Huis Chocolate is moving on from Valentine's Day chocolate hearts to delicious Easter Bunnies. With the new holiday fast approaching, Lee and her Aunt Nettie, who own the really cool chocolate shop, have hired a new employee, Bunny Birdsong. Bunny is going through a divorce and isn't working out too well in the chocolate-making part of the business. Lee is about to show her the door when she notices that Bunny *might* be able to help out with the office/business side of things.

Bunny is a sad case with a lot of baggage thanks to her soon-to-be ex named Beau; he has a current flame but his Aunt Abigail is bound and determined to keep Bunny and Beau together. After a day of drama in the shop, Abigail's body is found in the building next door that's currently under construction.

Being that the building was not ready for tenants, all the doors into the place should have been locked. So, to begin, the police think that Bunny had a good motive and easy access, but Lee doesn't think that Bunny has the personality to commit murder. In fact, Lee begins her own investigation in order to try and clear her distraught employee's name.

There are many books in this fantastic series and the author doesn't waste any time. Drawing readers into the story immediately, the mystery goes from one hurdle to the next, speeding toward the end. An added extra bit of fun comes in the form of chocolate stories scattered throughout, so readers can learn all there is to know about this universal delight. If you haven't read the others, you will most definitely want to jump on board this savory bandwagon and go back to the very beginning to devour all the *Chocoholic Mysteries*.

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



THE MIDNIGHT BELL

By Jack Higgins

In this newest adventure starring Sean Dillon, he is taking on the new leader of a very well-known terrorist group, al-Qaeda. This new leader calls himself the 'Master,' but everything else about him remains a big secret. Now Dillon has just taken out previous leaders, but this time around the Master has plans to make sure he doesn't end up suffering the same fate as the monsters that preceded him. He has decided to eliminate Dillon before he's able to add another 'notch to his gun barrel.'

The Master contacts Dillon to annoy him, brag about his abilities, and find out just how much he knows about him personally, his officials and their operations. Dillon's allies, as usual, include Vietnam vet Blake Johnson, who runs "The Basement" which is the American President's personal security department, and Dillon's cousin, Hannah Flynn, who is just nineteen years old and a gun-toting gal who isn't at all upset by violence. She had grown up in an IRA family and knows how to handle a weapon.

But Dillon's mission will run parallel to a no-name criminal who kills a woman in a drunken automobile accident, as well as a man who works for the CIA and wants nothing more than to voice his anti-terrorism plans and be heard.

Many readers of Jack Higgins, and there are certainly millions, will love this as much as any other title Higgins has been able to create over the years. As always, this is action-packed and offers an intricate plot that all comes together easily and succinctly in the end.

As a huge fan of Jack Higgins, I'm looking forward to the next book featuring Sean Dillon as I close the pages on this one.

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

TWICE TOLD TAIL

By Ali Brandon

This book takes readers back into the amazing shop of Pettistone's Fine Books, where we meet up once again with Darla Pettistone, along with Hamlet, her black cat, who isn't the only 'shadow lurking around home and hearth in Brooklyn.'

Darla is gearing up for the busiest shopping season of the year. She's also just begun her online store, where one anonymous bidder is offering a really high price for an antique book, which has made Darla a bit confused.

Darla's friend, Detective Fee Reese, has asked her to help his fiancée with some of the girly stuff that occurs when getting ready for a wedding. So Darla and her other friend Jake (a nickname for Jacqueline) who is a former police officer and now a Private Eye, takes the bride, Connie, to a bridal salon to help her pick out a gown. Unfortunately, a gown is not the only thing that they stumble over. Connie actually believes that she found a dead body in the dressing room; upside is, she's just a woman in an overly tight gown who has fainted.

After that little experience, they head with Connie to the antique shop (located next to the bookstore) so the bride can find 'something old.' But this time when they find a dead body, it's for real. The owner is dead as a doornail by the cash register.

A police investigation, a distraught bride, a collectible book that continues to shoot up in value, a black cat that looks a lot like Hamlet wandering the block and, last but not least, a man who has been seen more than once watching the building—all of these pieces come together to bring about a mystery that is completely and utterly exciting and fun to read!

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



THE RIPPER'S SHADOW

By Laura Joh Rowland

It is the year 1888, and in London, England, guess what's happening? That's right. Jack the Ripper is just gearing up to start.

In this Ripper tale, Miss Sarah Bain is a woman who owns her very own business in Whitechapel—which is odd for the 1800's; she is a photographer, and a highly talented one at that. In order to supplement her income she takes photographs of prostitutes. But when Sarah's subjects start being killed off in horrific ways, she begins to think that these killings are more than just a coincidence. She wants to protect these women, as well as herself, by finding this killer and getting him off the streets.

Sarah begins her quest with assistance: a street rascal named Mick, a homosexual aristocrat named Hugh, a Jewish butcher and his wife, and a young actress. After many years of keeping people at a distance, Sarah is starting to think of these assistants as family. But when her little band of friends really hit it off and begin their own investigations, they find themselves in all kinds of danger. As Sarah and the rest inquire into a killing spree that will eventually become the 'crimes of the century' and try to figure out the Ripper's secrets, it not only brings them to the attention of the police but also The Ripper, who would like very much to silence Sarah and her group for good.

Every once in a while a historical figure pokes their nose out of the sand and becomes a major source of entertainment again. Lately, Jack the Ripper has been this figure that many, many authors have chosen to bring back into the public eye. This is one author who should be given an A+ for a new take on a very old subject. From the brilliant, unique characters to the frightening fog filling London's alleys, this is one tale you will not want to put down.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Charlatan's Crown," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

ORPHAN X

By Gregg Hurwitz

As the beginning of what looks to be an absolutely thrilling series to come, "Orphan X" by Gregg Hurwitz has it all.

Our main character, Orphan X, was taken from an orphanage to be trained in a secret world. From a little known government agency came the creation of the Orphan Program. This was specifically set in place to raise and train kids from orphanages, and other youngsters that no one cared about, to be the world's most competent killers to be used only for solo, covert operations. But when the technology of drones came along, the need for humans dropped, and the Orphan Program was left to die. But one student, Orphan X (AKA: Evan Smoak) had learned a great deal, even how to disappear.

When he does, he decides to do a little freelance work when a mentor of his is killed. Let's just say that Evan takes out a few bad guys who rightfully deserved and received some of Orphan X's imaginative justice.

His new business is about helping people who really need him. After a would-be client calls his victim's hotline at 1-855-2NOWHERE, they answer his first question: "Do you need my help?" If the answer is the right one, and for the right reasons, a new client is born.

In his condo in Los Angeles, Evan retains a secret vault full of technology; technology that he uses to eliminate a dirty cop into teen prostitution, and a few other unsavory types. But soon, tables are turned, and Evan finds a target placed firmly on his own back. Someone who knows all about his past is out to kill Orphan X, and a few former Orphans show up to help him face the eliminator down.

Being that this is Evan's first adventure in print, and being that it was absolute non-stop suspense from the word 'go,' it's not hard to foresee that fans will be waiting impatiently for Orphan X to arrive again. 5 Stars!

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





RING OF FIRE

By Brad Taylor

Taskforce is an off-the-books team of secret operatives that answers only to the President of the U.S. and a group of thirteen people from various branches of the government, known as the Oversight Council.

When Pike Logan and Jennifer Cahill are called to the Washington, D.C. headquarters of Taskforce, they know that something covert is up. It seems that while Taskforce was tracking terrorist exchanges, they stumbled across repeated conversations held between a known jihadist and a reporter. Although the conversations were harmless, a piece of valuable information was disclosed. Turns out that some secret documents, known as the Panama Papers, are going to be released by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, a group of whistleblowers with a history of honesty.

Taskforce is concerned about a law firm they once used to create offshore shell companies to cover up their existence. Kurt Hale, Director of Taskforce, has requested permission to obtain the documents before they're made public, in order to start damage control. Hale is denied by the Oversight Council; they decide that it's too risky to use Taskforce operatives for anything other than a true threat.

As for Logan and Cahill, however, they don't technically work for Taskforce. They own their own company and simply moonlight for Hale if need be. Receiving the orders to seize the Panama Papers and report back, they are given no backup for the operation. It will soon be the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11, and there is a very wealthy Saudi businessman planning an attack for that day. Called the Ring of Fire, this attack is slated to cause even more damage to America, giving Taskforce a very real threat that they must stop in time. And with two separate operations occurring, it will be interesting to see who can complete their job and keep the U.S. unharmed.

This is one of those action/thrillers that will keep readers on the edge of their seats until the very end.

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

THE PERFECT GIRL

By Gilly Macmillan

In this exciting mystery, the "perfect" female comes in the form of a seventeen-year-old genius who is an absolute sensation at the piano. Named Zoe Maisey, she and her mother became outcasts from their previous community when Zoe was found guilty of driving under the influence and causing an accident that killed three teenagers, including her own best friend.

After serving her penance, her mother Maria, now remarried, has made it a point to erase this fact from their past so that no one will ever know. New husband Chris, and his own teenage son, Lucas, have entered into this family without having any prior knowledge of what Zoe once did. Of course, there are also those people who do know every single piece of mother and daughter's soiled past, including a former lawyer, Zoe's aunt, and her aunt's alcoholic husband, Richard.

But Zoe's secret is not the only one being kept. Even young Lucas has baggage of his own and Chris, his father, has a penchant for schemes. But the worst comes when, on the night of a huge piano recital that Zoe has planned for, Maria is found dead. It is then that every shaky lie that was holding things together begins falling apart.

In the aftermath of the crime, all the main characters try to figure out what happened, and what 'ties' that are supposed to bind will actually be broken for good. As for Zoe, she realizes that reality is hardly ever easy and usually you don't see that freight train coming right at you until it's too late.

The plot of this one is extremely interesting and as edgy as they get. Readers who love suspense do *not* want to miss this one.

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



THE DEATH OF KINGS

By Rennie Airth



In the year 1938, in Kent, England, a lovely actress by the name of Portia Blake is murdered at the estate of Sr. Jack Jessup—a close friend of the Prince of Wales. An ex-convict is arrested for the crime, immediately convicted, and the case is closed in what most people would call the blink of an eye. It seems that Owen Norris, a traveling farmworker with a history of violent behavior against women, confessed to Blake's murder. Of course, nothing could be that easy.

It is years later. John Madden, retired and extremely happy about being so, is asked by Chief Inspector Angus Sinclair to look into an anonymous letter he receives that suggests Norris was actually innocent back then. The letter also contains a jade necklace that was supposedly around the victim's neck back in 1938, and disappeared.

Although Madden doesn't have any official status anymore, he still agrees to snoop around quietly, hoping to find evidence that would call for a reopening of the case. This will be quite a job, seeing as that eleven years have passed since the crime, and the people who have passed away that were involved makes it difficult to re-interview them.

There's no proof that the necklace is the same one Portia was wearing the night she was murdered; the man who originally confessed to the crime had stopped the police from following other leads at the time and, worst of all, the man who confessed has already been executed. With all of these issues on his plate, Madden visits the crime scenes and interviews as many people as he can. But it's when another anonymous letter is received that Scotland Yard finally agrees to reopen the case, taking the police in an entirely different direction.

This is the fifth book in this series and fans will come away with a deep desire to meet up with Madden again.

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

A DEATH IN THE DALES

By Frances Brody

"A Death in the Dales" is a book that readers will want to get comfortable with, on the sofa, drinking a cup of tea/coffee. Why? Because this is a terrific British cozy with such a great plot and cool characters that it will steal away the day.

Kate Shackleton is trying to find out the truth about a murder. Kate and her niece, Harriet, are on holiday in the village of Landcliffe. Harriet has recently recovered from an illness and Kate thinks that it would be enjoyable for her to get away from town and spend a couple of weeks in the country. Also, Kate wants to spend some time with Lucian Simonson, the local Landcliffe doctor, to see if they have any type of future together. So they decide to stay at Lucian's "recently" late aunt's house during their stay.

The gist of the murder comes from Landcliffe, itself. Lucian's aunt had always wanted to meet Kate and get her to help clear a man's name in a murder that took place ten years earlier. Lucian's aunt, Freda Simonson, was convinced that the wrong man was convicted of the crime back then. And when Freda dies, it looks like the truth of the past will never be brought to light. Even though the entire town believes the right man died, Kate does her own investigating and comes upon something (I can't tell you about) that brings together the motive and means of a historical crime.

This unexpected ending will have readers clapping. If looking for deep romance, however, the Kate and Lucian storyline may be explored more in the future. For now, it is the mystery that commands the book and sets up that all-day read. 5-Stars to this one!

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

FIELD OF FIRE

By Marc Cameron

Cameron's fantastic character, Jericho Quinn, is once again at the forefront of this incredibly awesome read.

At a high school football game in Dallas, Texas, a lethal nerve gas is let out into the stadium and all fingers point to ISIS—especially since the people seen releasing the gas were dressed like members of the terrorist group.

The next target is Los Angeles, where innocent lives are taken away. The National Security Advisor for the President calls on Jericho Quinn, and others with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI), to uncover the criminals and stop the threat before another attack.

The gas is called 'New Archangel' and is said to be linked to a Russian chemist by the name of Kostya Volodin. But as the search for the man commences, it is found that Volodin and his daughter have disappeared and are currently in hiding. It's not that he doesn't want to help America. In fact, Volodin wanted to defect to the U.S. and he's hiding from Russian officials who are desperately trying to find their scientist before he releases anymore news concerning their lethal gas. Yes, it is the Russians who are responsible for these attacks, with blame being set on a terror organization that call themselves the Black Hundreds.

Quinn is asked to find Volodin in Alaska while others from the OSI are sent to New York where the scientist's son has apparently been sent some New Archangel by accident. What Quinn doesn't know is that he's on a path that's running directly at a Russian sniper known locally as "Worst of the Moon." Playing a cat-and-mouse game in the freezing cold of the Alaskan backwoods, Quinn must locate the scientist and not become the target of the sniper's bullet.

Lots and lots of action teams up with fascinating characters that create the ultimate suspense from the word 'go.' Jericho Quinn is most definitely one of the best characters in the thriller realm.

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

SEEDS OF DECEPTION

By Sheila Connolly

Winter has come, and Meg and Seth have recently gotten married and are getting ready to go away on a honeymoon. They have chosen to visit Monticello (Thomas Jefferson's famous orchards) and, on their way back home, are planning to stop in New Jersey to visit with Meg's folks.

When they arrive at Meg's parent's house, however, they find that the dead body of the gardener/handyman was found in their backyard after they had returned from watching Meg and Seth's wedding. Meg is beginning to think that her parents want to just ignore the situation and hope that it will go away. Since that's not going to happen, Meg starts to investigate on her own. Now, her parents don't think Meg should help, but Meg is more than worried about blame being cast on her family by the town's Chief of Police who is not fond of her father.

But the violence has not yet ended. Meg's father's law partner is harmed as he is entering their office; this new crime makes Meg's father change his mind and begin to help her unravel the mystery. With a miserable police chief looking at Meg's father as the number one suspect, Meg and Seth cut their honeymoon short to find out exactly what happened.

"Seeds of Deception" is a good cozy read, but the characters are so well-written that if you haven't read the others in the series, you should definitely do so. When Meg and Seth return home to their own orchard in 2017, it will be interesting to see what crops up.

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



DEAD, BATH AND BEYOND

By Lorraine Bartlett with Laurie Cass

As far as Katie Bonner's business is concerned, her shop in Artisan Alley is headed in the right direction. The only question she still has lingering in her mind is what it would've been like if she'd purchased the Victorian house in Victoria Square and turned it into a B&B.

Today, Katie and her friend, Seth Landers, have come in from having an enjoyable day sailing. Unfortunately, before they can get away from the dock, they run into her ex-boss, Josh Kimper, who wants to make a scene. So Katie and Seth turn away from the confrontation and head for home. Running into Josh again is not a big deal, but the next morning brings the sound of sirens. When Katie investigates what the hubbub is all about, she learns that Josh's dead body has been discovered; he was apparently drowned in a hot tub in his room at the soon to be opening B&B in Victoria Square. Stranger still, when the body is autopsied, the police reveal that his lungs were filled with lake water, not bath water. And as the cops start their investigation, so does Katie.

Soon, yet again, she finds herself in over her head; the accusations have been turned on her and she needs to find the killer before her freedom and her business disappear. Through her snooping, Katie visits with Josh's widow, who does not appear sorrowful about her husband's demise at all. This, according to Katie, puts Marcie first on the list of suspects. But Katie also learns that her ex-boss had been buying up local real estate and even a yacht. With that much money changing hands, she wonders if his business dealings made someone mad enough to off him.

As fresh and entertaining as the very first in this series. Readers will have a ball trying to deduce this new, incredible mystery set in the lovely Victoria Square as the suspects add up.

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



TELL ME NO LIES

By Lynn Chandler Willis

Ten years ago, a police officer named Tommy Logan was killed on duty while trying to break up a fight between a couple arguing about a paycheck, of all things. Unfortunately, this was the day Tommy didn't wear his vest; he didn't think he would need it on a domestic call such as this. His wife, Ava Logan, had her own secrets; she'd been in love with Tommy's partner Grayson Ridge, who is now the sheriff.

It's present day and Ava stops at Trish Given's trailer to bring Trish's daughter, Ivy, home after babysitting. When she takes the toddler into the house, she finds Trish's dead body on the floor. Being the writer for the local newspaper, Ava knows she has a huge story. But Grayson Ridge tells her to hold off.

Suffice to say, Ava is extremely strong-minded and begins her own investigation while keeping the toddler so she's not put into the system—the same foster system that harmed Ava long ago.

Grayson is currently running in a local election against a man who has brought forward a complaint about the theft of ginseng (a medicinal root) in order to make the sheriff look bad. As Ava looks into the story, she finds that dead friend, Trish, was actually selling ginseng, but where she got her supply is a mystery.

When Ava gets too close to putting clues together and solving the crimes, someone takes a shot at her and her children when they're hiking. And when the toddler's grandparents announce that they don't want the now orphaned child, Ava decides to adopt her while opening another investigation to find out who the kid's father is and where he might be located.

According to author, Lynn Chandler Willis, this is the start of a mystery series. And as a reader who loves intricate mysteries that are filled to the brim with investigations, I'm grateful there will be more to come.

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





THE DANGEROUS LADIES AFFAIR

By Marcia Muller & Bill Pronzini

This book is the next installment in the well-written *Carpenter and Quincannon Mystery* series, featuring Sabina Carpenter and her partner, John Quincannon. This duo has their own Professional Detective Services, and each has just been handed a couple of cases that begin with a set of adulterous affairs. However, these two cases take them in two very different directions.

San Francisco suffragette Amity Wellman claims the right for women to carry on sexual affairs without fear of negative public consequences. The problem with this theory is, she's begun to receive anonymous letters that warn her of payback she gets in the form of a gunshot someone sends her from outside her very own house. This shot brings in Sabina Carpenter to investigate. Amity does seem to have a group of friends, any one of which would send a shot at her for fun. From Amity's lover, tea importer Fenton Egan, and his fearsome wife, Prudence; to the head of the anti-suffragist Solidarity Party, Nathaniel Dobbs. There are also hundreds of the city's anti-feminist busybodies who could be the culprit. In other words; too many names, too little time.

In the meantime, Sabina's partner, John Quincannon, also has a new client. Titus Wrixton, Woolworth National Bank President, is having his own affair that has already cost him a bundle to keep quiet. He has paid \$5,000 to a blackmailer sending letters threatening to expose everything, and the criminal has now come back for seconds. John arranges to watch the pick-up of the second payment, and attempts to follow the man who takes the suitcase full of cash to Gunpowder Alley where...someone shoots him. The victim's name is Raymond Sonderberg, but the suitcase of money has vanished into thin air.

Watching this come together makes for a fantastic book by this husband-and-wife team who are, as always, right on the money when it comes to delivering awesome mysteries. A real treat for readers!

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

REVELATION

By Carter Wilson

Talk about a seriously "odd" take on religion and psychopaths, "Revelation" is one book that will have your pulse racing.

Let's begin with a man by the name of Coyote. What starts out as a calm, normal college project turns into a quest to discover a whole new religion. Think of the ultimate megalomaniac: obsessed, greedy for power...this is Coyote, and his new religion is about to be born.

Harden Campbell is Coyote's university roommate. Harden is completely unlike Coyote. In fact, Harden knows that his roommate is about as psycho as one can get. This belief is solidified when Harden finds himself waking up on the dirty, wet floor of a cell. He sees unusual objects around the room, including the mutilated body of a good friend, an ancient typewriter, and a pile of blank paper. The words on the top sheet declare: "Tell me a story." Harden knows the eerie message comes from his insane roommate, and that if he wants even the slightest chance of freedom, he'll have to sit down and write the story of what really happened at Wyland University. And it better be really good in order to save his life and reunite him with his true love. Coyote will be reading every word and basically "grading" Harden on whether the story is good enough for survival.

The real Book of Revelation, as we all know it, is an account of the end of the world and the return of Christ. It's the big "fight," so to speak. Full of demons and beasts, there are many translations/meanings and no one to this day really knows who wrote it. Some say it was the Apostle John, while others think the author was Judas. As readers get into this particular "Revelation" however, they will find a brand new beast who's extremely hard to forget.

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



DEAD IN A FLASH

By Brynn Bonner

"Dead in a Flash" is the fourth very cool tale in the *Family History Mystery* series. We are once again with genealogists, Soph McClure and Esme Saba, who are hired to create scrapbook tributes focusing on a former senator from North Carolina. Seems that Senator Stanton Sawyer wishes to have scrapbooks made that sum up both his career victories and personal life.

As the two women look through the senator's past, they find that his baby brother was killed in a fire that took down the family home. The senator is still sad about this incident, especially since his parents always believed that the fire was actually set to cover up his brother being kidnapped. Either way, the man wants this case solved. He is determined to find out if his parents were right all along, whether or not his sibling is still alive.

With the many snapshots of evidence in their possession, the two women also become determined to find out about the tragedy. Beginning their work on the senator's career, collecting information and putting it into scrapbooks, they then turn to his family and personal life. The women find that Senator Sawyer is a very likable man and supported by many. However, there is one glitch that appears when it comes to the tragic fire.

This series of books is blessed with two main characters who are entertaining, very convincing, and can hold a reader's attention and interest while also working through the "family trees" that always seem to be filled with secrets and lies.

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



STALKED

By Elizabeth Heiter

Haley Cooke, a high school cheerleader, goes missing. Local police are puzzled as they start digging into where she may have gone, and her family is overwhelmed—along with her college boyfriend who is worried and her friends who are at a complete loss as to what could have happened.

After a month's time has passed without a clue as to Haley's whereabouts, the town asks for help from the FBI. And they get it, in the form of FBI profiler Evelyn Baine.

When another case comes to the forefront, taking place at the college where Haley's boyfriend attends, things turn darker. A coed has been beaten and barely escapes with her life, and when she's asked for details, she claims that she was part of a human trafficking ring.

Another agent by the name of Kyle McKenzie is assigned, along with his partner, to this new case and they soon find themselves working with Evelyn. As Evelyn digs deeper into Haley's life, she finds that most everyone who was close to the girl has something to hide; from her parents to an older boyfriend to a friend who envied Haley's life. As Evelyn uncovers more and more about the missing Haley, the fact that she may be caught up in an elaborate hoax, with Haley just running away on her own, falls into the mix of other paths that lead in all different directions. So...is the girl just a runaway who simply wanted to be free? Or is she, perhaps, a member of this human trafficking ring that just wasn't lucky enough to get away?

As the story builds there is never a moment where the reader isn't locked in. For anyone who is into books about profiling, a little bit of psychiatry, and even a dash of romance, this one's for you! Heiter has given readers a real, first-class crime novel with this one; loaded with facts and detail, this title is pure suspense from beginning to end.

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

WE WISH YOU A MURDEROUS CHRISTMAS

By Vicki Delany

Not only does author Vicki Delany wish you a murderous Christmas with this title, she also adds “and a deadly New Year.”

We begin at the well-named Yuletide Inn in Rudolph, New York (AKA: America’s Christmas Town). The Yuletide Inn has been the main attraction of this village for many years. When one of the owners is stricken with a heart attack, however, said owner’s son Gord comes back home to take care of both his father and the Inn.

Much to the dismay of many in town, Gord hasn’t changed a lot since the last time they saw him. He has a cruel attitude which shows almost immediately. He makes it known that as long as he’s in charge there will be no Christmas merriment and the Inn is not even going to play a part in the holiday this year. Considering you’re talking about sightseers/visitors’ dollars going out the window, it’s not really a surprise that Gord’s announcement rattles enough cages that he is found stabbed to death, with umpteen suspects to choose from as being the murderer.

Merry Wilkinson, the daughter of Rudolph’s previous mayor, has also moved home recently with hopes to bring the Christmas spirit back to revive the town and get their tourist industry flourishing. When her father (known as the town’s Santa) is suspected of Gord’s murder, Merry is immediately on the case. She starts her own investigation, working closely with friends and family to try and find out about Gord’s life in California before he came back to run the Inn. She and her helpers have quite a few suspects and work hard to uncover the truth behind the killing.

As always with this author, the mystery is on par with those of Christie’s, and readers will be thrilled to see how this all comes to pass and whether or not the New Year will leave a door open for installment number three.

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

THE TRAPPED GIRL

By Robert Dugoni

This new thriller by Robert Dugoni begins with a single, frightening case. A woman is found in a state of decomposition. Her resting place? A crab pot in Seattle.

This Jane Doe is discovered while a young man is launching a boat on his way to get some crab to sell. Now, by law, only the Native American tribes are legally able to crab this early in the season, and if anyone else is caught doing so the fine is more than expensive. But this young man was sneaking into a spot that he’d been using lately and, up until now, had not been caught. This particular morning, however, he had far more to worry about than a few crab pots. When he came across one that was more than heavy, he flashed his light on the contents to reveal this woman’s hand coming out of the pot, as if reaching for help that never came.

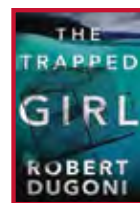
In comes Detective Tracy Crosswhite and her team. A fascinating character readers have run into before, Crosswhite is handed the case and delves into it with both feet, trying her best to figure out who the woman was and how on earth the path of her life landed her inside a crab pot below the water.

Tracy’s life is anything but easy, being a female hard-hitting detective in a man’s world. Her problems with her superior, Captain Nolasco, seem to be a constant pain, but she tries to keep her focus on bringing the killer of this woman to justice.

Robert Dugoni, yet again, delivers an excellent read. The past and present, as Crosswhite uncovers the truth about this hideous crime are intriguing. With many twists, turns and bumps in the road traveled by the detective and her cohorts, this absolutely superb plot becomes more than just a little entertaining.

The problem remains the same: Readers must now once again wait impatiently for the next book by Robert Dugoni to arrive.

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



THE SEVENTH PLAGUE

By James Rollins

When you see a title by this author, your heart rate increases. Rollins is one of the best, and with a new *Sigma Force* novel, he proves once again that he can create thrills and chills at top-speed.

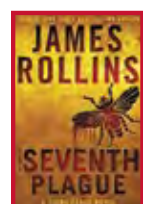
It begins with an archeological dig that’s going very wrong. Archeologist Harold McCabe appears at the dig ... by racing out of the sand. Of course, this appearance occurs two years after McCabe vanished into the desert. McCabe had spent most of his career trying to prove that the events in the Old Testament book of Exodus were real, including the plagues that descended. He was so certain that he got a survey group together and took off to prove that the account of Moses was pure fact. But instead, they were never heard from again ... until now.

He can’t share his story, because he dies almost immediately. But when an autopsy is done, they find that he’d been partially mummified before his death, and existing within his body is a deadly disease. With his appearance, a new virus has been set free on the world, but it just might not be the first time for this virus.

Within twenty-four hours everyone present in the exam room becomes violently ill; soon after, the virus begins to spread. Scientists determine that the virus is airborne and contagious, but other than that, it’s a mystery. When clues suggest that everything may be linked to an old vial of darkened red water collected from the Nile thousands of years ago, Sigma Force is called in. They need to determine if this virus is bioterrorism or ... an actual act of God.

An amazing mix of historical fiction, science, and weaponry makes this a truly terrific and never-before-seen read. Rollins gives us a lot of things to mull over, including unique stories of historical characters, like Mark Twain and Nikola Tesla. You see it here first, readers: “The Seventh Plague” is author James Rollins’ best book ever!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Charlatan’s Crown,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



SOUTH VILLAGE

By Rob Hart

Once an amateur Private Investigator, in spite of his best intentions, Ash made a disaster of his life in New York. Now he’s trying to build a new life in a completely different location. Hitchhiking to South Village, Ash ends up on a commune in the Georgia woods with a friend, drinking and waiting for a passport so he can flee the country and all the things that are constantly following him.

When a man referred to as “Crusty Pete” falls to his death from atop a rope bridge, the law calls it an accident, but Ash suspects something a lot more menacing has happened. As Ash looks into Pete’s death, he is shocked to find that the peaceful commune is actually a cover for a faction preparing to commit a terrible act of violence. Ash also comes to believe that the dead man was up to no good, since his personal effects contained an old arson manual and Pete had been sending coded messages outside the commune.

Finding access to a computer that he can use to get help from the outside, the FBI arrives to ask questions. Ash must now make a choice on whether or not to run or try and stop the killers from harming many.

Much like the old mysteries, such as Raymond Chandler and Rex Stout, the *Ash McKenna* books bring that believability factor into mysteries that are “crazy” good.

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





THE COMPANY SHE KEPT

By Archer Mayor

Get ready for yet another great story by Archer Mayor, featuring Joe Gunther and the Vermont Bureau of Investigation team.

The nearly frozen body of Susan Raffner, Vermont State Senator, is found hanging off a cliff near the interstate; a rude, horrible term has been carved into her chest. A strange, already creepy case, Governor Gail Zigman places Joe Gunther in charge, wanting the Bureau to get to the bottom of this as fast as possible.

Joe actually knew the victim; she was an activist and the governor's close friend and advisor. Along with the testy Willy Kunkle and Sammie Martens, the only female on the Vermont Bureau of Investigation squad, Joe begins to hunt for clues in this bizarre killing, hoping against hope that they will find something before the newspapers get wind of the victim's past and the publicity goes wild.

Personal and romantic ties are everywhere in this one. Both Joe and the governor are corrupted by people the victim knew and hung around with, and more questions than answers keep arising the deeper the Bureau digs. It is a fact that the crime could very well be a crime of hate, yet there are so many possibilities that Joe cannot rule out passion, politics, or simple revenge until all the clues are uncovered.

Archer Mayor is a master writer! Enough said.

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

TRUE FAITH AND ALLEGIANCE

By Mark Greaney

Every time you see a "Tom Clancy" novel, you feel two emotions: One, excitement that the cool character of Jack Ryan is still going strong even though his creator has passed away. And, two, pride for writer Mark Greaney who continues the Tom Clancy/Jack Ryan tradition in a way that would make Clancy extremely happy.

Terrorists are plotting to bring the United States to its knees and start a war. U.S. President Jack Ryan will be facing a new challenge; one that seems far more difficult than anything he ever had to face in the past.

Classified information that includes long, in-depth profiles of the U.S.'s top-ranking military personnel and, more important, undercover operators, is being sold on the black market. ISIS is of course involved, but they are not looking to kill the "average soldier." What they want to kill is a far more high-profile target in order to upset the people and force war to commence.

When bodies start to pile up, President Ryan decides to turn to "The Campus," which happens to be an off-the-books government agency. Shorthanded, they are forced into working their operators at top speed; one of their operators just happens to be Jack Ryan, Jr., the President's son.

Soon plot lines are popping up all over the place as Ryan, Jr. takes the place of Ryan, Sr. mirroring the first Clancy novels ever written. Son steps into dad's shoes and fills them perfectly, as his investigation reveals something secretive that has worked its way into the inner parts of our nation and started a clock ticking that can only be stopped by the President, himself.

The regular cast of characters is on hand, and author Mark Greaney should continue to be applauded for writing yet another true, fresh, thrilling page-turner that, unbelievably, is nearly eight hundred pages long. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ▪



TIME OF DEATH

By Lucy Kerr

Frankie Stapleton, an Emergency Room nurse working at a busy Chicago hospital, has just gone through her third broken engagement. Out of the blue, her brother-in-law Matt calls her to tell Frankie that her sister Charlie is having a crisis. Seems Charlie is in the hospital expecting a baby and is having complications. She needs her sister's help, so Frankie heads back to Stillwater, Illinois... the town she ran from a long time ago, leaving her mother and sister to run the family business by themselves.

When Frankie arrives at Stillwater General Hospital, the facility is in a frenzy dealing with casualties from a bus crash. As she waits to see her sister, she spots an elderly man, Clem Jensen, sitting and waiting for a medic. Clem has suffered a heart attack while waiting on a bench outside the ER, and since no one seems to be taking care of him, Frankie treats him herself.

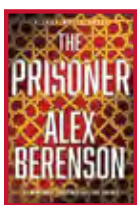
Unfortunately, Clem dies during the night and his family threatens to sue the hospital. If that isn't enough, the hospital administrator threatens to get Frankie's nursing license taken away from her and try to pin Clem's death on her inability; not to mention, illegally sticking her nose in where it didn't belong.

Stillwater brings Frankie nothing but trouble as usual. This is the place where her first ex, Noah MacLean, is now a sheriff's deputy. Frankie is sure that Clem was murdered and starts to dig into his life for a motive. Oddities arise, such as the fact that the man was taking the wrong medicine for his own condition and was somehow paying for his grandson's very expensive medications for epilepsy.

Her unofficial investigation pushes Frankie directly into her former fiancé's path. And as she tries to deal with the town, Frankie is being watched by the killer who is desperate to frame her for murder.

Fascinating characters with dark backstories, and an extremely good plotline, makes this an incredible suspense.

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



THE PRISONER

By Alex Berenson

Sounds incredible, but this is book number *eleven* in Alex Berenson's amazing series starring John Wells.

Wells is a different main character in this particular book as he had turned Muslim while he was an al-Qaeda prisoner many books ago. Now, in this tale, he must use his religion and knowledge to make the members of al-Qaeda believe that he is still the real thing.

Wells has to return to his old beginnings to uncover some information from an ISIS prisoner in a United States run foreign prison located in Afghanistan. Having to blow the whistle on a CIA mole and resume his own undercover identity, Wells can only hope he comes out of this one alive.

To break things down a bit, this particular operation is to find out who, very high up in the CIA, is passing messages to ISIS, letting them know what the Americans are planning. It seems that there is evidence that someone in the CIA is getting very cozy with the dangerous group and Wells must find out who this person is without *his* finding out that Wells is investigating him. Unfortunately, in order to make his mission successful, John Wells will have to do something that he thought (and prayed) he would never have to do again. He has to become a terrorist, get himself captured and go undercover to befriend an ISIS prisoner.

Unlike the past, when Wells was the only American agent to ever make his way into al-Qaeda, these present-day times have changed considerably. Your local terrorist organizations have gotten bigger and better; far meaner and much more powerful. Wells knows this might just be his last gasp, but there isn't anyone else to do the job.

If you want thrills and chills, Alex Berenson and John Wells remain one of the best pairings of an author and a main character out there.

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

SUSPENSE THEATRE COMES ALIVE!

In Six Unique Resources by **Amnon Kabatchnik**

"Kabatchnik provides a wealth of material for lovers
of theatre" -- *Los Angeles Times*

"An extraordinary contribution to mystery
scholarship" -- *Mystery Scene*

"It's a HIT!" -- *Deadly Pleasures*

Gold Medal

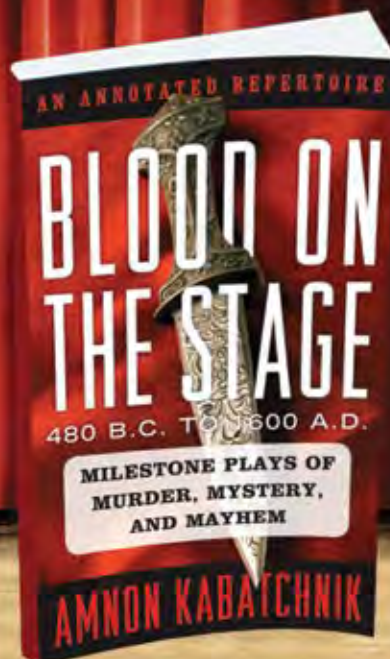
*Benjamin Franklin Awards
Independent Publishers Book Awards*

Runner-Up

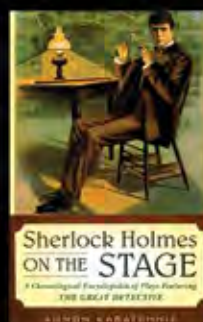
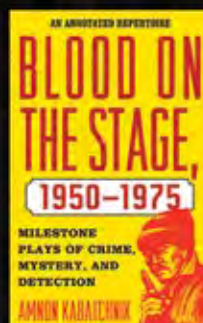
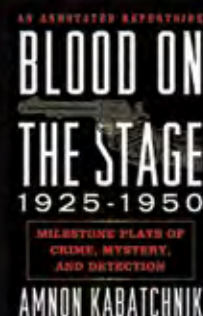
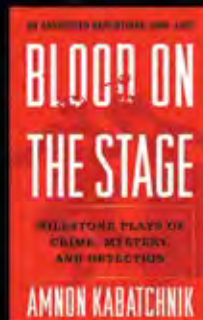
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LA LA LAND

2016

Genre – Comedy/Drama/Musical (PG-13)



With a film getting this much award attention, including as front-runner to win Best Picture at this year's Oscars, it was necessary to see if *La La Land* lived up to the hype. Not only does it exceed expectations, this throwback to the stylish musicals from the heyday of that era will easily take home several statuettes. Oscar Prediction: Best Picture and Best Actress along with at least five more wins.

The story deals with a young woman named Mia who moves to Los Angeles to make it big in the world of motion pictures, but struggles with audition after audition. The closest she has come to making it onto a movie lot is a barista at the studio coffee shop. Sebastian is a jazz musician who can't keep a job due to wanting to play his own style of music, and dreams of opening his own club. The two of them meet, and to say they don't like each other would be an understatement. As fate continues to put them together, they start to fall for each other.

The music is stellar, and the acting is top notch. The story meanders a bit once the real world intrudes in the fantasy, and the ending is neither expected or necessarily how it should transpire. Still, this is easily the one to beat at the Oscars. Those who enjoy *Singin' in the Rain* or other classic musicals will love it. ■

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

2017

Genre – Animation/Action/Adventure (PG)

DC Entertainment has supplied a streak of films with superheroes that have not been that entertaining. Superman and Batman have somewhat lost their appeal as a result. Who knew that an animated sequel to the awesome *Lego Movie* from 2014 would not only make Batman fun again, but also be one of the best Batman movies ever?

The Joker has a bold plan (again) to destroy Gotham City. Batman, of course, saves the day, but what the Joker learns from his interaction with Batman is that the Caped Crusader has no respect for him at all. He always assumed he was Batman's number one enemy, but Batman sets him straight. Now the Joker has to come up with something completely unexpected to not only finally defeat Batman, but also get his respect. Batman is forced to have to work with others for the first time in his isolated life, and he doesn't know how to handle teamwork and collaboration.

The humor and sheer cleverness of the story are appealing to the mind and eyes. The movie takes every opportunity to make fun of the entire Batman franchise, including references to the bizarre villains from the comics, such as Condiment King and Calendar Man, to digs at the 1966 TV series and the various feature films up to the present. There is even a dig at the Marvel Universe with Batman's computer password. Imagine a Batman film made by the folks who made the movie *Airplane* and you have an inkling of the insanity that lights up the screen. ■



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



America's Favorite Suspense Authors On the Rules of Fiction

THE STORYTELLER: JON LAND'S FIVE RULES

By Anthony Franze and Barry Lancet
Press Photo Credit: Rayzor Bachand

Happy New Year! Over the past four years, Anthony Franze has interviewed dozens of bestselling authors about their “rules” of writing. For 2017, Anthony is pleased to announce that award-winning author Barry Lancet will join the series. Together, Anthony and Barry will continue to interview America’s favorite suspense authors. They kick off the new year with fan favorite, Jon Land.



Bestselling author Jon Land didn't learn the art of storytelling in a classroom or writer's workshop. He learned out in the wild. It started in the 1970s when Land was a teenage counselor at Camp Samoset in Casco, Maine. The kids would gather around a campfire—unencumbered back then by smartphones, social media, or similar distractions—and Land was charged with keeping them entertained.

“I told them stories that I’d come up with on the fly,” he said. “I often would tell versions of old *Twilight Zone* episodes. The problem was that I could remember the beginning and the end of the episodes, but not the rest, so I had to make up the middle organically.” Land considered this



great training for becoming a thriller writer. “I learned what worked and what didn’t in crafting a story. I could tell if I lost the audience; the kids would grow restless. And I could tell if I had them riveted; I could see it in their faces, hear it in the stillness of the night.”

Today, some four decades later, Land is still captivating audiences with his stories, including his popular *Caitlin Strong* series. And this month marks a milestone: his fortieth novel in print. In “The Rising,” Land teams up with bestseller Heather Graham for a sci-fi thriller critics are praising as “skyrocketing from page one and never taking a breath.”

When we spoke recently, Land revealed that he’s still making up his stories on the fly. He’s also still going to summer camp, though now it’s a gathering for readers, writers, and fans—the ThrillerFest summer conference in New York. Land distilled forty books’ worth of wisdom into five rules:

1. ALWAYS HAVE FORWARD MOMENTUM (“JUST TELL THE STORY!”)

“I don’t think of myself as a writer; a writer is someone who just puts words on a page. I’m a storyteller.” One of Land’s core tenets is to “just tell the story.” He believes passionately that doing this well means “making sure that every scene, every character, every line—everything—moves the story forward.”

Land, who also is a successful screenwriter, said suspense writers can learn a lot from film. “In the best movies, like *The Godfather* or *Chinatown*, every shot has a purpose; the director didn’t waste a single frame. I feel the same way about writing. Everything needs to advance the story—in every scene the character needs to discover something he or she didn’t know.” Have a flashback? Backstory? Showing off some research? If so, it had better move the story forward (it usually doesn’t). If not, it should hit the cutting room floor.

2. IT’S ABOUT THE CHARACTER, STUPID

Land likes author John D. MacDonald’s definition of “story”: “Stuff happens to people you care about.” Land said that the “stuff” won’t matter—no matter how good it is—if readers don’t care about the characters. “Your plot won’t matter, it won’t have any *umph*, if you don’t care about the people things are happening to. I always ask myself, what makes me care about the characters?”

For Land, great characters “are both heroic but flawed.” Land’s Caitlin Strong is a fifth-generation Texas Ranger, which gives her instant action credibility. But it’s her emotional struggles that make you care. “Caitlin needs to compensate for her loner tendencies. She’s an old-school gunfighter and wants to be alone in the wilderness, that’s her pull. Her push is her love for Cort Wesley Masters and his two sons to whom she’s become a surrogate mother.”

During the series, this push-pull allows Strong to evolve. It also gives her a hurdle she must surmount. “It’s not what characters achieve that’s important, it’s what they overcome to achieve it.”

3. STRUCTURE THE STORY WITH A PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL CORE

Land looks at structure as two parallel lines that intersect. On one line is the physical core—“the nuts and bolts, what happens with the plot.” On the other, “the emotional core, the emotional dilemma.” Land structures his novels so the two lines intersect. A case in point: in his upcoming novel, “Strong to the Bone,” “the reader learns that Caitlin Strong was sexually assaulted in college but she thought the perpetrator was dead. Then a college student is assaulted and the DNA test says it’s the same perp—the dead man. The physical core, the assault, overlaps with the emotional core, the reemergence of Strong’s



own trauma.”

4. SETTING ISN'T JUST ABOUT PLACE

“I write in third person and see only what the character sees. And for me, setting is not just about place; it refers to the micro. The manner of speech, how light reflects in an office, what it’s like to feel a sandstorm in the desert.”

To capture the nuance of each setting, Land said there is no substitute for visiting the places in person. At the same time, you can’t always make it to every locale in the book, so he has a tip for writers. “Robert Lewis Stevenson said, ‘It doesn’t matter if you believe what I’m saying is true. All that matters is that you do not disbelieve it.’ So, I don’t need to make you believe the setting is authentic; it just matters that you not disbelieve.” If you can get the reader to trust you on one or two settings, then they’re bound to trust you on the others. “That’s how you build credibility for the places you couldn’t get to. If you have one-hundred places in the book, go to ten and it’s the ticket to credibility.”

5. WRITE ORGANICALLY (DON'T OUTLINE)

Staying true to the impromptu skills he honed around the campfire, Land does not outline his novels. “For me, the best is when you surprise yourself; that’s when you get readers enthralled. I think the greatest suspense is organic, when you don’t plan the twist but it just emerges.”

Land of course has an advantage. He’s written forty novels and has the confidence that he will find the story as he goes along. “Every writer has to find his or her comfort zone. Some use index cards, others are big outliners and know everything that’s gonna happen in the book. Whatever works.”

But he still urges writers to try to give the characters room to see where they might go. “Some of the greatest plot twists in films—*The Sixth Sense* and *The Usual Suspects*—weren’t planned. The writers had a light bulb moment.”

Land believes the spontaneity of the writing process is the key. “Give it a shot,” he said, “you might just surprise yourself. And, more importantly, surprise your readers.” ■

* * *

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

** Barry Lancet is the author of the award-winning international suspense series featuring [Jim Brodie](#). The latest entry is “*Pacific Burn*” (Simon & Schuster, 2016). The first Brodie book, “*Japantown*,” won a Barry Award for “Best Debut Novel” and the second, “*Tokyo Kill*,” was a Shamus Award Finalist. The fourth, “*The Spy Across the Table*,” releases on June 20, 2017. An American expat raised in California, Lancet has lived in Japan for more than twenty years.

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



Featured Artist

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*

Alexis Frost

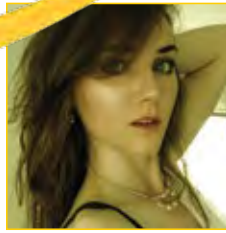
FINDS BEAUTY OUTSIDE HER DOOR

BLUE FIRE EMBRACE

Model Credit: <http://tris-marie.deviantart.com>



Model Credit: <http://francescaamymaria.deviantart.com>



Every artist seeks true inspiration, and Alexis Frost has an ample supply simply by looking at her surroundings each and every day. With Canada for a backdrop, she heralds the numerous landscapes, climates, cultures, and even those stunningly beautiful sunsets she deems “spectacular light shows” that can only be found in the Great White North.

From childhood onward, Alexis was obsessed with art. Playing sports, hiking and enjoying all that Canada has to give, she believes that each and every activity she chose contributed to her eventually becoming an artist, and creating fantastical works that have definitely become her first love.

Living on a little farmstead in the countryside of Ontario, Alexis has a close-knit family that she spends a great deal of time with when not working on her next artistic project. From singing opera to writing fantasy novels in her spare time, Alexis delves into all creative mediums. She was kind enough to sit down with *Suspense Magazine* and open up about her art, her “perfectionist” trait, and moving into the digital realm.



Model Credit: <http://kuoma-stock.deviantart.com>

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG): When did you first realize you had a passion for art?

Alexis Frost (A.F.): Well, I've really loved doodling, sketching and scrap-booking ever since I was a kid. I can hardly remember a single ‘point’ when it suddenly became an all-consuming passion, but art class was undoubtedly my favorite subject in school. My mom realized my love (and I guess talent, although it was pretty ugly at the time...) and never had trouble wondering what to buy me for my birthday.

Beyond the rudimentary art classes in grade school, I'm completely self-taught. My favorite mediums are photo manipulation, digital painting, graphite sketch and watercolor painting.

S. MAG.: Of all your pieces, which is your favorite and why?

A.F.: My favorite of my art pieces would have to be “Lei e la Notte.” Even after all the art I've made since, it's still so special to me. It was done on my iPad in the days before I had Photoshop; it was the first time (and one of the few overall) that a piece turned out precisely and exactly the way I wanted it to. This is an extremely rare occurrence for me, as I am a huge perfectionist. It was also when I realized how much I truly wanted to continue doing photo manipulation art. Because, after that, I knew making something that wasn't garbage was possible!

S. MAG.: How would you describe your process? Do you work on one piece at a time or do you have several projects in various stages?

A.F.: Oh... wow! I've worked very hard on streamlining my process lately because I've discovered it's very important for fueling creativity.

Ideas come. Sometimes all at once, sometimes they're not so good, but when I have one that I think is unique, I get to work. Sometimes I am inspired by a movie or story, but often it's an idea that comes from a certain color combination; or an idea for a lighting arrangement, a unique setting, a fantasy creature, another person's artwork, or even a cool stock image.

I gather stock photos and reference material first. Sometimes more than I



Model Credit: <http://francescaamymaria.deviantart.com>



LEI E LA NOTTE

Model Credit: <http://simonamoonstock.deviantart.com>



need, but this is a good thing because plans can often change even in mid-stream. After that comes the composition, then the paint work and the touch-ups. Lastly comes the nit-picking and nasty perfectionist stuff...then, done!

I am usually obsessed with brainstorming a single project until it's done, but there are times when a break is needed and I'll work on another piece as means of a breather. So, yeah, I don't always have multiple projects in the works, but sometimes it occurs.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite artist? Why?

A.F.: Nadia Strelkina. (<http://fantasy-fairy-angel.deviantart.com>).

As someone whose favorites are always fluctuating, however, this is a pretty difficult question. But honestly, I've been staggered by Nadia's work since before I even began my own work in any professional form, so it would have to be her. My first introduction to her art was when I built a puzzle that used one of her images, and I just had to see more. Nadia's spin on fantasy creatures and settings had me at first sight. Hers is the level of perfection that I aspire to. The stuff of dreams!

I've also been greatly impressed by digital artists, like Whendell Souza (<http://whendell.deviantart.com>) and lesser known, but no less talented artists, like Sumera Areemus (<http://areemus.deviantart.com>). You might notice some of their style in my art since I am a shameless 'fangirl' over theirs.

Oh, and honestly there are soooooo many more! My list could go on forever. I can't believe I managed to narrow it down to just three!

S. MAG.: What is your biggest challenge professionally? What brings you the most joy?

A.F.: Battling my own perfectionism is definitely my biggest challenge. Unless my work is absolutely flawless to my own eyes (which is never; ha, ha) I'm just not satisfied. Sometimes I have to remind myself that you don't climb every mountain with the first step you take. Honestly, I almost never like a finished piece until months later when I forget how it was made and all the mistakes I thought were so obvious at the time.

Having other people appreciate my artwork brings me a lot of joy. Whether it's a family member or just a comment online, I get a ton of encouragement this way. I believe that artists have a responsibility to bring something into creation that no one else can. It's amazing when other people can appreciate my art—interpret it in their own way and even apply it to their own experiences.

S. MAG.: What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given? Would you give that same advice to someone new to the artistic realm, or would you revise it based on your personal experiences?

A.F.: "Take your time." Quality over quantity is the old rule that has stood the test of time. Some artists have only a small number of works in their gallery, but they are all totally stunning, because the proper time and effort was put into each one.

"Study other artists." Many of them share their amazing tutorials for free that an artist can learn so much from. Try the tutorials! They really work!

And, lastly: "Don't feel forced to put your art out on the internet if you think you're not ready." This is super important. Immediately throwing your art into the world of harsh critics (well-meaning though they may be) can be very discouraging for new artists. I've seen so many artists with potential abandon their artistic journey for this reason alone! Whereas practicing on your own for a while, with only yourself and close friends/family to please, can help an artist so much in terms of finding their own style, art subjects, techniques, etc.

S. MAG.: Finish this sentence: If I wasn't an artist, I would be _____.

ATLANTIS LIGHTS

Model Credit: <http://faestock.deviantart.com>



A.F.: A singer/story writer/model/voice actress! Ugh, so many things, I can't decide!

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

A.F.: *There used to be some American football commercials on TV that used the phrase "Leave Nothing." It parallels the Bible line: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." That's always been my favorite quote. It just fills a lot of situations for me; art related or otherwise.*

S. MAG.: What does a day in your life look like? Tell us something about your home country that we wouldn't find in a travel brochure.

A.F.: *Right now my life looks like a whole lot of winter. But it's not so bad. Snow is a great way to appreciate spring when it finally arrives. I honestly couldn't live in a country without trees. Tall, beautiful, spire-like trees. Canada is such an amazing place to get your "tree fix" and much of my inspiration comes from travel and hiking.*

You will also find the most gorgeous sunsets in the world up here in the Great White North, which is something I think would surprise people who aren't from here. I'm absolutely serious! I've Googled beautiful sunsets online and there's just nothing that compares to some of these spectacular light shows.

S. MAG.: What are you working on now?

A.F.: *I'm working on improving my digital painting skills. Up until now my art has been about 95% photo manipulation, and it's always been my ultimate goal to paint exclusively digital: my favorite media!*

As everyone can see, by studying the memorable works of art Alexis creates, this is one Canadian woman who is surrounded by beauty and is gifted with the immense talent to bring that beauty to life! For more information about Alexis, go to: <http://frostalexis.deviantart.com>. ▀

CAREY BALDWIN

LOOKING TO THRILL

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publisher



Author Carey Baldwin just released her latest book “Stolen.” Carey began her career in the world of romantic suspense and then gravitated into the thriller realm with her last couple of books. Carey is a mild-mannered physician (still practicing full time) by day and the author of edgy suspense by night. She holds two doctoral degrees, one in medicine and one in psychology. She lives in the southwestern United States with her family and in her spare time loves to chase wildflowers.

A fun addition to any author website, readers will find a list of Carey’s confessions, like these:

~ I invented a test called the SEX REP. It was published in the *Journal of Personality*. Not how it sounds though—it’s not about what happens between the sheets. It’s used to measure sex-role stereotyping and gender identity.

~ Along with my two kids, I was once dropped off in the Alaskan wilderness by a float plane. We hiked through Misty Fjords National Monument in total isolation. Except, of course, for the bears.

~ I’m shy, but I pretend I’m not. So hey, that one’s our secret.

We love that she’s taking the time to help our readers get to know her better. Let’s look inside “Stolen” and then you’ll find our exclusive interview below. We hope you’ll enjoy meeting Carey as much as we have.

Is she missing...or a murderer?

When Laura Chaucer, daughter of a U.S. senator, vanishes from her college campus, celebrated FBI profilers Special Agent Atticus Spenser and forensic psychiatrist Dr. Caitlin Cassidy are called in. Thirteen years ago, Laura and her nanny disappeared from her family’s Denver home. Laura was found alive, but her nanny wasn’t so lucky...and the killer was never caught. Laura could identify him—if only she didn’t have a deep, dark hole in her memory.

Now she’s missing again. Did the troubled young woman run away or has the kidnapper returned? As women who look eerily similar to Laura’s nanny begin turning up dead, the Chaucer family psychiatrist renders a disturbing opinion: Laura is unstable, a danger to herself and others. Who knows what terrible secrets lurk in the shadowy recesses of her mind? Cassidy and Spenser must solve one of the most infamous cold cases ever to uncover the answer: Is Laura a killer, or is a monster still out there waiting to claim another victim?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Your new title, “Stolen,” stars your characters Caitlin Cassidy, forensic psychiatrist, and Special Agent with the FBI Atticus Spenser. Can you give readers a little background on this pair? How they came to be in the first place?

Carey Baldwin (C.B.): *I'd be happy to! Caity is a forensic psychiatrist who got started working with legal defense teams to make sure innocents weren't railroaded for crimes they didn't commit. Spense is an FBI profiler who'll do anything to get a bad guy off the streets. That made for some prickly problems between the two, and fighting a massive, physical attraction to each other from opposite sides of the courtroom didn't help. It wasn't until the two were forced to work together on the Man in the Maze case (in "Judgement") that they realized they had one very important thing in common: They are both fearless seekers of the truth—no matter the consequence.*

S. MAG.: Can you give readers inside information on "Stolen" and what thrills they should expect?

C.B.: *The inspiration for "Stolen" came from several real-life cases blended together. In some of those cases, there were major problems with evidence collection as well as media misinformation and public finger pointing based on unproven assumptions and wild conjecture. What really drove me to write the book was wondering what it would be like to be at the center of all that chaos. Hence, Laura Chaucer came to life in my mind—a young woman who truly doesn't know whether or not she's a murderer.*

In addition to riding shotgun with Caity and Spense as they put the puzzle pieces together and solve an infamous cold case, readers will get to know Laura in depth. I hope they'll enjoy the setting of the beautiful Rocky Mountains as well.

S. MAG.: How do you keep the stories so fresh? Along those same lines, how far do you see this particular series going into the future?

C.B.: *First of all, thanks for the compliment! I do work hard to keep the stories fresh. I like to dig deeper into the characters with every book. That way the reader and I can continue to discover new dimensions to Caity and Spense with each installment. It's hard to say how far the series will go, but I will tell you I'm under contract for the next book...it should be out in September.*

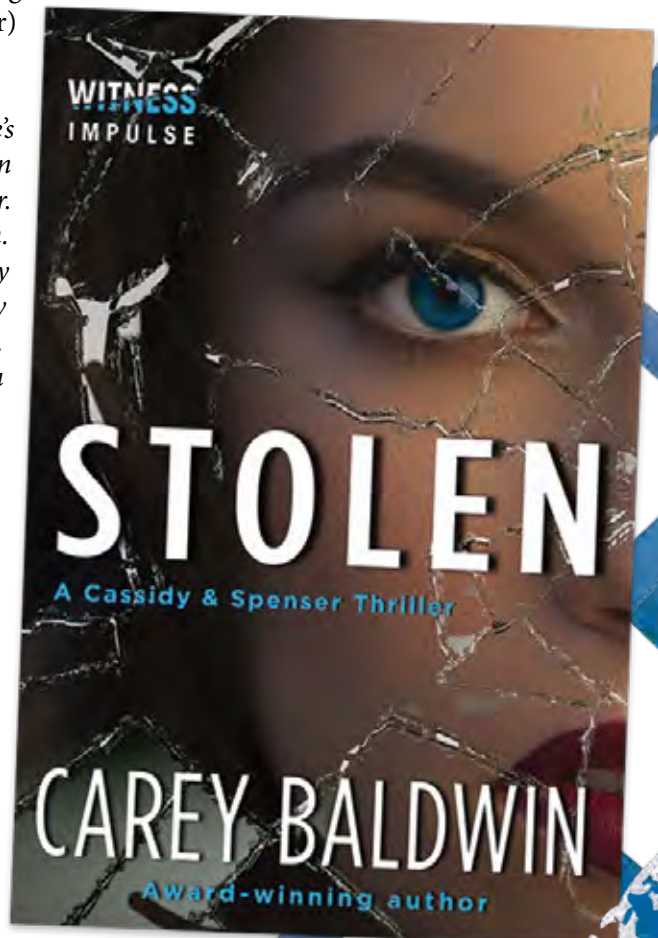
S. MAG.: Your life is full, to say the least (LOL) being a full-time doctor, mother of two, and an author of this high caliber must be exhausting at times. How do you manage to get everything done? It would be interesting for readers (and the struggling author) to learn what a day in the life of Carey Baldwin entails.

C.B.: *Again, thanks for the compliment! As far as a day in the life, there's theory, and then there's reality. In theory, I get up at the crack of dawn every day. I write 1,000 words, and then I head to the gym for an hour. Afterward, I charge off to the office and see patients until around 7 p.m. Then I come home and relax with my family. In reality, there are many days I don't get my words in, and even more that I miss the gym. I try my best, but I've blown more than one deadline, despite my best efforts. The trick is not quitting. If I get behind, I still keep going. If you are a struggling author, do not quit. That's worth repeating. Do not quit.*

S. MAG.: The wedding pics posted in the 'FUN' section of your author page are lovely. Can you tell us where the ceremony was held, and what the day was like? Will, perhaps, there be an upcoming wedding in one of your amazing books?

C.B.: *Funny you asked about an upcoming book wedding...I do love destination weddings. I'll leave it at that.*

The scoop about my own wedding. This is a second marriage for both of us. My husband had already had a gigantic, formal wedding, and he assumed that since we were "older" I wouldn't want a big wedding. Little did he know that I married in secret the first time around (don't ask—I was young and foolish) and I had always wished for something more. Although he was willing, I could tell by the look on his face he would be miserable going through a big ceremony. That



night we saw a movie called *Just Go With It* with Adam Sandler and Jennifer Aniston. The movie was set in Hawaii and had a destination wedding as part of the plot. Bingo! We had a solution. I got to marry the love of my life in the most romantic ceremony ever—sunset at Kapalua Beach in Maui, surrounded by our children and our most intimate friends. He was spared the hoopla of a formal event. What's that saying about the second time around?

S. MAG.: Having two doctoral degrees, one in medicine and one in psychology, the depth of knowledge you own must play a large part in your writing. Can you tell us a bit about that? Such as, how do the ideas come to you? Do events in your practice ever inspire you or transcend onto the page?

C.B.: *Events from my psychology practice definitely have inspired me. I can remember being a wet-behind-the-ears psychologist and hearing some very gruesome confessions. That inspired the book "Confession," although my situation in real life wasn't as dramatic as sitting across from a serial killer...as far as I know.*

And my first published book, "First Do No Evil," was inspired in part by the fears my medical patients voiced when the cervical cancer vaccine initially became available. It was also inspired by my mother's battle with breast cancer, and my hope that someday soon that, too, will become a vaccine preventable disease.

S. MAG.: Is there a genre you would love to delve into at some point in the future that you haven't yet tried?

C.B.: *I'm interested in true crime. But I'm not sure I want to go that far toward the dark side. In fiction, I can make sure that evil never prevails.*

S. MAG.: One of your 'confessions' is that you are a reality TV junkie. For all the others out there, what is your favorite show, character, and why?

C.B.: *Survivor. I have a manuscript under my bed about lovers reunited on opposite teams on a Survivor-like show. It's called "Stranded Hearts." It was the first novel I ever wrote, and it's going to stay hidden. It has reality TV, an eco-terrorist and a secret baby. I don't know how I could've left out the kitchen sink!*



S. MAG.: As an author, how do you feel about the digital world? What do you think are the positives/negatives when it comes to everything being online?

C.B.: *I love the digital world. I think it has increased accessibility to books for readers, and I'm all for that. I also love print media, though, and I believe there's room for both. I embrace both worlds.*

S. MAG.: Is there a "favorite" moment between a fan and yourself that you can share with our readers?

C.B.: *One of my favorite moments was when a reader emailed to tell me she was very upset by my book, "First Do No Evil." She outlined a list of reasons, but the biggest was that I had killed off a certain character. This character had only two scenes in the book. But I had worked hard to make readers care about this individual. The reader and I wound up sending many emails back and forth, and it became clear to me that my characters and my story were as real to her as they were to me. That's gratifying, to say the least.*

We would like to thank Carey for taking the time to speak with us. For more information on Carey and her work, check out her website and see more confessions at www.careybaldwin.com. ■

How to Attract More Followers on Twitter

7 STEPS TO SUCCESS



By Lynne Constantine

Have you ever wondered what makes some authors attract thousands of followers, while some sit unnoticed? There are many things that go into creating a thriving following on Twitter. As in life, on social media, first impressions count.

Your Twitter profile is only one component of your author platform and should complement your overall brand. That means the photo on your website, and your Facebook author page, should be the same one used on Twitter (all social media sites should have a similar look and feel). Your header photo should also be the same one used on all other social media.

What can you do to stand out on Twitter and make others click ‘follow’?

1. Make your Twitter handle easy to find. Yes, I know, someone took your name. I was lucky in that all I had to do was drop the “e” from my last name and I am @LynneConstantin—easy to find. Your user name can’t be longer than 15 characters which can be problematic for those of us with longer names. Take some time and brainstorm ways to get as close to the name you are writing under, even if you have to add ‘author’ or ‘books’ after it. The key is for the first characters to be the ones closest to your name so that when people search—you come up.

For Example: If you are HarryWriter and someone else has already claimed your name, you could try @HarryWriterBooks or @HarryWriterAuth. It’s best to have whatever follows the @ to be as close to your name as possible.

2. Be clear about who you are. Do you write horror? Include that keyword. Are you passionate about education? Include that as well. Your profile should be written in the first person unlike your typical bio. Twitter is personal and you want to sound approachable. Look at other profiles of authors you admire. Take your time and make yours unique to you.

There are some keywords known to increase followers. Throw a few of these in, if appropriate: official, founder, speaker, expert, author (Peter Guirguis/Expert Twitter Tips)

3. Make it easy to find you. Is there a link to Twitter on your website? On your Facebook page? On your email? On your business card? You get the picture. Someone may be looking for you but because your Twitter name is not exactly the same as your author name (see number 1) they can’t find you on the Twitter search bar.

4. Tweet great content that gets retweeted. That’s one way for your name to start appearing on others’ feeds. If you keep tweeting relevant content, others will want to follow you.

5. Retweet others. What goes around comes around. Be generous with your retweets and positive comments. Others will see that you are someone beneficial to interact with.

6. Follow others. Most people are happy to reciprocate—especially if you follow like-minded people.

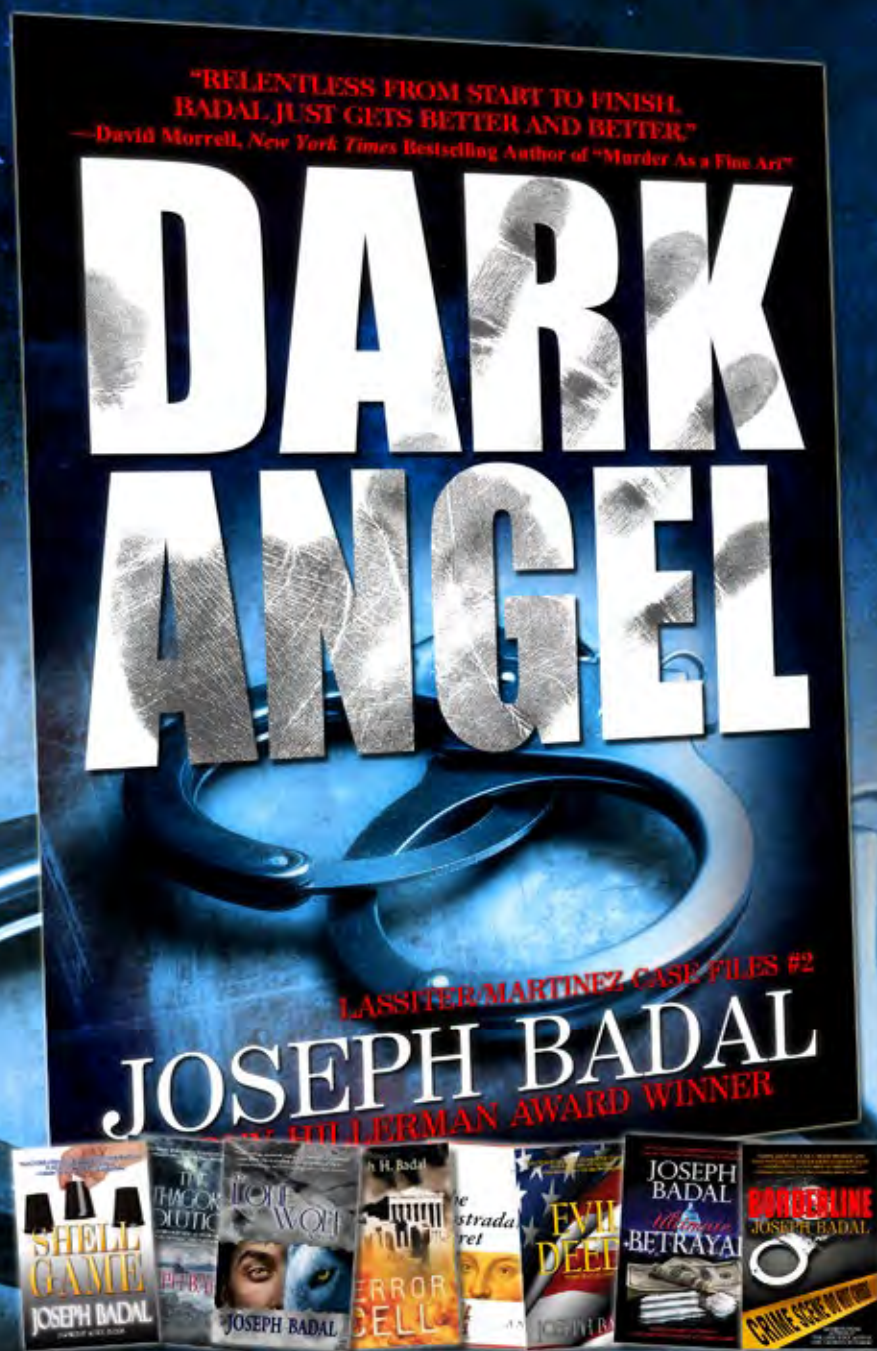
7. Stay active. If your last tweet was a month ago, there’s little reason for someone to follow you. Try to get on daily. Tweet. Retweet. Engage.

For more Twitter “how to’s” check out the social media tab on my website: <http://lynneconstantine.com/category/social-media>. ■

For more articles on social media and writing visit: <http://lynneconstantine.com/category/blog> and if you’d like some social media support, check out Lynne’s Twitter Package for authors: <http://bit.ly/authorpackage>.

Lynne is a coffee drinking, Twitter addicted, fiction writer always working on her next book. She is the co-author of “Circle Dance,” a family saga written with her sister, as well as two other novels to be released soon. She is the managing partner of a social media consulting firm and gives talks on the role of social media in publishing and how to establish a solid author platform. Lynne is a contributing editor to International Thriller Writer’s online magazine, The Big Thrill.

IN **"DARK ANGEL,"** THE SECOND IN THE **LASSITER/MARTINEZ CASE FILES** SERIES, DETECTIVES BARBARA LASSITER AND SUSAN MARTINEZ PICK UP WHERE THEY LEFT OFF IN **"BORDERLINE."**



“‘DARK ANGEL’ IS ANOTHER THRILL RIDE BY ACCLAIMED SUSPENSE AUTHOR JOSEPH BADAL. IT’S RELENTLESS FROM START TO FINISH. BADAL JUST GETS BETTER AND BETTER.”

—David Morrell, *New York Times* Bestselling Author

“THE UNIQUELY ORIGINAL ‘DARK ANGEL’ IS A RIVETING, ON-POINT THRILLER THAT READS LIKE BRIAN GARFIELD’S ‘DEATH WISH’ ON STEROIDS. CRIME-THRILLER WRITING AT ITS ABSOLUTE BEST.”

—Jon Land, *USA Today* Bestselling Author

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SUSPENSE
PUBLISHING

LIBBY FISCHER HELLMANN

CHECK OUT A ~~DIFFERENT~~ DISTINCTIVE SIDE OF THRILLERS

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*

Press Photo: Michael Candee, First Light Creative



Crime writer Libby Fischer Hellmann is back with her latest book, “War, Spies and Bobby Sox.” This book is a little bit off the beaten path from a normal, every day thriller, which fascinates us. We love to explore all the different angles of the genre and Libby Fischer Hellmann is someone we all should know.

Libby left a career in broadcast news in Washington, DC and moved to Chicago 35 years ago, where she, naturally, began to write gritty crime fiction. Twelve novels and twenty short stories later, she claims they’ll take her out of the Windy City feet first. She has been nominated for many awards in the mystery and crime writing community and has even won a few.

Her novels include the now five-volume *Ellie Foreman* series, which she describes as a cross between *Desperate Housewives* and *24*; the hard-boiled 4-volume *Georgia Davis PI* series, and three stand-alone historical thrillers that Libby calls her “Revolution Trilogy.” Her short stories have been published in a dozen anthologies, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and Ed Gorman’s “25 Criminally Good Short Stories” collection. In 2005 Libby was the national president of Sisters in Crime, a 3,500 member organization dedicated to the advancement of female crime fiction authors. She also hosts a monthly radio show called “Second Sunday Crime” on the Authors on the Air internet network.

Let’s take a quick look inside the book and then you can hear from Libby in the interview below.

As World War II rages across Europe and the Pacific, its impact ripples through communities in the heartland of America. A farm girl is locked in a dangerous love triangle with two German soldiers held in an Illinois POW camp... Another German, a war refugee, is forced to risk her life spying on the developing Manhattan Project in Chicago... And espionage surrounds the disappearance of an actress from the thriving Jewish community of Chicago’s Lawndale. In this trio of tales, acclaimed thriller author Libby Fischer Hellmann beautifully depicts the tumultuous effect of war on the home front and illustrates how the action, terror, and tragedy of World War II was not confined to the front lines.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Let’s start out with the biggest question: Your historical suspense collection entitled “War, Spies and Bobby Sox” is one heck of a project that includes titles that will once again delight readers. Can you give everyone background on the project? How it came to be?

Libby Fischer Hellmann (L.F.H.): *I've always been an avid reader of WW2 fiction, because I think it's the last time in recent history where there was such clarity between good and evil. There was no question that we were on the right side of history, which helped unite the country (and the Allies) and triggered an aggressive, virtuous effort to confront and triumph over the evil. Still, I have always been intimidated about writing about the era; so many rich, beautiful stories have already been written...what could I possibly add? A friend of mine thought differently, and while it wasn't a dare, she encouraged me to give it a try. I was intrigued, but I knew I had to choose just a few tiny pieces of the "canvas." Eventually, the stories that make up "War, Spies, and Bobby Sox" came to me, albeit one at a time, and I gave it my best shot.*

S. MAG.: What "sparked" the idea to create the first title in the collection?

L.F.H.: *"The Incidental Spy." A couple of years ago I decided to focus in more depth on espionage techniques, strategy, and objectives, which have always fascinated me. After reading as much as I could, I visited Bletchley Park in the UK, as well as the Spy Museum in DC. Then I read some more. I decided to try out what I'd learned in a WW2 setting, mostly because the techniques used back then were new (for the era), tangible, and fairly easy to understand and implement. "The Incidental Spy" was the result. I originally published it in 2015, thinking I'd write a companion novella about Bletchley Park. But then I got caught up in the German POW population in the US (nearly half a million German soldiers were incarcerated in the States during WW2). So the companion novella turned out to be P.O.W. instead. Btw, your readers can find out more about the background of P.O.W. at <http://bit.ly/2l9gVPg>. Oh, and I did move on to digital espionage and surveillance in "Jump Cut," the 5th Ellie Foreman mystery, which was released in 2016.*

S. MAG.: The characters in your books are extremely well-written—to the point where seeing them on the big screen would be a true thrill. Did your personal life ever transcend onto the page—characters, careers, locations, etc.? If so, is there a particular personal story you can share in regards to a character that was "born?"

L.F.H.: *First, thankssomuchforthekind words. Characterization is possibly my favorite part of the process, and I try hard to make my protagonists and supporting characters credible and three-dimensional. To answer the question, however, I would say, yes, absolutely, my personal life has jumped onto the page. Mostly in service to plot. "Easy Innocence," the story of high school prostitutes, began with a powder puff football game that actually occurred half a mile from my house. I was just going through a divorce and my teenage daughter was the*

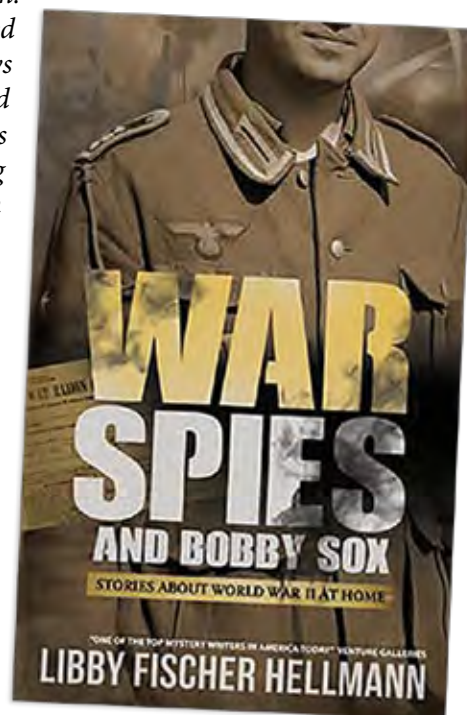
*same age as the girls in the novel. (And yes, it was a nail-biting experience.) In the opening of "Jump Cut," Ellie's gangstah-
rap neighbor actually lived half a mile from me in the other direction. And like my protagonist, Ellie Foreman, I used to take long walks around the village with my best friend Susan (who passed away unfortunately in 2004). In addition, some of the Sixties chapters in "Set the Night on Fire" were taken from my own experience. In fact, there's a scene in STNOF that occurred in real life exactly the way I wrote it. If any of your readers can guess which one it was, I'll send them a free signed copy of the book. Promise!*

S. MAG.: With your background in film production/video production, is there any chance readers/fans will see these tales on the small and/or big screen in the future?

L.F.H.: *From your mouth to God's ear. I am involved with something at the moment, but I'm not holding my breath. If it happens, you'll hear me shouting from the rooftops. But even if nothing of mine ever appears on the big (or little) screen, I am grateful to have studied and worked in film and video for as long as I did. When I turned to writing, I see scenes as if they were filmed, complete with establishing shots, dollies, edits, pans, and close-ups. In fact, I usually have to see a scene play out in the movie of my imagination before I can write it.*

S. MAG.: Can you tell us a bit about the company you founded—Fischer Hellmann Communications—and what it's like to conduct speaker training programs, etc.?

L.F.H.: *Before I had any idea I'd be writing crime fiction, I spent a lot of years working at Burson-Marsteller, the huge public relations firm. Before that, I worked in broadcast news for eight years, and prior to that, I was at NYU earning a Masters in Film Production. Because of my background in both film and TV news, Burson hired me for two major activities: I wrote and produced corporate films and videos for our clients; and I trained managers and executives for press interviews,*



speeches, and presentations. I loved doing both, probably because they are so different. In one, I could express myself creatively (to a more or lesser extent depending on the project) and in the other, I could teach individuals how to communicate clearly and persuasively. After my son was born, I realized I wanted to see him grow up, so I decided to go out on my own and offer both skill sets. That's what FHC is all about.

S. MAG.: Do you find that in this 21st century digital realm that media training is an absolute must? Especially for authors?

L.F.H.: Yes, I do. Being accessible and interesting is part of an author's marketing tool kit, and who among us can afford not to market? Curiously, I find authors are either terrific interviewees (because they're great storytellers) or they're awful because they can only express themselves on the page. In a way I've kind of come full circle because I now have both a monthly radio show and TV show where I interview authors! It helps when they know the rules of the road.

S. MAG.: Along those same lines, the digital world is certainly taking over, so to speak. How do you feel, as a writer, about the "e-everything" boat that authors must jump on in order to stay afloat? Is there anything in particular you miss about the more pen-and-ink realm that was once the only way to publish?

L.F.H.: That's an interesting question—I knew when I signed my first contract 17 years ago that marketing and promotion were going to be a critical part of being an author. Still, the changes over the past 10-15 years have been so dramatic that even I didn't realize how much time I would devote to social media and promotion. It's definitely cut into my writing time—I'm one of those authors who only publishes once a year, but you know what? I have no desire to churn out stuff more often. Between writing and promoting, I actually want to have a life. I'm not getting any younger, and I have that bucket list of places I want to see while I still can. Plus books to read at my leisure.

S. MAG.: You most certainly do create "Compulsively Readable Thrillers." Considering that you've spread your creativity across many genres—from suspense mysteries to historicals to police procedurals, and more—is there a particular genre you have not yet tried that you wish to explore one day?

L.F.H.: Great question. I've thought about writing a non-mystery/crime/thriller, but every time I start to plot it, a crime seems to take center stage. I'm envious of writers like Jodi Picoult, who doesn't write mysteries per se, but her stories are incredibly suspenseful, and always have one of those perfect O'Henry twists at the end. I've just started a slightly different

kind of novel—it's a stand-alone historical (with crimes and family secrets), but it will be written from three characters' POVs, all in first person. And each character writes during a different time period, so the reader (hopefully) will need to put all the stories together to get the "complete" story. Of course, it's an enormous challenge, which is why I'm procrastinating. Big time. Want to have lunch?

S. MAG.: After writing/publishing many novels, as well as many short stories, can you give readers/authors a look at both? What are the positives and negatives when it comes to a full-length novel versus a short story?

L.F.H.: How much time do we have?

A few years ago I wrote an article on the benefits of writing short stories. Those reasons are still valid—they help deepen your craft, they allow you to experiment with different characters and settings, they help launch your career...and, um, they're short. Writing a novel requires more of a commitment. I liken it to a marriage as opposed to an affair. There is room to grow your story and characters, but there's always the chance both will veer off into territory you didn't expect. Which can be fine. Or not. I also believe that, particularly in a novel, a character must behave credibly, according to his/her own set of values. That takes time to figure out. At least it does for me. Presenting that character with obstacles, actions, and choices that will reveal their character and define the themes of the story is challenging. And then there's the prose itself. There's more space in a novel to create beautiful narrative and description than in a short story, which for me is yet another challenge. Sheesh... Maybe I should quit writing novels altogether. (Only kidding. Sort of.)

S. MAG.: Is there a certain series character that you miss in your day-to-day life? Is there always a characteristic or two that keeps them close to your heart, and are there any that you feel you will go back to at some point?

L.F.H.: I already mentioned my friend Susan—oddly, she was the only "real" person from my life who was essentially the same on paper as she was in reality. Same name, same description, pretty much the same personality—the yin to Ellie's yang. At the time, of course, we had no idea she would get an aggressive form of breast cancer. She succumbed while I was finishing Ellie book #4. That might have been one of the reasons I didn't write Ellie #5 until 10 years had passed. And Susan, of course, is very much alive in that book, and will remain so through the life of the series. So yes, Susan feels very close to me, and I still miss her.

We would like to thank Libby for the interview. For more information please check out her website at www.libbyhellmann.com. ■

MATT HILTON

British Thriller Master

Interview by Weldon Burge for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Niall McDiarmid



Matt Hilton quit his career as a police officer to pursue his love of writing tight, American-style thrillers. He is the author of the high-octane *Joe Hunter* thriller series, including “The Devil’s Anvil” and “Blood Tracks,” the first in a new series. His first book, “Dead Men’s Dust,” was shortlisted for the International Thriller Writers’ Debut Book of 2009 Award, and was a *Sunday Times* bestseller. Matt was also named “thriller of the year 2009” by *The Daily Telegraph*. “Dead Men’s Dust” was a top-ten Kindle bestseller in 2013 and 2016. The *Joe Hunter* series is widely published in UK territories and in the US, and the books have been translated into German, Italian, Romanian, and Bulgarian.

As well as the *Joe Hunter* series, Matt has been published in anthologies and collections, and has published supernatural/horror novels. He has recently published the next *Joe Hunter* novel, “No Safe Place,” in May 2016, and his next Tess Grey novel, “Painted Skins,” in August 2016. The third Tess and Po book, “Raw Wounds,” is due to be published in July 2017.

Matt took a few minutes to chat with us about his work, and discuss some of the ways he constructs his fiction.

Weldon Burge (W.B.): *Joe Hunter* is a former soldier, a sharp investigator, and someone who’s not afraid to throw some punches when the need arises. The books in the series (currently 11) don’t lack for action and have a cinematic “feel” to them. How did you develop the Hunter character?

Matt Hilton (M.H.): *Hunter’s development is a long story of trial and error, but I’ll try to be brief.*

Sometimes fictional characters emerge full-grown in the author’s mind, but that wasn’t the case with Hunter. He came about as the result of an amalgamation of characters I’d written about previously, including a swordsman called Andra Kendrick in a series of gothic fantasy tales, plus a British PI in an unpublished series of books, and influenced by some of my favorites from books. Even comics I read growing up, including Don Pendleton’s Mack Bolan, Marvel Comics’ The Punisher, and 2000AD Comics’ Judge Dredd. Hunter is the sum of many parts, and has gone through a couple of name changes before he finally hit the bookshelves.

For years, I tried to get a publishing deal based on standalone books, but was unsuccessful. I finally punted the idea of Joe Hunter as a modern-day version of the men’s action books that were popular in the 1970s. I think, because most of my peers in the UK were writing police procedurals at the time, it was seen as a fresh take on the thriller genre and my idea was snapped up. I wasn’t doing anything unique, because I was firmly influenced by American-style thrillers and was a particular fan of David Morrell and Dean Koontz, among many others. I’d hoped to emulate similar fast-moving tales to fill the gap in the British market.

In the beginning, Hunter was a darker shade of gray than he has become. Back in the early books, he was uncompromising

when it came to dealing with the bad guys. But lately I've toned him down a little, allowed him to mature, and made him a more fractured and conflicted character.

The allowances of writing a series and short stories featuring Hunter has given me the opportunity to delve further into his character and show different aspects of him through his adventures. Some readers find his moral decisions shaky excuses for the manner in which he sometimes deals with the bad guys. But he is what he is: other readers love him for the same reason.

W.B.: So, how much of Joe Hunter is Matt Hilton?

M.H.: You might say that Hunter and I follow a similar code of honor. It's just he's prepared to do what needs to be done, whereas I'm more reticent and don't fancy ending in prison for the rest of my life!

W.B.: You've been a police officer and a private security expert. How have the requisite skills of those positions impacted your writing?

M.H.: I'd say the main influences have been anecdotal at best. Because I don't write police procedurals, and the books are set primarily in the US, there's little in the books when it comes to British police work. However, I do have experience dealing with dangerous and angry people, as well as many victims of crime. So I try to lean on those experiences when writing from the point of view of the characters in my books.

By their nature, my books tend to be a bit violent and dark, so I enjoy lightening things with humor. During my careers with the police and in private security, there were many times when my sides were splitting with laughter. I've included some of those funny moments from my past (suitably disguised) in the books. In Joe Hunter 11, "No Safe Place," Joe Hunter tells a "shaggy dog" story, and the incidents happened to me when I was a police officer. Unless you were there, you'd be hard put to believe it's the truth.

W.B.: You're also an expert in kempo jujitsu. As a martial art aficionado, do you think the focus and temperament of those skills help in your fiction?

M.H.: Yeah, definitely. I think the self-discipline of training in a martial art is exactly the same as the self-discipline necessary to be a professional author. There are mornings when I get up and would far prefer to sit and binge watch some TV. I have to give myself a mental shake, get to my computer and put down words on the screen. It's no different to me than those times when I was hurting, confused, and out of breath when I had to push through, get up off the dojo floor, and face my opponent again.

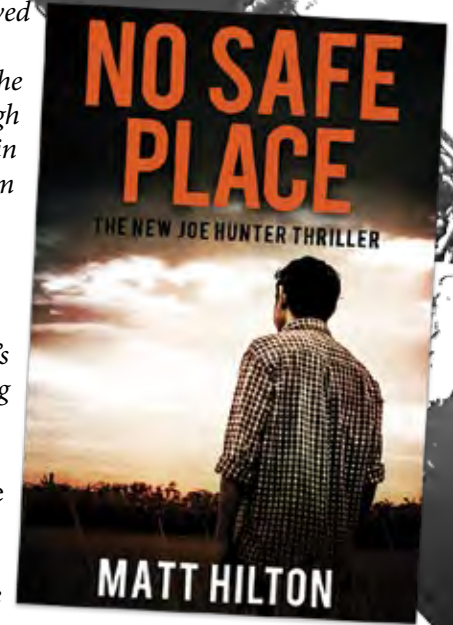
Martial art training is all about repetition, honing of skills, and building up muscle memory and a tough and clear mind, as much as it is about defending one's self. Writing a book (though not as painful or wind-sapping) is a similar battle for me. Typing "The End" is much like achieving my next grade (or belt) in martial arts. And it immediately becomes the spur in my flanks to get on and achieve the next one.

Metaphors aside, I also try to keep the action scenes real (although overblown). I have Hunter and his adversaries utilizing genuine fighting skills that I've either employed myself or witnessed. Also, in many respects, the code of conduct that Hunter follows is similar to Bushido—the way of the warrior—and I do inject some old Samurai stories and fables into the tales. Anyone familiar with the martial arts will probably recognize them when they come across them.

W.B.: You now have the Grey and Villere series; "Painted Skins" and "Blood Tracks" were recently published. What's your rationale for writing series characters?

M.H.: It's all motivated by financial reward! No, seriously, it has just been a matter of circumstance and contractual obligations. I'd love to write more standalone novels, but my publishers prefer to concentrate on series characters. I can understand why. I'm a reader too, and I like nothing more than going back to favorite authors and familiar characters time after time.

I do get to stretch my imagination periodically, and during quiet spells between contractual deadlines I like writing something different. Often these are short stories, but I've also written standalone novels too. I have offered these to my publishers in the past, but have been greeted by a palm to the face. "You're our Joe Hunter guy," I was told, "and we don't want to cause any reader confusion." Taking Grey and Villere to a different publisher was a deliberate decision so that I could at least get something new out into readers' hands. Hopefully in the future, more of my standalone books will be made available.



W.B.: Besides thrillers, you've written horror/supernatural fiction, including "Preternatural," "Dominion," "Darkest Hour," and "The Shadows Call." Is there a method to switching between the two genres?

M.H.: *Yeah, I love reading and writing horror and supernatural tales. Sometimes the genre leaks into my thriller writing too—though I'm careful that it is not too overt—and I'd say that my horror books also happen to be thrillers.*

I guess, to me, it's all about telling a story, and it doesn't really matter to me if the story is a straight crime thriller or an over-the-top monster romp. It's whatever best fits the tale. I find because I grew up reading men's action fiction alongside horror and fantasy novels. I'm a sum of all my reading parts so can quite easily flit from one mind-set to another where it suits. Really, many crime fiction books could easily be labeled horror—there's always a debate about what genre "The Silence of the Lambs" fits into—and the opposite is true. I love mashing up genres, and love to read crime fiction with a supernatural element (John Connolly's Charley Parker and Stephen Leather's Jack Nightingale books being firm favorites).

As far as a method goes, I guess for me it's just being able to conjure up the best frame of mind. Even writing in the horror field, where there are many subgenres, the feel you get when writing is different. Writing "Dominion," which is about an apocalyptic plague of Djinn loosed on the US, was akin to writing a blockbuster sci-fi movie, full of dread, tension, cliff-hanger escapes and explosions. While "The Shadows Call" is a traditional creepy haunted house tale (with a modern twist) so it felt very different indeed while writing. The former was accomplished with a buzz of adrenalin and a few fist-pumps, the latter a crawling sensation on the back of the neck and some nervous glances over my shoulder.

W.B.: I'm a big fan of the late Ed McBain, especially his 87th Precinct series. The novels are driven largely by McBain's keen sense for dialogue. Your books also contain smart dialogue. How do you handle dialogue as you write? Do you read it out loud, for example, to determine if the dialogue sounds realistic?

M.H.: *Dialogue can prove really tricky. Written dialogue is nothing like real conversation, where more understanding is gained from body language, facial expressions, inflection and what remains unsaid, and where people butt in and talk over each other. Getting it right, without the dialogue sounding stilted or lame, is difficult.*

The way I do it is to play out the interactions in my head, and then pick out the salient points I need to get across. I try to give each character a unique voice. Even without a dialogue tag, the reader should know who was speaking. I've written deliberately over-the-top characters in places so it is immediately apparent who says what, where and when. Rink, Joe Hunter's sidekick, is an Asian-American with a southern drawl, so it's easy to differentiate his words from Hunter's northern English. In my Grey and Villere series, I have a character called Pinky Leclerc, a seriously over-the-top guy who has a weird speech pattern he has deliberately cultivated to fit his flamboyant image.

Sometimes dialogue can be read in a way in which it was never intended. I write Hunter with a sense of pathos, irony and self-deprecating humor. But some readers think that he comes across as arrogant and pithy. This was driven home to me when I once heard an audio version of Hunter delivered like the voice-over on a 1980's action movie. To say I cringed is an understatement.



W.B.: Ed McBain was just one of many pen names used by Evan Hunter. Have you considered writing under a pseudonym?

M.H.: *There's a strange case of serendipity. I originally wrote Joe Hunter with a different name: Evan. He too could have been Evan Hunter, if my publisher hadn't demanded a different name!*

On the subject of pen names, I have done so. In the early stages of my publishing career, I was asked to submit a tale to an anthology called "Holiday of the Dead," a compilation of zombie tales. I was given the blessing of my publisher, and agent, but asked to submit under a pen name (to avoid that "reader confusion" they were concerned about). So my tale, "Apocalypse Noo" comes with the byline of Vallon Jackson, a play on words as my parents are called Val and Jack, and yes, I'm their son. In the future, I'm tempted to use a pen name to get some of my other work—besides the two series I'm best known for—accepted by publishers.

W.B.: You've been published in a number of anthologies, so you turn your hand to short stories on occasion. What do you find most satisfying about writing short fiction?

M.H.: *Sometimes an idea lends itself to the short story format more than it does a novel, so I simply tell the tale in the way I think best fits. But there's more to it than that.*

A lot of my short fiction was originally written to appear online at certain webzines, so were constrained by specific word counts. I wrote many of them to fit. Others were commissioned stories, but again there was a specified word count, so I stayed within the remit. Other tales I initially wrote for myself, usually during periods where I was stuck on an ongoing novel and needed to clear my head of the clutter. The writing of the short story was to keep my creativity going while allowing my subconscious mind to work on the problem holding me back on the other book. Usually, once I'd purged myself of the clutter (read as: the ideas for a short story), the blockage had cleared and I could continue with the novel unhindered by other characters begging to be heard.

And there's more: I grew up listening to my father narrating ad lib tales, usually horror or ghost stories, and fell in love with the format at a very early age. I'm still known to regale a crowd with a ghost story or two of my own whenever the lights are low and there's a cold wind blowing outside.

W.B.: Sherlock Holmes or Nero Wolfe?

M.H.: *Being a Brit I'd be hanged, drawn, and quartered if I didn't say Sherlock Holmes. To be fair, my exposure to Nero Wolfe has been very limited, so I'd choose Holmes anyway.*

W.B.: When sitting at your desk, facing a computer monitor, fingers hovering over the keyboard, what type of reader do you envision?

M.H.: *That's an interesting question and not something I've given much thought before. I guess I'd say I would envision a reader who enjoys a thumping good read, who likes to go with the flow and is willing to suspend disbelief for the sake of enjoyment. I'm a realist. I know I'm no Man Booker Prize winning author, but that's not my intention. I just enjoy a good old, action-driven romp and hope my readers are of a similar mind.*

W.B.: Your brother James Hilton is also a thriller writer. Do you bounce ideas off one another? Maybe provide some friendly competition to keep you both on your toes?

M.H.: *Jim and I are very close, and many of the things we've done throughout our lives have been done together, and with mutual support. Our writing is no different. We're both fans of each other's writing. But we have little influence on each other's work, other than perhaps as beta-readers, and to offer the odd little suggestion here and there. I think that keeps us honest, and it avoids our writing coming across as "samey-samey." In my mind there's no competition.*

I'm a proud big brother. I loved Jim's debut novel "Search and Destroy," which proved to be my favorite thriller read of the year. Jim writes action-driven thrillers similar to mine—as well as horror—but in his unique voice. So, to me it was no different than having discovered another author I enjoyed reading, despite our familial connections. I'd love to see him gain the readership he deserves.

W.B.: If you could be a character in an action movie, who would you be?

M.H.: *I'd love to be cast as John McClane's British cousin in a Die Hard movie. To date in the franchise, most of the Brits have played bad guys. I'd love to be the well-meaning but bumbling comic relief that finally finds his inner hero and helps save the day.*

W.B.: When it comes to writing, what's on your bucket list?

M.H.: *I hope to write a novel with the grandeur of Stephen King's "The Stand," a sweeping epic with memorable characters that will stand the test of time ... and maybe win me the Booker Prize. Ha! I don't know if that will ever happen, but if ever the opportunity arises, I'll be on it.*

W.B.: And one last question, going back to TV detectives in the '70s: Steve McGarrett, Columbo, or Kojak?

M.H.: *Without a doubt it would be Kojak. Back when I was a kid, I couldn't suck on a lollipop without exclaiming, "Who loves ya, baby?" And I still occasionally do.*

W.B.: Thanks, Matt. Keep up the great work!

To learn more about Matt, visit his website at www.matthiltonbooks.com. ■

THE KEY TO BEING PUBLISHED... AND TO DEVELOPING A FOLLOWING

By Joseph Badal

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Ten years ago, I spoke at a writer's conference on the topic "How to Get Published." Since that presentation, I have given dozens of speeches at conferences and to writers groups on that topic. But, because of dramatic changes in the publishing business, I amended my presentation to include the subtitle, "And to Developing a Following." This change was necessitated by the dramatic transformation in the publishing business around self-publishing platforms.

There are, theoretically, quality gatekeepers at various stages of the traditional publishing business who cull poor writing from the process. Agents and editors pick through submissions and eliminate those that don't meet high standards of writing. Everything from bad formatting to poor spelling and punctuation, point of view slips, story contradictions, pedestrian prose, and lack of tension can relegate a manuscript to the slush or discard pile.

This traditional path to publishing has been augmented by a self-publishing wing of the business that avoids the agent/publisher gatekeepers and affords a writer the opportunity to leap from finished manuscript to eBook and print listings on a platform like Amazon.com. A writer can even take advantage of a robust vanity publishing industry via which he can, for a fee, have his work published in electronic and print formats. These alternatives to the traditional publishing route have given writers the chance to quickly become published authors. At a time when there aren't enough agents and traditional publishers to manage the huge aspiring author community, this alternative path has been a boon to hundreds of thousands of writers.

But there's a trap in the path of writers who follow this new alternative route to becoming published. Too often, they allow their passion for, and excitement about, being published to override the discipline and hard work necessary to produce quality work. Without an agent and editor providing quality screening, a writer can expose a sloppy or even badly written product to the reading public. And the reading public, because of Internet platforms, is huge and worldwide. Expose a bad book to that worldwide audience and you risk souring it on anything you subsequently produce, regardless of quality.

There are many important elements to being published...and developing a following. Take James Patterson's Master Class online—he covers most of those elements in that class. But the one aspect of writing, being published, and developing a following that I contend is most important is the editing process. It is so important that when asked what I believe is the key to writing success, I always answer, "Editing-Editing-Editing."

Remember that the writing scene has never been more competitive. If you want to be published AND want to develop a readership, you must produce a quality product. If you sold defective widgets, you would never have a repeat customer. Writing is no different.

It's not enough to be a good storyteller. There are certain rules to the craft of writing that all writers should follow. This is particularly important in the mystery/thriller genre because it is especially competitive. Maybe, if you're Stephen King, you can stretch some of these rules. But, if you're a new or aspiring author, stretching rules can be an obstacle to being published and, even if you self-publish, can kill your chance of building a following.

“ONE OF THE HIGHEST OF HIGHS IS WHEN MY PUBLISHER TELLS ME, ‘YOUR MANUSCRIPTS ARE SO EASY TO WORK WITH BECAUSE OF THE EDITING YOU’VE DONE.’ ”

If you play golf, you know it isn’t enough to buy the equipment and then think playing the game is just a matter of going out and hitting the ball. You quickly learn there are fundamentals and rules to the game...mechanical rules that you have to follow if you want to succeed: keep your head down, keep your head steady, don’t grip the club too tightly, slow down your swing, make sure you address the ball properly, and on and on. And you need to remember all of these rules at the same time. Writing is very similar. There are fundamental rules to the writing game, as well. Some of these are:

- Tell a good story.
- Show; don’t tell
- Avoid uneconomical writing.
- Use dialogue vs. omniscient narration.
- Avoid over-explanation.
- Create characters you like.
- Avoid monotone writing: embrace tension.
- Avoid “started,” “began,” etc.

These are just a few of the rules that I try to follow in my writing. As important as they are, I still contend that editing until you can’t stand your own story anymore is the most important of all the rules you should follow. And, then, you should put your manuscript in the hands of a professional editor who is unconcerned about hurting your feelings and who has one goal in mind: to make you as good a writer as you possibly can be. Without sufficient editing, a published poem, short story, or novel will become exposed to the public before it’s ready for prime time. I know how excited you can be about sharing your story with the world. I’ve been there. Doing so prematurely can be the death knell of your work and of your career. Just because your mother and your spouse love your story doesn’t make it ready for prime time.

A relationship with an editor can be difficult under any circumstances. Your editor’s job is to criticize your work. It’s akin to someone telling you that your baby is ugly. But you should keep in mind that an ugly baby will probably always be ugly. An ugly manuscript can become a work of beauty if you work with the right editor and if you remember that being defensive about criticism from a good editor is stupid, getting your feelings hurt over criticism of your work is stupid, and ignoring good advice is stupid.

After eleven published novels, I still edit a manuscript at least a half-dozen times, and then I turn it over to an independent editor who gets absolutely gleeful about every typo, contradiction, and bit of bad writing he finds. After I correct the manuscript, it then goes to my publisher whose in-house editor hacks away at the work. I take a great deal of pride in the fact that this final “hacking” yields a minimal number of changes.

I have realized many “highs” since I began my writing career. One of the highest of highs is when my publisher tells me, “Your manuscripts are so easy to work with because of the editing you’ve done.”

Sure you have to have a good story to tell. But there are plenty of good stories out there. The way you differentiate your good story from all the others is through solid editing. That editing-editing-editing will give you a leg up on developing a following that will be begging for your next novel. ■

Joseph Badal is the author of eleven novels and is an Amazon Bestselling Author. He has received numerous awards for his work, including the Tony Hillerman Award for Best Fiction Book and the Gold Medal from the Military Writers Society of America.



THE MILLER HOUSE

By John Raab

"YOU WUSS," JIMMY SHOT AT STEVEN as they stood on the sidewalk in front of the old Miller house.

"I am not," Steven said, his voice trembling just a bit as it grew low. "This is stupid anyway."

The two fourteen-year-old boys—Jimmy Roberts and Steven Schwartz—remained still, looking up at the old Victorian house that had been vacant for over ten years. Each boy knew of the stories that circulated through town. The Miller house was the scene of a terrible homicide—a night of horror when Mike Miller killed his wife and two children while they slept.

Built in the mid 1800's by Stenson Miller, a man who made his fortune in coal, the residence played home to Stenson and his three children; two sons who lost their lives in the Civil War, and one girl named Cynthia who inherited the family fortune when her father passed in 1907. When Mike, the great grandchild of Cynthia who worked as an investment banker, married Mary Benson and they had three children, the Miller house was still the centerpiece of the town. Referred to as Miller Castle by the citizens, the family was an extremely quiet group. Although, leading up to that horrific night odd things began to happen. It was only six months before the murders that the children were taken out of school and given private tutors.

Hours passed after Mike Miller killed his family before he then called 911, alerting the police to what he had done. When the law arrived, they found Mike in the kitchen making breakfast. His family members were sitting at the dining room table, well-dressed but covered in their own blood. It didn't take long for Mike to be deemed unfit to stand trial, especially after he claimed that killing his family was something he *had* to do—it was the only way he could save them from the torture the house would bring down upon their heads.

Since the time of the murders the town of Silver Creek,

Ohio had finally healed, but no one ever forgot what had occurred and the whispers continued. The thick, black rods of the iron fence rose almost ten feet and enclosed the entire property. Some people would swear they could see shadows passing in front of the windows; one person even stated that they'd seen a man wearing a tuxedo standing in the upper bedroom window holding an axe while looking down at them. Many citizens would dismiss these stories as people simply looking for attention. Over the years, several people stopped by to take pictures and many ghost hunters attempted to gain access, but the Miller Family Trust would not allow it. All they ever wanted to do was let time pass so that the stories could fade.

"Come on sissy! You said you would do it, so *do it*," Jimmy said.

Steven sighed. He was at the age where he was trying to impress the cool crowd at school. On his baseball team was Jimmy, one of the more popular kids, and Steven wanted to use this as an opportunity to try and become his friend. During practice the two of them were shagging fly balls in the outfield when Steven stated that he would go into the old Miller house because he wasn't scared a bit. Jimmy smiled and laughed out loud. He didn't believe him and dared him to do just that. And if Steven backed out...popularity would only be a dream.

Now, here they were. A Friday night. Jimmy had agreed to spend the night at Steven's house and they'd snuck out to complete the dare, or Steven risked Jimmy's teasing until the end of time.

Jimmy pulled out his cellphone and turned on the camera. Starting to record, Steven knew that he had made a horrible mistake. There was no part of him that wanted to go into the house, but if he didn't he knew that video would be shown all over school and probably posted on YouTube. He'd never live it down.

"Shut up. I'm going," Steven said.

"Take some pictures while you're in there. It would be cool if there was still some blood," Jimmy said.

Steven didn't respond; he walked up to the fence and took a deep breath. He pulled out his cellphone, opened up the flashlight app and clicked it on. He was still running through his head how bad it would be if he chickened out right now. Like many kids his age, it was scarier to deal with the teasing than go into some old scary house.

Carefully climbing the fence, he was able to maneuver over the top of the posts. Jumping down to the other side, he fell to the ground. Jimmy started to laugh. Steven felt a sting in his left ankle, but other than that he was okay. Ignoring Jimmy, he stood up and dusted himself off, taking a moment to look around with his cellphone flashlight.

The lawn had turned to dust years ago. The Trust paid the property tax, but had done very little in maintaining the house and grounds. The city council had tried to get the house demolished many times, but since it was over a hundred years old, the Historical Society was able to stop the effort. There was some talk of the Miller Family Trust selling the house so it could be turned into a tourist spot, getting the idea from the Gleensheen Mansion—the site of two murders—in Duluth, Minnesota.

Steven turned around and saw that Jimmy was still taping.

"Dude, that fall will be a big hit," Jimmy said, holding up his phone.

Looking away, Steven headed to the front door. Most of the white paint had chipped away over time, leaving behind old, worn out wood. Slowly walking up the three stairs that led to the porch, Steven's heart raced faster as the wood creaked and groaned.

"Come on man. Do it already," Jimmy barked from the sidewalk.

"I'm going," Steven shouted.

Reaching up, he tried the doorknob but it was locked. He hoped that he'd just dodged a bullet. After all, it wasn't his fault the door was locked; they couldn't hold that against him. *He'd at least walked this far*, Steven thought.

He turned around and looked at Jimmy. "It's locked."

"So what, you said you would go in so find a way, chicken shit."

Damn. He didn't want to break the front door, so Steven just stood there wondering what he could do to get inside. Even if Jimmy was pushing him, he could easily get out of this by saying he wasn't going to break in because he wasn't stupid enough to get arrested. In fact, he was hoping a cop would drive by and see them so he would have to stop, but the road was silent. After 9:00 p.m., Silver Creek turned into a ghost town, even on a Friday night. Not even a cricket could be heard hovering anywhere near the Miller house.

Steven put his hand back on the doorknob. He heard a faint crackling sound, like rusted metal giving way, and this

time the knob turned. Swallowing his fear, he pushed the door open a crack.

"That's weird," Steven said to himself.

"I thought you said it was locked, liar," Jimmy said. "Now go in, wuss."

He was screwed. It was now or never. If he didn't do it, life as he hoped for would be over. Opening the door just enough to put his head inside, he pulled out his cellphone and turned on the flashlight. Stepping across the threshold, Steven held his breath. The house was dark as pitch. The only sliver of light shone through a dirty upper window coming from an outside street light.

Now in the foyer, Steven moved his flashlight around the small area. Thick layers of dust and a short, narrow hallway leading straight back into an inky room, with a flight of stairs and a closed doorway on his right were all that welcomed him.

Leaving the front door open, he took a couple of furtive steps further inside. His hands were soaking wet, and he had to keep changing the hand holding his phone so he could wipe them dry on his jeans. The last time his heart beat this quickly was when he'd asked Michelle Harper to the seventh-grade dance; a proposal she'd flatly refused.

To his left there was an open entryway leading to what he assumed was the living room. He slowly continued forward. The flashlight on his phone wasn't strong enough. The beam could only project, at most, ten feet ahead of him where he could barely make out a couch and table sitting on an old rug. As he advanced he tripped on a bucket sitting in the middle of the hall. His gasp covered the small *click* that materialized from the front door slowly closing and locking behind him.

As he walked further into the room he spotted a curio cabinet with the glass panes broken out and a lamp sitting on an end table. What he didn't find, however, was the layer of dust that should have covered everything in the room. A chill ran through his body. Opening up the camera app on his phone, Steven snapped a couple of pictures for Jimmy. Everybody knew that the murders had taken place upstairs, but he would lie about going up...and tell everyone that the stairs were broken or something.

As he turned to leave, he heard a creak.

"Stupid old house, they all make noise," Steven said out loud, as if to remind himself that "living" houses didn't exist.

Then...he saw the shadow.

"Jimmy, is that you?" Steven could barely breathe, thinking briefly that Jimmy was somehow inside messing with him. But, how could he do that? *He isn't brave enough to come in here*, Steven thought.

The distinct sound of footsteps came from above.

"Screw this." Turning around fast to make a run for the exit, Steven forgot about the bucket obstructing his path and this time did trip; tumbling to the floor, he dropped his phone.

Thankful that his screen hadn't gone black and the

flashlight was still working. Steven scrambled for the phone and heard the footsteps grow louder, closer. Advancing down the stairs. Jumping to his feet, Steven was just about to run when he saw him.

Jimmy felt a little antsy standing on the sidewalk, staring at the now closed door. He texted Steven.

"U coming?"

He stared at the screen, hoping for a reply, but no response arrived.

"Dude, let's go!" Steven had certainly proven himself and now all Jimmy wanted to do was get the hell out of there.

Three little dots in gray appeared on his screen.

"Steven won't be leaving," the text read.

Dropping his phone to the pavement, the screen cracked. Jimmy glanced up at the foreboding building. Hearing a small chime coming from the ground, he looked back at the cell. Through long, thin breaks in the glass, he read new words that emerged.

"Come inside and join him."

Letting out a scream, Jimmy turned and ran down the center of the street.

FOUR YEARS LATER COLUMBUS, OHIO STATE MENTAL HOSPITAL

Jimmy Roberts had turned eighteen last week and was finally being released from the hospital, a place he'd been admitted to only a few days after Steven had disappeared. For the first year, Jimmy hadn't spoken much. But over the last handful of years, he'd finally opened up to his doctor and participated in group sessions.

Today he walked briskly into Dr. Alexander's office, a man he'd spoken to on a daily basis for the past four years. Dr. William Alexander was a middle aged man of forty-five. He'd been working with children his entire career and for the last twelve years he'd worked in the hospital exclusively. Jimmy was by far his most challenging patient. Many of the kids he saw were abused, neglected or abandoned in some way, but Jimmy was from a good home. Both his parents had jobs and they loved Jimmy very much. He was their only child, so they'd probably spoiled him too much, but no abuse had ever come his way.

"Jimmy, how are you doing?" Dr. Alexander asked.

Jimmy sat down on the red leather chair in front of the doctor's desk. "I'm good. A little nervous, to be honest."

"I can understand. Just remember to take things one day at a time. If you need me I'm only a phone call away."

Jimmy nodded his head in acceptance.

"I know your parents are excited to have you back. I hear you're going to take some courses and get your GED, and then...maybe college?" Dr. Alexander asked.

"Yeah."

"What are you thinking of taking?"

"I don't know. I like to write," Jimmy replied.

"I think that's great." The doctor smiled and looked up at the clock, "Well, you ready to go?"

"Yeah."

Dr. Alexander got up from his desk and Jimmy followed. They walked down the hall in silence to the room where Jimmy's parents—Doug and Sally Roberts—were waiting. Jimmy's mother jumped from her seat and ran to hug her son as soon as they cleared the double doors. Dr. Alexander shook Doug's hand.

"We can't thank you enough for everything you've done for our son," Doug said.

"No need to thank me. I'm just happy to see Jimmy get on with his life."

Sally hugged Dr. Alexander, speaking through her tears, "Thank you for saving our son."

Walking to the exit, the doctor handed over Jimmy's release papers. "There is a prescription in there, but before you fill it I want you to call me and let me know the situation. Deal?"

They all agreed. His parents couldn't seem to leave fast enough, but as Jimmy climbed into the back seat of the car, his fear found a foothold and grew as he turned around and watched the large stone fade in the distance.

The first night in his own bed, Jimmy couldn't sleep. He kept waking every hour, waiting for the sound of yelling or for someone to come into his room for bed check. It was the first time in years he should have been able to sleep without distraction. Giving up at four a.m., Jimmy switched on the TV for noise, got out of bed and went to his window. The light of the full moon lit up the street, but all was quiet.

He remembered the last night he'd looked out this window. Even though the person who killed Steven was caught—a homeless man who'd been sleeping in the Miller house for months—the man had always maintained his innocence. He claimed that he never saw Steven and wasn't even at the house when the boys had come by that evening, but Jimmy was afraid that whoever or whatever killed Steven was still out there. It had taken intense therapy for Jimmy to believe that the right man had been caught for the crime; or, at least, that's what he kept telling himself.

Craning his neck to look up and down the street, Jimmy glimpsed a rabbit running across the neighbor's yard. When he was ready to return to bed, he saw a shadow. He focused on a car parked directly across the street from his house and saw the shadow slipping around the rear of the vehicle. At first, he assumed it was another animal, but the shadow had the definite shape of a human. Immediately closing his curtains, Jimmy went back to bed, reminding himself yet again that he was all better now—there was *nothing* coming for him.

Staring at the clock that read half-past eight, Jimmy tried to forget what he thought he saw last night. He knew that

whatever it was, it had nothing to do with him. All he needed to do now was start his new life and keep the past exactly where it needed to stay: in the past. Cleaning up, he headed downstairs to grab some breakfast.

"Hi, honey. How'd you sleep?" Sally asked.

"It was strange sleeping in my bed. Guess there are a lot of things to get used to."

Sally reached out and hugged her son.

"I'll be fine. I'm going to check out that driving school. I need to get my license," he said, reaching into the fridge for the orange juice.

Sally returned to the stove and the sizzling bacon. "I think that's a great idea. I'll get your dad to take you."

"Where is Dad?"

"He's in the garage messing around with that car of his." She rolled her eyes and smiled at him.

Jimmy knew that the car was purchased shortly after he'd left as a way to keep his father occupied.

Grabbing a piece of toast, Jimmy walked out to the garage. His father was standing in front of his worktable seemingly searching for a tool. The 1969 Camaro he was working on sat with the hood up.

"Morning Dad, how's it going?"

His father looked up. "Morning Champ, how'd you sleep?"

"It was a little quiet, but that's just something I need to get used to again," he repeated to his father.

"It'll take some time," Doug nodded. "But we're here to help you through."

"Do *you* need some help?"

After a quick hug, the two of them started working on the Camaro and for the next hour Jimmy actually felt normal. He didn't think about the past and, for the first time, he believed he could really beat this and move on.

It had been a busy day, but a good one. With a bowl of Rocky Road ice cream, Jimmy sat down on the living room couch and flipped on the TV to channel surf. He wasn't familiar with the popular shows, but sports were still his first love so he turned on the MLB channel. His parents had gone to bed a couple of hours earlier, and while he watched the scores and highlights from the day, Jimmy heard a knock on the front door. It wasn't a loud noise, more like the delicate knock of a small child. A little startled, Jimmy placed his bowl on the table and went to answer.

No one was there. Looking down, fear coursed through his body faster than the blood pumping in his veins. He was staring at his own baseball cap; the one he wore at fourteen years old. Looking up and scanning the area, he saw no one. But when he reached for the cap, he spotted an envelope underneath and grabbed it. His hands shook as he slit the paper open and read the short note.

Why did you leave me?

Steven.

Jimmy's body turned to ice. Glancing down at the now overturned baseball cap he spotted a word written on the underside of the brim: *Steven*. Closing his eyes, Jimmy made a decision. This would never end until he faced his fears head on. Either he visited the Miller house, or live with the fact that something out there would never give him peace.

It was nearly midnight when Jimmy left home. He tried to reach Dr. Alexander but got his voicemail and left a message, thanking the man for all that he'd done. He finished his message by declaring that tonight he was going to face his fears.

Fitting the baseball cap snugly on his head, Jimmy knew that while he'd never been close to Steven, he still carried the weight of guilt that what had happened was his fault. Nothing would change the fact that he'd pushed Steven into that house. Tonight he would face that guilt and, hopefully, let it go for good so he could stop holding onto the baggage. Armed with only the handwritten note and a small flashlight, Jimmy quietly slipped out the back door.

Dr. Alexander jerked awake. He knew something bad was about to happen. He reached over and grabbed his cellphone and saw that he had missed a call from Jimmy, but never heard the phone ring. Listening to the voicemail, he practically jumped from his bed as panic overtook him. He phoned the Roberts' house, with no answer. Dressing quickly, he ran from the house and jumped in his car. The drive from his home to Silver Creek would easily take forty-five minutes even on a clear night, but Dr. Alexander shoved the accelerator to the floor, praying that he'd arrive in time.

Jimmy stood outside the black rod iron gate. The night Steven jumped the fence and fell on his ass replayed in his mind. He'd had a good laugh back then, a moment that now made him feel absolutely sick. As the memories of that fateful night rushed through his mind, he could see Steven walking toward the old house, but this time he could read the fear in Steven's eyes. Jimmy shook his head, trying to stop the horror movie from playing in his mind.

Taking a step closer, he stared through the iron bars and wasn't surprised to see the front door slightly open. Jimmy knew the house, and whatever was inside had been preparing for his arrival. He knew that he could walk away, but if he did his life would only get worse. Taking a deep breath, he scaled the fence and jumped down into the yard. A cold breeze rippled along his skin as he walked up to the door and pulled out his flashlight. The only sound he could hear was the *whoosh-whoosh* of his heart beating out of control.

Jimmy pushed the door open fully and walked inside, using his flashlight to scan the foyer. He imagined what Steven must have been feeling all those years ago; how scared he must've been and how brave he was to take on such a ridiculous dare.

Walking into what could have been a living room or maybe a parlor, Jimmy avoided a bucket that was lying on its side in the hall.

"Hello?" Jimmy shouted into the darkness.

He waited to see if someone or something would call back, but only silence met his ears. When Jimmy actually heard his name being yelled, it was coming from outside the building.

"Jimmy? Jimmy? Are you in there?"

Frozen in place, Jimmy attempted to make out who the voice belonged to.

Appearing at the threshold, Dr. Alexander burst inside and was immediately framed by the beam of Jimmy's flashlight. "Are you okay?"

Jimmy issued a grateful sigh as he aimed the flashlight toward the dusty floor. "Yeah, Doc. I'm fine."

Alexander offered him a confused look. "Why are we here, Jimmy?"

He took a moment and then stared up at the man who'd helped him for so long. "I need to finish this. I need to face my fear so I can move on."

"We talked about this. The man responsible for Steven's death was caught and is on death row. You'll find nothing in this house except spiders and bad memories."

"No. You're wrong," Jimmy stated. Pulling the note out of his pocket, he handed it over to Dr. Alexander.

"Where did you get this?"

"It was left for me outside our house, along with the hat. It belonged to Steven. It was from our baseball team."

"Jimmy, you have to listen to me," Dr. Alexander continued, "Let's just go back to your house and talk this through."

Agreement on the tip of his tongue, Jimmy stopped when a loud creak resounded through the house. It felt as if the air was talking back—demanding that they stay inside its walls.

"I told you, Doc," Jimmy barely whispered. "We're *not* alone."

"Jimmy, please. It's just an old house."

"No. I can't. I need to finish this." Jimmy took a step away from the doctor. "Steven needs me. I left him last time, I won't do that again."

Dr. Alexander's normally cool demeanor slipped. "Dammit Jimmy! Steven died. The killer was taken into custody and is still sitting in prison; I checked. There's nobody here, it's all in your imagination." Taking a deep breath, Alexander's professional facade returned.

Jimmy could almost read the man. It seemed as if he actually believed that Jimmy might have written the note himself just to return to the hospital.

"Look, remember all those times we discussed this in my office? Guilt only has power if *you* let it. You're the one with the power, Jimmy. Listen to me. Steven is dead. You have got to let him go."

"Then why is he standing right behind you?" Jimmy's

voice filled the air.

Dr. Alexander turned around fast, but didn't have enough time to react. The axe blade hit him squarely in the chest. Blood spattered on the wall and the stairs; even falling on Jimmy who was completely paralyzed.

"Steven?" Jimmy's voice quivered.

The figure stepped forward. Jimmy gazed at the same baseball cap that was sitting snugly on his own head, but as the man's face came into focus Jimmy became even more confused.

"Mr. Schwartz?"

"Yes, Jimmy. Thanks for coming. I didn't expect a third person, but that's all right. We won't be leaving anyway."

Steven's father raised the axe up to his shoulder. Seemingly keeping it ready to strike in case Jimmy tried anything.

"But...why?" Jimmy said.

"Why? Did you say *why*?" The anger in the man's voice and pain in his eyes were evident. "*You* let my boy die! You pushed him into this house. That homeless guy may have killed him, but it might as well have been you that put the knife in his back. You didn't do anything to help him. You just let him die, which is exactly what I'm going to do to you."

Dr. Alexander's words echoed in Jimmy's brain. *Guilt only has power if you let it. You're the one with the power.* Holding the flashlight to his side, Jimmy came to his senses. He knew that if he didn't do something fast he would suffer the same fate as Steven, and he wasn't going to let that happen. He was better; he could feel it. It *wasn't* his fault. He was only a kid back then and had done what any kid would have—he ran.

"Mr. Schwartz, I'm so sorry for what happened to Steven. I know that I messed up, but I didn't kill Steven. Believe me, I will always live with the guilt of what happened that night."

"Well, at least you won't suffer long then," the man said. "I don't want your apology. I don't care what you say. My son is dead and you let him die, that's all I care about."

As Mr. Schwartz raised the axe over his head, Jimmy heard footsteps on the stairs. It was Steven's father who looked first, as Jimmy took the flashlight and aimed the beam toward the staircase. Nothing was there. When Mr. Schwartz turned back and took his knock-out swing, Jimmy directed the light at the man's eyes. He missed Jimmy by inches but the force of the swing knocked him off balance. The axe hit the floor but Mr. Schwartz stayed on his feet.

The voice Jimmy heard as he was pivoting toward the front door was crystal clear. "Get out."

The blade entered the back of Mr. Schwartz and his body dropped to the floor.

Jimmy's vision was blurred as pure adrenaline fueled his muscles pushing him through the front door and propelling him off the porch. It was only when he stood gasping beyond the gate that he turned back and saw the dim beam from his fallen flashlight capture a shadow closing the front door. ■

LIVING HIS DREAM MARK GREANEY



Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Carrie Echols

Mark Greaney is a name continuously spoken about in conversations surrounding political thrillers and suspense novels that keep readers enthralled from word one. His own fantastic series, *The Gray Man*, has found a place of honor in all reader's hearts. While the other "half of his output," according to the author, comes in the form of a series starring another well-known character that was first brought to life by bestselling author Tom Clancy. That character's name? Jack Ryan. With a new *Gray Man* title on the way and the release of the latest *Jack Ryan* tale, "True Faith and Allegiance"—which brings Jack Ryan, Jr. into the public eye this time out—Mark Greaney's days are more than busy.

With a deep love of reading that eventually turned into an education focused on Political Science and International Relations, Mark established a broad understanding of the world, and a deeper understanding of the psychologies of world leaders and what makes these people in power "tick."

Still seeing writing as a "dream job," Mark rises early to the sights and sounds of Paris, as of late, while there researching 2018's *Gray Man* novel, "Weaponized." After that, he will be off on a trip that will

span seven cities in eight days to research yet another book that's in the works. It was a pleasure Mark could take time out of his truly busy schedule to sit down with *Suspense Magazine* and talk about his background, his newest story ideas, and the two series' that continue to stay atop every suspense/thriller "best of the best" lists!

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Being that the Jack Ryan character has been in existence for many novels now, and the fact that readers still clamor for the next one to be written, how is it that you continue to keep these stories so fresh and exciting?

Mark Greaney (M.G.): *There are always new and interesting developments in world affairs in general, or military and intelligence matters specifically, that grab my attention. The deeper I look into some real-world issue the more motivated I am to both research it for my own curiosity and shine a light on it with my fiction.*

S. MAG.: Does the background you have in International Relations and Political Science help you in your work and research?

M.G.: I had a deep love of reading as a kid, mostly of history, and that began to turn into world affairs and current events in my high school and college years, so it was only natural that I turned that into the focus of my studies. More than anything, Poli-Sci and International Relations, along with foreign travel and language studies, gave me a broader scope and deeper understanding

of the world, and a fascination with the psychologies of world leaders and other influencers. I think that helps me with developing characters, because I am always wondering what makes people tick.

S. MAG.: How, exactly, did you get involved as Tom Clancy's collaborator?

M.G.: My own series, *The Gray Man*, is edited by Tom Colgan, who was also Tom Clancy's editor. I had just turned in my third *Gray Man* novel, "Ballistic," when Tom Colgan contacted my agent and asked if I was interested in working with Clancy, because he was looking for a new co-author. I eventually got the job, and that year Tom and I put out "Locked On," my first collaboration in the Jack Ryan world. I did two more collaborations before Tom passed away, and then his family asked me, among others, to continue the series. "True Faith and Allegiance" is my seventh Tom Clancy novel. I've also released my sixth *Gray Man* novel, "Gunmetal Gray," so the Clancy world is only half of my output.

S. MAG.: Can you tell readers a bit about the new "True Faith and Allegiance" title? As well as the inspiration behind it?

M.G.: A few years ago I was alarmed to see that due to a successful cyber espionage campaign by the Chinese, every application filled out for access for a classified position in the U.S. government was now in the hands of those who could do harm to America. Twenty-two million men and women who applied for a security clearance to work for the government were now compromised, along with specific and oftentimes delicate information about their personal lives. I had also been interested in how open source intelligence methods have been refined by intelligence agencies to use social media as a targeting tool. I combined these two very relevant and contemporary phenomena together as a potent weapon, and in the book, I put this weapon in the hands of a myriad of America's most dangerous enemies.

"True Faith and Allegiance" comes from the Oath of Office, an oath given by military and intelligence personnel, as well as others. Since these men and women swear to bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the government they serve also has a responsibility to protect them, which is a crux of the novel.

S. MAG.: Along those same lines, when it comes to this title, the world of President Jack Ryan and the addition of the Russians is running a bit side-by-side with the real media/press in America as we speak. Does the real political world hold any excitement for you, or is the imagination a better place to be...so to speak?

M.G.: The real political world is at once exciting and depressing to me, but it is something I tackle head on in both my Clancy and my *Gray Man* books. In the Clancy world, Jack Ryan is a unique president and a unique commander-in-chief. I do my best to portray him just as Tom did; a good man, doing his best, following his core beliefs while at the same time knowing he has to play the Washington game to some degree in order to be successful.

S. MAG.: When you look down the road at books to come, do you perceive an ending to the Jack Ryan legacy at some point? Do you feel that there is someone in the wings to take Ryan's place if he were to say "so long?"

M.G.: Jack Ryan is America's James Bond. A totally different character than Bond, of course, but he is an American literary and film icon. I hope he, and his son, Jack Ryan Jr., last as long as Bond does. I hope the Jack Ryan stories continue long after we're all gone.

S. MAG.: You have visited dozens of countries. But is there a certain locale that you have never placed your characters in that you wish to one day explore in a storyline...or even in person? If so, where would that be and why?

M.G.: There are many, but the African interior would be a truly fascinating place to explore, both in person and in a book. The politics, personalities, wars, rugged nature and remoteness for the average American reader draw me to that part of the world, and I'm sure I'll find my way there before long. I have also been interested in Asia, so my latest *Gray Man* novel, "Gunmetal Gray,"



is based in Hong Kong, China, and other Southeast Asian locales. I already can't wait to get back to Hong Kong and explore other corners of that part of the globe.

S. MAG.: Can you give our readers—as well as those writers out there who may be just starting out—a look into the Mark Greaney writing realm? Such as, is there a certain time you like to write; do you have a set number of hours to write each day, etc.?

M.G.: *I'm an early riser, so I'm usually working by six am, and often by five am. I work as long as I can, try to stay away from e-mail or the business/promotion side of the job and focus on the creative side, because I judge my success or failure each day by my word count. I do most of my reading and other research later in the day, and I get a lot of creative fodder from watching films and TV, often foreign films, and I do this in the evening. That's an ideal day, but as I get closer to a deadline, my writing day expands and expands and the other diversions all take a back seat to putting good words on the page.*

S. MAG.: What about writing really inspires you to continue the hard work of creating and imagining? Would you say that writing is still a 'dream job' in your eyes?

M.G.: *It's absolutely a dream job. I'm conducting this interview from an apartment I've rented with my wife in Paris. It's a very simple apartment, nothing fancy at all, but still, it's in the heart of Paris. I'm over here researching 2018's Gray Man novel, "Weaponized," and next week I'm off to Poland and Germany—seven cities in eight days, researching another book I'm working on. I started writing my first novel at age twenty-two, and was first published at age forty-two, so I know what it's like to dream of the career I have right now, and if I ever do find myself grouchy about my job, I just want to punch myself in the nose! I enjoy the work and always want to get better at the craft, and I'm always bumping into new story ideas. One other thing inspires me: reading great books. When I read something amazing, 95 percent of me is so excited I can't wait to tell everyone I know about it, and 5 percent of me is truly annoyed I didn't think of it myself!*

S. MAG.: Are you interested in future collaborations with other authors at some point? If so, is there another genre, perhaps, that you're interested in pursuing one day?

M.G.: *Very much so. I am currently collaborating with a first-time author and active duty Marine Lt. Colonel on a novel titled "Red Metal." It's not a different genre, but it definitely goes in a new direction for me and expands my horizons. It involves a Russian invasion on two continents, and the men and women on both sides, in the military, intelligence, and political realms. It's a massive and ambitious project, but it's also great fun to work on, and I expect it to come out in the second half of 2018.*

S. MAG.: Could you tell readers about "The Gray Man?" From the new books coming out, to the future you see for the character?

M.G.: *"Gunmetal Gray" is the sixth book in the series, but it is a stand-alone novel. It follows CIA contract asset Court Gentry, a former hit man for hire, as he tracks a Chinese defector on the run who happens to hold the virtual keys to the Chinese military's cyber realm. Also after the defector are Chinese government assassins, Hong Kong Triads, Thai and Vietnamese criminal organizations, and Russian paramilitaries. It's a big novel that received starred reviews in Publishers Weekly and Kirkus, and I'm very proud of how it turned out.*

From the latest *Gray Man* adventure, to the recently released *Jack Ryan* thriller, to the brand new collaboration taking place, Mark Greaney has definitely proven to the world that his energy is boundless and his immense talent has definitely placed him in a class all by himself.

To learn more about Mark Greaney and his upcoming "hits," head to: www.markgreaneybooks.com. ■

GUNMETAL GRAY

By Mark Greaney

Featuring Mark Greaney's amazing character, Court Gentry, "Gunmetal Gray" is the latest action-packed thrill-ride in the *Gray Man* series.

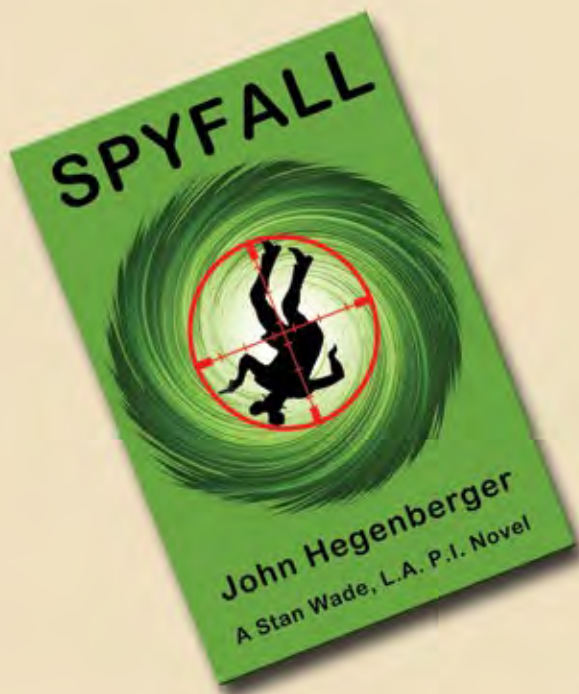
Court, after being on the run for five years, is now back working full-time at the CIA. On Court's first mission he found himself shot at, chased and nearly killed by a pair of Chinese agents. But he still has no idea why. Discovering that his friend, Don Fitzroy, is being held hostage by the Chinese, Court immediately goes on a search and rescue. In Hong Kong he learns that Fan Jiang was the reason Fitzroy was there in the first place. His initial mission was to track down Fan who is a man the CIA hopes holds the secret to stop what seems to be a group of unbeatable, invincible Chinese hackers. Court learns that two kill teams were sent out by Fitzroy to track down Fan and both of them have disappeared.

The *Gray Man* has already wished that he'd stayed away from the whole CIA 'gig' to begin with. His loyalty, perseverance, and abilities make him take on the hunt for Fan, as he attempts to find the man, gather up Intel, and then get out of the place alive.

Of course, as Court begins his mission, he does so with the knowledge that many other groups are also out there looking who are not interested in keeping Fan—or Court—alive to fight another day. But if Court does this well, he may unveil an entire ring of foreign agents, as well as take some truly bad guys off the streets before even more havoc can be brought.

When author Mark Greaney began the *Gray Man* series, fans jumped on board. And with each new book, he proves that he can deliver stories that engage and excite. Greaney is one author that has definitely received a seat in the suspense/thriller Hall of Fame.

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



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Telling Details:

JAMES ROLLINS

on Science, Suspense & “The Seventh Plague”

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: James Rollins



If imagination truly is the essence of discovery, as Winston once proclaimed, then James Rollins has enriched a worldwide audience with his mind-bending international thrillers. A #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, his books—including the critically acclaimed and wildly popular *Sigma Force* series—have been translated into more than forty languages and earned comparisons to the best in the business. That’s an impressive, and suitably appropriate, achievement for the man who was beholden to scientific adventure stories as a child. Beyond his literary successes, Rollins, who had a previous career in veterinary medicine and continues to volunteer his time in support of

his local SPCA, is the founder of Authors United—a group of bestselling scribes dedicated to raising funds and awareness for USA Cares.

Rollins’s 12th *Sigma Force* novel, “The Seventh Plague” (William Morrow), was published in December and represents the continued melding of personal and professional interests. The title received starred reviews from both *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*; the former called the work “epic” while the latter praised: “When it comes to the blending of action, adventure, history, and science, there is no other author who does it better than Rollins. Fans of Clive Cussler, Steve Berry, and Michael Crichton should already have Rollins on their mandatory reading list.”

Now, the author reflects on the facts that inspire page-turning fiction ...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): How do you conceptualize plot when beginning a new book—and what provided the impetus for “The Seventh Plague”?

James Rollins (J.R.): *I always have my antennas up 24/7 for that next great tidbit or idea that could become the foundation for a novel, whether that be a historical mystery or some scientific intrigue. I subscribe to 22 magazines (some print, some online), I have newsfeeds trickling information daily, I’m addicted to the Discovery, History, and National Geographic channels, and when I travel I take a ton of pictures and ask locals strange questions (“Tell me something about your town that no one knows about?”). For this new novel, the historical mystery goes all the way back to the Old Testament: Did the story found in the Book of Exodus—of Moses and the ten plagues—truly happen? As to the science, the novel explores the ramifications of climate change. While it may sound like those two aspects might not go together, they surprisingly do in a most startling and real way.*

J.B.V.: This is your 12th *Sigma Force* novel. How do you see the books as having evolved over time—and what are the challenges of satisfying both new and longtime readers with the same story?

J.R.: *I think novels of suspense work best if they are a reflection of our times. In the past, the Cold War brought us some of the best spy thrillers. Likewise, the terrorist threats of today have given rise to a slew of nail-biting political potboilers. So over the course of twelve books, I've sought to make my stories a mirror of our current condition, both nationally and globally. But it is a challenge to service new and old readers for an ongoing series. You have to bring new facets to your cast of characters and see them grow over the course of the series. For example, Commander Gray Pierce has been struggling with a father who has been sliding into the foggy depths of advancing Alzheimer's. In the first book, the signs of dementia are limited, but by this novel, that issue comes to a head. It's a part of the story I think readers can relate to, as we all struggle in our everyday lives to balance professional duties at work with personal responsibilities at home. Yet, such a progression of character requires filling in the backstory for new readers, and that can certainly be a juggling act.*

J.B.V.: You weave history and science throughout your storylines. How do you balance education with entertainment so as not to sacrifice narrative immediacy—and in what ways does creative license influence this process?

J.R.: *I always love this distinguishing definition between fiction and nonfiction: the goal of nonfiction is to pass on facts to your reader, while the goal of fiction is to pass on emotion. And I keep this firmly in mind while writing. My foremost objective is to keep readers turning the pages long into the night, to keep their hearts pounding. So while it's important to lay a realistic foundation upon which to construct a rollercoaster of a plot, story is tantamount. So even when sharing facts or educating a reader about some aspect of the story, it should be as engaging as that tense action scene. Sometimes that means having characters argue heatedly about a point or have there be a steep cost to obtaining some factual detail.*

As to creative license, I believe firmly in the "telling detail." If you fold enough real, verifiable details into a story, you will win the readers' trust to believe what comes next. Like if I correctly name the street where there's a Starbucks in Hoboken, a reader who has been to that Starbucks location will believe anything I write after that—at least I hope they do, because where I plan to take them next is going to be a wild ride.

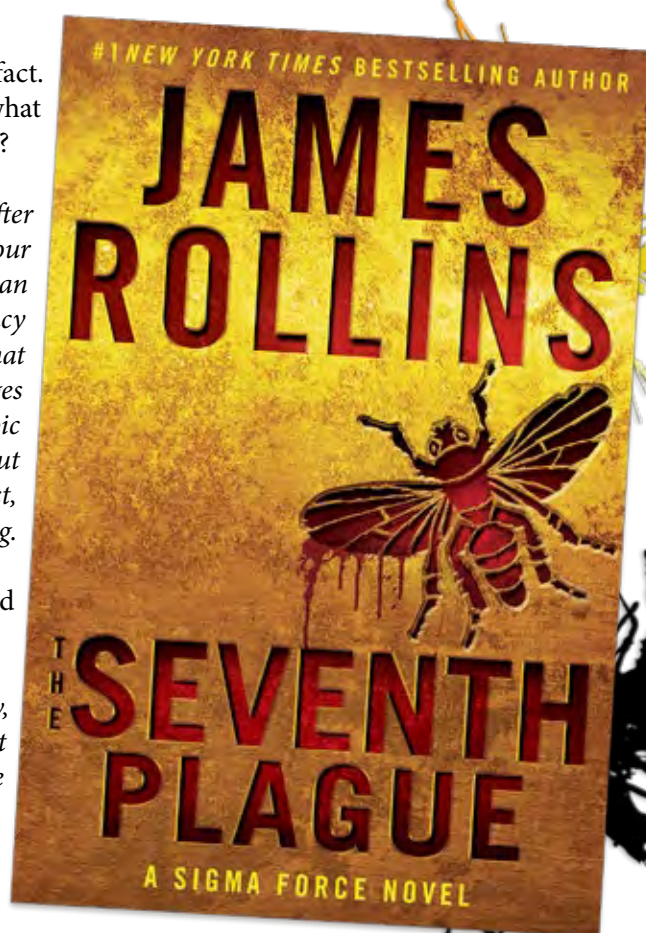
J.B.V.: Though your books are works of fiction they are grounded in fact. How do they serve as cautionary tales for the modern world—and what do you hope readers might take away from this particular installment?

J.R.: *I think the best stories are those that have resonance with a reader after they turn the last page and close the book, and shining a mirror on our times is a great way of accomplishing that. Television shows often tout an episode as "ripped from the headlines" because they know such immediacy attracts viewers. Similarly, if I can concoct a story that can capture that same immediacy, it excites me in the storyline as much as I hope it engages a reader. For "The Seventh Plague," the novel addresses the polarizing topic of climate change: Is it real? If so, what's causing it? What can we do about it? And while I don't mean for this book to be a dry diatribe on the subject, there are details found in this novel that are both cautionary and shocking.*

J.B.V.: Leave us with a teaser: What comes next for Director Crowe and Commander Grayson Pierce?

J.R.: *"The Seventh Plague" ends with a shocking choice made by Gray, one that will have lasting repercussions that will reverberate into the next Sigma novel, but to give any further detail will ruin the surprise. But be warned, major changes are in store for all.*

To learn more about James, please check out his website where he keeps his fans updated, at <http://jamesrollins.com>. ■



DEER SANCTUARY

By Susan Wingate

Zanie Walker strains to listen for prowlers over the clumping her muck-lucks make on the raised wooden porch. She heads down a set of snowy steps wrapped in chicken wire placed to prevent slips when wood goes slimy during rainy season.

Past a twin planting of Picea and some low-growing rosemary, a spicy aroma guarantees Zanie's promise to herself of plans to make a hearty batch of soup later this afternoon. This weather needs soup. The sun can barely catch her through a stretch of tall reeds and cedar hedging the pond. She steps off the stairs onto gravel that leaches into mucky grass in the direction of a shed storing three bins full of grain.

There are seven out to greet her. You never know how many will show. They appear ghostly, sauntering in through the morning mist. A yearling stands closest to the shed—a knot-head, a boy, about eight months old. He's ready to sprint if Zanie moves the wrong way. She mutters to him and the mini-herd, coy, sidle off and blow frost from their snouts. Impatient and hungry, they still act afraid after nine years of being a sanctuary for them. But fear is good when you're a wild animal. The wild ones must retain a certain instinctual measure because, as with monsters, poachers are real.

Bundled in a muffler coiled at the collar of a subzero anorak flak jacket, and pilling from two years worn during winters spent in Kandahar, Zanie's fingers sting at frost biting through a pair of old driving gloves. Donning a soft leather ratchet-belt, complete with a sheathed hideaway-blade and snap-on paracord, the belt loops through the waistband of Zanie's powder pants. For added warmth, she's slipped on a black sweater cap that boasts a gold eagle insignia over a sable chop of hair.

When she unlocks the combination, the double-door creaks and springs open, like an exhibitionist in a trench coat. The smell inside pours out a mix of sweet molasses, dusty grain, and rat urine—a juxtaposition of smells she's become accustomed to.

A wolf spider named Legs, hangs cloistered in a gauzy sack at the uppermost right corner in the back. Zanie admires Legs. Legs is a survivor. Other spiders in the shed dangle lifeless at Legs' hand. The deer shed is her home. But make no mistake—Legs never approaches Zanie and Zanie never

approaches Legs. Legs has become the shed gargoyle and protector, along with a machete and a semi-auto Ruger 9mil Zanie stowed in the shed the last time something happened, where she secured her rig in a black zippered bag suspended on the inside of the door. Two extra stocked clips along with a new box of fifty full-metal-jacket cartridges sag the bottom of the bag.

O-4 always ordered: Take no prisoners. Don't muddy the water. Make blue water red. O-4 called her Frog Girl—an endearment of gender in comparison to the rest of her male counterparts.

"Howdy Legs," she whispers to the spider. Legs shrinks deep into her web. "Sure. I'm the scary one, right?" The clanking of lids off each bin reminds Zanie of marching band cymbals. Their metal echoes and dies across the morning air.

But in her peripheral vision she spots two hulking forms rush past the pond, hunched, and skulking through a low fog that has settled across the field. The fog, thick like whipping cream, swells and curls under a sudden wind that shoves the mass over the water but laps up onto land. The shield of fog casts a curtain over reeds on the embankment and adds protection for whatever, or whoever, is out there. Squinting, daring the intruders to reveal themselves, Zanie retrieves the Ruger, sets the clip, and stuffs it into her pocket.

Could be two big dogs.

Whatever. May only be more deer coming in, but you can never be careful enough. Dogs and men—both have been known to make bad decisions concerning the welfare of deer.

Safety first.

By the time she dishes out the deer food, the fog will have reached the house. She scoops out fifteen pounds, three portions each, of wet COB, dry COB, and alfalfa pellets into a deep metal bowl. She closes the shed, and then heads off. Never mind that her normal route takes her right in the direction of the perpetrators.

Fixed deep within the gray brume, Zanie's eyes don't fall to the ground when her boots sink into a long, shallow bog of slush created by the latest snow storm. The bog pools outside of the dog fence. Sloshing through the muck marks each noisy step. Her quadriceps burn from the added exertion.

She's strong but knows she's making far too much racket for whoever is hiding in the dense oblivion of fog.

Most of twenty deer have shown up and are following now. Zanie calls out for the rest, "Oh deer! My deer!" To bring them in.

A snap from the woods makes Zanie crouch. She sets the bowl onto a spot under the Doug Fir. Sixty-feet worth of fir foliage provide an umbrella that keeps the ground drier than other areas. Five fawn, three does, and a set of antlered bucks trot up, noses down, ready for breakfast.

The snapping originated from a sprawl of ocean spray, alders, and Rugosa rose that spring up wild throughout the woods with limbs stripped by cold. The woods circle her property, breaking and reconnecting in waves around the perimeter of the back field.

A third buck bolts out from the thicket. Another branch snaps as the deer leaps onto the scene. Zanie stands. Just a stag. Its antlers fully displayed—a four-pointer. A doe lifts her head, snout high, as though snubbing the buck's sudden entrance. At full stretch the female is only as tall as Zanie's chest but looks around the same weight—if it's true, that is, what they say about black-tailed does not getting much larger than one-thirty. A few deer bound off. Zanie can feel their thudding hooves vibrate the earth through the soles of her boots.

The deer are all keyed-up this morning. Edgy. Nervous.

Thrumming sizzles through the air. An arrow zips near, passing inches from Zanie's head. She flinches back. The third buck crumples. The arrow has pierced its heart. The deer jerks violently. A hooked Ling cod once flipped around like that, on the deck of a chartered boat.

Finally, the poor thing stops. Within seconds, death consumes the animal as blood drains from the lesion. Zanie's cheeks flash hot. Pity for the deer turns to momentary fear. She adjusts her fear into anger. Anger to rage. Rage to calm. Inaction to action. Only seconds have passed.

"No hunting here!" She screams and stomps to the edge of the woods.

The dogs snarl and thunder at the back screen exit. Fenn, her big boy, threatens to break out but knows better until permitted. The smaller one yips like he's caught a rabbit in a trap.

"Dogs. Come!" The command is all Fenn needs to split the screening. He knows the out course. Their training has paid off. Fenn bounds up onto one boulder that abuts a barn wood fence. He scrambles over to the free side, completely missing a set of tapering boulders she's placed there. The small boy follows but always falters at the top.

"Now, Walter. I need you."

Walter tip-toes onto the wood fence and jumps down, taking the set of rock stairs.

Both dogs sit shivering at her feet. Fenn's pit bull instinct causes drool to bleed from his jaws. Walter growls and won't keep his bum seated. His terrier nature makes him twitchy

but vicious when provoked. Fenn—well, Fenn's destroyed several bite-sleeves during early training.

Another arrow missiles through the air and connects with a second buck, hitting its hind leg. The deer squeals and falls. It is flailing but will stop soon when shock settles him.

Traces of two male voices ripple in. Zanie cocks her head, strains to listen. She hears nervous laughter.

This is funny?

"Snap to." She yells.

Her arm whips straight, sending the dogs off in the direction of the offenders. As trained, they serpentine toward their target. Years of work will prove their mettle one way or the other—live or die. The dogs race, zigzagging into the woods, and disappear. She shuts her eyes, following them with her hearing. The dogs are barking, growling, obeying. One of the male perps has been startled. He yells something vile.

The dogs go crazy. Zanie casts her black eyes above the fog. She sees blue sky and sends up a prayer for Fenn and Walter's safety.

With her gun readied and clutched in both hands, she holds the firearm barrel high. She whoops like an ambulance, trying to scatter the remaining herd of deer. They look perplexed. Zanie pulls off one shot over the house and the herd surges in unison to the opposite side of the field, through a deep throng of blackberry and nettle.

Someone screams. A younger-sounding man. Fenn and Walter have downed him. Their barking and growling consume his words but Zanie knows begging when she hears it. Then she hears yelping from one of the dogs.

Dear God. Not Walter.

Fenn's growling heightens and he lets loose on his prey.

Good boy, Fennie.

Zanie takes off to assist. "Fenn. Walter." She keeps her voice low and deadly—sinister, like a mother protecting her children. She continues into the woods, angling her body sideways to offer less of a target. She tastes old coffee on her tongue. Her mouth goes dry. Once again, she readies her weapon and, as she marches forth, pulls back the handgun slide, chambering a cartridge from the clip into the magazine. Precision is a must.

Tactics: Detailed maneuvers to achieve objectives set by strategy.

Again, she closes her eyes. The dogs and the downed guy are to the left, closer to the pond. About seventy yards.

One of the perps tries to skate. She sneers and approximates his position. The other calls out, begging, screaming for Fenn to stop his assault and for the other guy to come back. But his friend is bailing. Zanie listens and counts, nodding with each step the runner takes, letting her ears track him. She points the gun in his approximate direction, moving left then right, angling the Ruger lower, listening for each footfall, each snapping dead twig as the invader tries to extricate himself from the situation he created. Zanie follows

his desperation, his rapid breathing. She zeroes in and aims below his waist.

Zanie squeezes the trigger. The shot is subsumed by the fog. The perp gasps. His feet trip up and he falls, breaking dead growth under him.

She notes anger in his words, then confusion. He stops muttering completely and begins to whimper.

"I'm bleeding." He calls to his friend.

What a shame.

Zanie breaks through a scrubby thicket and spots the first downed guy. This one's rolling back and forth with Fenn grinding at his arms, head, and neck. Walter is sitting back and away, not moving. He's watching and panting.

"Walter," Zanie runs to him. Fenn is still going at the guy when he cries out.

"Get 'em off."

Zanie doesn't. Walter needs her. He's been shot with an arrow that is jutting out of his right thigh. Blood puddles red and shines in the snow around him. His white coat is bright but fades to pink as it wicks away from the wound. She holsters her gun and kneels. She pulls off her ratchet belt, unsheathes the knife, cuts off a length of the paracord and ties off Walter's leg—high at the hip, and tight. Her dog mewls from the pressure and lays down. She reaches into her pocket for her Leatherman and snips off each end of the arrow. He's okay for now. He'll survive. She'll fix him when she's completed the mission; when she's finished with these bastards.

Fenn is still mauling the guy and the guy is still rolling around on the ground. He's trying to protect his head and, basically, trying not to be ripped to pieces. She stands over them both, watching Fenn, allowing him to continue.

"Make 'em stop!" He says again.

"Who shot Walter?"

"Stop 'em!"

Zanie views the cold setting. The guy's hair takes on a frosty tone with a dewy haze settling in his blond hair. Leaves and dirt are in his eyes and mouth. Looks like no peace will be forthcoming if this guy can't behave when she asks him a simple question.

"Come on, sweetie," she says to Walter. She lifts him gently and turns. "Finish." She calls the order to Fenn over her shoulder. His growl deepens—a banshee howl before the kill.

"Trax! Trax did. He shot the dog." The guy cries out.

Trax moans a good fifty paces in the distance, southwest. His voice sounds weak, thready.

The mere suggestion of death—the great divider—makes Fenn's catch give up his friend.

"Your pal there'll die in ten, maybe fifteen, if he doesn't get assistance. Hollow-point most likely severed his artery." She pats her thigh. "Femoral. Throbs like a son-of-a-gun, I hear."

Trax begins to cry. "Billy. Help." He whines out.

"Billy," she says. "Hey there, Billy-boy. I'm Zanie." She calls to the other one through the brush, "Hey Trax. Having fun, are we?"

Fenn is chomping and slobbering, his pink tongue flicking mad at the air. The dog doesn't care if Billy fesses-up or not and waits only for her say-so. Zanie nods. The pit connects with one of his hands. Billy's flesh splits.

"Ouch," she says.

The dog backs off and sits. She nods again, allowing the dog to go. Billy crawls on his stomach but is snatched up when Fenn strikes the back of his neck and drags him back. Billy is Fenn's new chew toy.

Using her most professional command tone, she says, "Jab." Fenn stops dragging Billy, backs-up, and runs at him—in-and-out, like a boxer hoping for a KO.

Billy screams into the surrounding wilderness. He tries rolling onto his back. He's begging again. Blocking the dog. Crying.

Zanie nods and shows the dog the flat of her left hand. Fenn darts, locks his canines into the fat of the guy's palm again and begins to shake.

"Fennie. Be nice. Truck-pull."

The shaking changes to sharp, steady jerking like he's trying to pull a half-ton out of mud. Fenn wants to rip off his arm and Zanie knows he can do it. What Zanie also knows, she makes a mental list of: one, Billy will never again have the tools to cock a bow and arrow. Fenn's guaranteeing that future right now. Two, he most definitely won't want to kill anymore deer; three, he'll respect her land and learn to obey signs on other people's property.

"Please," Billy says. His hand is coming apart. Fat, muscle, and bone show in distinct contrast to one another. "Please." He says it again.

He's giving up. Thinks he's going to die.

Zanie cocks her head at him. "Are you sorry, Billy?"

The dog continues to tug and tear. It's difficult to dislodge tendons and ligaments from bone and muscle. Takes something sharper than dog teeth to do it—well, fast, anyway, like this guy wants—like a loose tooth. Takes a scalpel. Fenn spends time with his toy because that's all Fenn has. Time.

This guy, however, thinks time is running out.

She hefts Walter higher onto her hip and crosses her first two fingers—an order for Fenn to pause but not to release. Again, Zanie flattens her palm to the dog, ordering him to continue. He obeys.

"See how that works?"

"No, no, no." The guy gets out his pleas through all his crying.

Zanie holds up crossed fingers. Fenn pauses.

"You don't see how it works? Here. I'll show you again."

"No! I mean, yes. Yes. Please. Make 'em stop."

"Okay. I'll ask you again. Slowish-like, so you understand. Are, you, sorry, you killed one of my bucks? And, uh-oh, that you shot my dog? *My dog.*"

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SUSPENSE
PUBLISHING

Billy sucks in air through a series of sobs and can't get the words out.

"Fenn?"

"Please! No."

"Tell me you're sorry. Fenn's waiting," she says.

She pauses while he catches his breath. She kisses Walter's head. Fenn continues to pant and snarl. Billy's blood drools from in-between Fenn's teeth. Fenn wants this bad but he's being a good boy—not releasing his hand but not shredding him into jerky strips either.

"Billy," she begins, "Fenn here's a pit bull. Well, part pit. Trained guard dog, he is. I trained him. Navy trained me. Puzzle filling in for you?" She points to her sweater cap and tilts her left shoulder down, showing him a patch on her jacket and cap of an eagle insignia. The eagle is clutched to a gold trident and the label reads: SEAL TEAM THREE.

"Look. You think a dog bite is bad, be thankful I don't have a waterboard." She huffs. "No one ever liked waterboarding. Waterboarding sounds like surfing, like 'we're gonna have some fun,' but I can assure you. It's. No. Fun."

She glares at the guy who begins to blubber.

"Oh man," he says.

Zanie stands tall and shakes her head. "Nope. Only female in Team Three. Middle East. Although DEVGRU did ask me on as an instructor, you know, Special Warfare Development?" She smiled. "But I'm not a teacher-kind-a-gal. See, Billy. I don't need a gun, a knife, a board, or a dog to off you. Just this." She shows him her free hand. "I certainly don't need some wimpy arrow. Now, answer me, idiot. Your friend's dying over there. Are you sorry?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Yes, ma'am, what?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry."

"Fenn," she says. "Stand down."

Fenn places the man's hand beside him on the ground as gently as setting a baby into a cradle. He backs off but stands over the perp at attention.

"He'll go again, faster than you can say, 'jack rabbit,' if I give him the go-ahead. Won't you, Fennie?" She adjusts Walter to her other arm—he's not bleeding any longer—and strokes Fenn's head. He wags his tail once. "That looks nasty." Zanie says about Billy's hand and tosses her neck warmer onto his chest. "Wrap that and get up. After you help me save your friend's life, we're going to clean up the mess you made of my deer. Sheriff Jensen will want intel on this situation. He'll want to know how you entered my land illegally. By the way, he was Special Forces, Army Corp. Helped me post those 'No Trespassing' signs too, he did. I'm sure he'll get a big kick out of meeting you both." ■

Susan Wingate is a #1 Amazon bestseller and an award-winning author of books that span the genres of mystery, thriller, romantic suspense, paranormal, inspirational and Christian fiction, fantasy, memoir, and writing resources. To learn more, visit her website at www.susanwingate.com.

“Chaos” Reigns: Patricia Cornwell on Scarpetta & Suspense

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Patrick Ecclesine



Patricia Cornwell has been at the epicenter of crime fiction since making her debut with “Postmortem” (1990)—the first thriller to bring forensics to the forefront. That book introduced medical examiner Kay Scarpetta to the world and still holds the distinction of being the only title to win the Edgar, Creasey, Anthony, and Macavity awards as well as the French Prix du Roman d’Aventure prize in a single year. Since then, Cornwell has sold more than 100 million copies of her books in thirty-six languages throughout 120 countries and received accolades, including the Sherlock Award for best detective created by an American author, the Gold Dagger Award, the RBA Thriller

Award, and the Medal of Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters for her contributions to literary and artistic development. Cornwell began her career at the *Charlotte Observer* and later worked at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Virginia—experiences that have largely informed her writing. In addition to the *Scarpetta* books, she has authored the non-fiction title “Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper—Case Closed” (to be published in a revised and expanded edition—“Ripper: The Secret Life of Walter Sicker”—from Thomas & Mercer in January), a biography of Ruth Graham, two cookbooks, a children’s book, and two additional series, one of which features Win Garano, an upstart Boston detective, and the other Andy Brazil, an intrepid Charlotte reporter.

Cornwell’s most recent release, the instant *New York Times* bestseller, “Chaos” (WilliamMorrow), was published in November and marks the twenty-fourth book in her venerable *Scarpetta* series. *The Portsmouth Review* praised: “‘Chaos’ will once again prove why Cornwell has stayed at the top of the bestseller list for more than 25 years and continues to earn fans with her complex plots and stunning and realistic scientific details...will keep readers guessing until the end. And when readers think it’s over, Cornwell delivers the sharpest blow of all.” Further, Kirkus noted: “The closest analogue to Cornwell’s wildly successful series, in fact, may be a superhero franchise.”—an appropriate comparison, given that *Scarpetta* is currently being adapted for film by Fox 2000.

Now, the author reflects on her stylings of suspense...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): “Chaos” opens with *Scarpetta* struggling over the notion of having to entertain a public audience. In what ways did the increasing expectation of authors to entertain their readers beyond writing books influence this scene?

Patricia Cornwell (P.C.): *It’s very funny because I have certainly grown to be much more comfortable ‘entertaining’ people than Scarpetta could ever be... It took me forever to figure out that first scene and then once I got her into it, I said, ‘You know what? Let’s just have her walk somewhere. Let me get inside of her head and see what on earth is going on with her.’ And it was really sort of cheeky and fun when I was imagining that Scarpetta is getting coaching from her sister, who is not a particularly lovely person, and who’s telling her she’s got to loosen up and be a little funny and don’t sound like such a scientist and don’t be*

so boring. And so she's trying to rehearse the points that she's going to make at the Kennedy School of Government when she's talking about the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster... That is very different from my experiences in the real world because no one would ever ask me to speak about something like that. I'm not the expert, I'm an author, but I will tell you in the very early days, when I first started being asked to give book talks—and this goes all the way back to when I did my very first book, which was the Ruth Graham biography—I would write out my little speech and I'd try to make all the right points and after several times of that I just threw it out the window because I said, 'Nope, you have to reach your audience, and if your audience is not with you with what you started to prepare you'd better drop it and meet them where they are or they're going to get bored.' So I did have to learn a whole new set of skills very early on. How do you deal with the promoting part of all this and the publicity and getting up in front of groups of people? And now we have social media, and, fortunately, it's gotten a lot easier for me as I've gotten older, maybe because I don't take myself as seriously as I did when I was getting started. You know, I was very serious and very earnest in everything I was doing, and now it's like, 'Oh, please. Just laugh a little bit...' Here's my attitude—and this would not be Scarpetta's attitude because she's a professional, she's a scientist, she's a lawyer—my attitude when I get up in front of people today is they've come there for something and I want them to go home and feel like they didn't waste their time. That really is it in a nutshell. That is what I finally learned, and it took me many years to figure it out. It's funny you would ask me this question because nobody ever asks me about the other things that I have to do and whether it comes naturally to writers, because I think a lot of this doesn't come naturally to writers... I'll tell you, the trick I learned... is if you try to make it not about you, if you try to make it about the other person, not only are you not self-conscious but they end up having a good time. You will find that when I go out to speak I never have notes with me. I don't write out a speech. I have an idea of what I'm going to do but I wait until I get out there and I try to figure out what's going on with everyone in the audience and then I try to meet them where they are and then intuitively give them what they want. You just have to read the audience.

J.B.V.: Your books incorporate a lot of technology. How have you always managed to stay at the forefront of this field? Also, what do you see as the benefits versus the risks of such innovation?

P.C.: Well, those are very good questions. Something that a lot of people probably don't know is that I have a network of consultants that I have built over the decades, and I'm constantly getting new ones... These people, over the years, have also become my friends. For example, if I'm posting pictures on Twitter of a research dive trip I'm doing...two of the people with me are going to be homicide investigators who are friends of mine. One of them is a Chief Medical Examiner... I'm always with folks like this,

even if we're not actually doing research. And so through osmosis, since a lot of these people also work with the military, I'm always hearing about the latest and greatest that's coming down the pike, a lot of which starts in the military and then ends up over here stateside in law enforcement. A really good example of that is the CT scanner that I write about that Scarpetta now has in her office. That technology came from the military. They started doing that at Dover Air Force Base to take care of all our war casualties and any deaths on military bases, and so that ends up in the private sector. I find out about some of these things before they ever get to the private sector. And certainly when it comes to weapons your imagination is the only limit because any technology that becomes pervasive...the possibilities of what both good and bad guys can do with any new technology are practically limitless. So instead of just trying to focus on some new way of looking at a knife wound...I also want to throw in things that people haven't seen before and that Scarpetta has not seen before. And in "Chaos," this is a weapon that no one has ever seen before. They've seen other permutations of it but not this particular one. To get to the rest of your question, the risk in terms of writing about these things—and again, a very astute question because people probably don't know that I spend a lot of time thinking about that very subject when I start a book—I really anguish over it. I don't want to give people easy recipes for doing something terrible, so typically...it's something that while you could do it, it would not be easy...and that's intentional on my part... What I do is then say, 'What can we do with this that will absolutely baffle Scarpetta?' Because that's what's fun about it. How fun is it if she goes to John F. Kennedy Park and there's somebody there who's full of ball bearings and nails from a bomb? No. I'm sorry, but people don't want to read that because it's in the paper every day, if you know what I'm saying.



What I'd rather do is use the technology that we're seeing every day and create a weapon... That's exactly what we have in "Chaos," and that's what makes it fun... And that's the point, isn't it? I'm not a journalist reporting on real cases. I'm supposed to be creating fun adventures that entertain people, but mine are always infused with hardcore realities and things that can really happen and technology that is cutting edge... That's the verisimilitude of it, the authenticity, but the romp is completely made up and supposed to be fun and not supposed to make people miserable after they finish the book. They should enjoy the ride and be exhilarated by it but also learn a few things.

J.B.V.: In talking about exhilaration, let me ask you this: You've said that doing the research actually 'terrifies' you at times. How do you think that those experiences benefit the books? In what ways does the fright resonate?

P.C.: *Well, you know, I'll tell you that it goes back to when I was a journalist...at the Charlotte Observer. They didn't hire me to be a writer, but I would get some general assignment stories that nobody wanted. So to answer your question, this is a true story that happened to me in the very first six months, I believe, the very beginning of my job at the Charlotte Observer: There was a guy giving juggling lessons out in one of the local parks. Wow, that's an exciting story that's bound to win Pulitzer Prizes! And so they asked little old me if I would like to go cover that story. And I said, 'Of course I would.' So on that particular Sunday afternoon, or whatever it was, I went out to that park and met up with this guy and he said, 'Listen, if you want to know what it feels like to try to learn how to juggle, let me show you. Let me give you a lesson.' He actually took the balls and he took my hands and he started giving me juggling lessons. The photographer was taking pictures and I felt like the biggest idiot, but sure enough because I tried it the story became something different. It actually became a decent little story. Then the next little story they gave me was the backgammon tournament that was in town. It was the World Championship in Charlotte at the Radisson Hotel. They sent me down to cover that because nobody wanted to cover that, either... So the guy said, 'I'll tell you what. If you want to know what it's like to play backgammon, why not just play you in a match?' This was the World Champion, or whatever, at the time, and I said, 'OK.' Well, I had these unbelievably lucky roles of the dice and you won't believe that I actually won, or something... But I sat there and I did it, and each time I was asked to try something that I'd never done before—and I'm basically on display doing it because I'm doing a story—I was scared. I was scared of being stupid, not being any good at it. But I did it anyway. And then I learned: If you will just show up and try to understand what people are doing and, within reason, participate...you might write with an authenticity and a power that you could never have otherwise. And that began my method way back, in 1979, when I got my first job as a journalist, and I've really never stopped doing it. At age 60, I haven't changed a bit. I just try on bigger shoes and play with more dangerous things—and if I throw something in the air, it might explode. (Laughs.)*

J.B.V.: You've created a very successful brand and have a very passionate readership. A lot of us, I think, feel an ownership of Scarpetta and your other characters. How do you balance your role as their creator with what you feel might be your responsibility to your readers?

P.C.: *Well, a good creator should not be a dictator. A good creator creates something for other people to enjoy and to assimilate and to do their own creative thing with. So if I'm doing a good job as a creator of these stories, and of this series, then the readers who take the time to read the story, and to imagine what's going on and to see it in their own heads, they become participants in it. And I want them to be. That's exactly what I want them to do. I want them to appropriate the stories and these characters and to even feel like they are Scarpetta while they're going through the novel. If you don't make it something that invites people to join in and be part of it, at least in their imagination, then, in my opinion, you've failed at what you're supposed to be doing. This is not supposed to be about me showing off. This is supposed to be about me inviting you to something that you are so glad you came to. So that's what I try to remember, and I always remember that even though at the end of the day it's me sitting in the chair and I make the decisions, I do it for everybody else. It's for them. I'm not writing it for myself. I'm writing it for my readers... Maybe I shouldn't say that I think this is the proper attitude, but, in my opinion, I do believe it is.*

J.B.V.: And that's what makes Scarpetta real, among other things.

P.C.: *Well, we want her to be real and then we also have to remember the other most important element in any of these books, and it's the very thing that is the name of what you're representing. The most important thing is suspense. You've got to do what Wilkie Collins says. You have to make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, and make them wait. That is absolutely critical, and that is something that I hope to get really good at someday. I'm working on it!*

We'd like to thank Patricia for taking the time. To keep up-to-date, visit her website at www.patriciacornwell.com. ■

A Message to Aspiring Authors

By Janice Badal



At a recent holiday party, a married acquaintance told me, “I am so impressed that you’re writing a book. I could never do that.” My heart seemed to swell with pride. I smiled and was about to respond that writing a book was a life-long dream. But the woman added, “God, what are the chances you’ll ever get published? I hear it’s more likely that an unpublished author will be killed by a terrorist than be published.” I had to reflect for a moment. *Do I send the woman’s name and address to an ISIS website, or go off and cry?*

After I skulked off into a corner, I took a hefty drink from my wine glass and thought about what the woman had said. I knew she was correct about the odds of getting published . . . at least through traditional means: agent and large publisher. But before even getting to the point of being published, you have to go through the ups and downs of writing.

It’s painful, pulling the right phrase from the recesses of your brain. But it’s glorious when you do so. It’s almost overwhelming when a scene comes together as you envisioned it deep in the night, when you were unable to sleep because the story kept you awake. Sometimes, your characters are as real as the person sitting next to you. They whisper in your ear, their secrets become yours. They call to you and welcome you into their world...a world which *you* formed. The act of creation is sublime.

Unfortunately, the creative process is not a free-wheeling event. It involves structure and rules and mechanics that are, at times, counter-intuitive and, quite often, frustrating for the first-time, unpublished writer (you can’t say *author* because, as Wikipedia states, there is: “an implication that an author is a writer of one or more major works). You receive advice from published authors, your critique group members, and seminar presenters, such as:

- Don’t repeat words in the same paragraph, even for emphasis. No anaphora.
- Don’t use -ly words. No adverbs.
- Don’t use -ing words. No gerunds.
- Don’t use semicolons. No ;
- Don’t use colons. No :
- Don’t use exclamation marks. No !
- Don’t use many commas. Few ,
- Don’t *italicize*.
- Don’t write as the omniscient narrator.
- No long sentences.
- No long paragraphs.
- No present tense.

Avoid POV slips.

Don't use -ing words. No gerunds.

- Lots of dialogue.
- Avoid POV slips.
- Minimize dialogue tags, such as 'he said' or 'she said.'
- Leave out the parts that people won't read. (What?)

If you don't follow the guidelines above, you will never be published. *Ever*. Now, go forth and write... and enjoy it.

Obviously, no one conveyed these rules to Charles Dickens when he wrote "A Tale of Two Cities." Just look at that opening paragraph.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Talk about run-on sentences. Anaphora all over the place. Too many commas. And zero dialogue. *Tsk-tsk*. Poor Charles will never be read. To edit this miserable paragraph for modern sensibilities, it might look something like this:

Sydney Carton slumped in his chair, dragged on his cigar. He mumbled to his friend Bob, "It was the best of times." Carton brushed errant ashes from his vest.

"It was the worst of times," Bob replied, his lips pursed. He leaned against the door frame that lead to Carton's legal office.

"It was the age of wisdom." Carton, flustered, gazed at Bob.

"It was the age of foolishness." There was an edge to Bob's voice. He crossed his arms over his chest.

Perturbed, Carton sat straighter in his chair and spat out at his friend, "It was the epoch of belief." He furiously crushed his cigar butt into an ashtray.

Bob stepped closer to Carton, a threat in his closed fists. "It was the epoch of incredulity."

Well, you get the idea. Much better, right? Dickens hadn't a clue. And don't even get me started on F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Writing is torment and a delight. For me, as it is for most aspiring authors, writing has become an obsession, a passion that is all-consuming and unquenchable.

But, how do I find my voice, tell my story, when every few moments I realize I've used another gerund or adverb and need to rewrite, rethink how I'm going to say what I want to say? The story flows, but I feel hamstrung by the conventions, which I find unnatural. Fortunately, the voice in my head says, "Keep writing; it will all come." I believe.

I write, fitting the joy of creation around my work schedule. Yes, to create takes effort, commitment, and resolve. It is a delightful, inspiring struggle. But, I've found I'd rather be in the writing trenches: my passion for writing wrestling with the agony that sometimes accompanies the process. The alternative is to take the easy way out and not try. But the danger that comes with avoidance of discomfort is not feeling deeply, not to be *alive*. Sure, I look forward to being published. But, even if I knew I'd never be published, I'd still write. Because I cannot NOT write.

So, go forth and write... and enjoy it! And try to not worry about what people say about the odds of getting published, or about the chances that you'll be targeted by a terrorist. ■

Janice Badal is an aspiring author who lives in Albuquerque and is currently working on a trilogy of suspense novels. She has a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology and spent twenty-five years counseling adults in a private practice.

Don't use -ly words. No adverbs.



STORMFALL

By John Hegenberger
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Over here, south of the border, there probably were a few Mexicanos who didn't want the Alamo movie to be made. Instead, they likely wanted to re-do the battle and the ones that followed, in order to take back the land for their country.

We continued driving along the dusty road beside a set of rail tracks that led into the town proper. My sinuses reacted, commanding me to sneeze from the dirt cloud four times without restraint. Slate shook his head and gave me a disdainful "Jesus" look. High above, a lonely single-engine airplane droned toward the western sun.

Ciudad Acuna was a ramshackle collection of buildings thrown together around a central plaza and cathedral and impressed me more than Brackettville had. The plaza was still the main social gathering place for the town's residents, with small shops, a stand where you could get a shoeshine, and a few rusty autos parked near a cantina called Ma Crosby's. Slate knew the bar as "the best joint in town" to get margaritas, mariachi music, and information.

We strolled casually inside. I tipped my hat to the rotund barkeep the way Randolph Scott would have. "Nice little town you've got here."

The man flicked a short cloth at a fly on the bar and then gestured grandly for us to have a seat at a table near a smoke-streaked stone fireplace.

I discovered that I was starving and joined Slate in ordering the *especial del dia*. There was a tender, smoky cabrito—roasted young goat—served with a half onion, roasted, and Camarones Crosby, which I found were shrimp stuffed with cheese and peppers wrapped in bacon.

Surprisingly, I was delighted to find that I could wash it all down with a tall glass of cherry Kool-Aid. "What does a Firewrangler do, exactly?"

Slate eyed me and my drink. "He flourishes the flames."

I think he winked. "And people pay good money for that?"

"Bet on it, Pard." He twitched a finger at my glass. "And by the way, that stuff makes you look like you're wearing lipstick."

I chomped on a red pepper, hoping it would make my complexion blend in with my lips.

My silent partner sat drinking a beer, absently digging at the cork on the underside of the bottle cap with his thumb nail.

I remained calm, quiet and deliberate, which was getting us nowhere at the speed of light.

Since we had the place to ourselves, except for a drunk sleeping on crossed arms at the end of the bar, I decided to take the metaphorical bull by the horns and asked the barkeep for directions to Dr. Z's clinic.

"The Saint Anthony Hospital is down Hidalgo road, senors, turn right at Allende." He waved a damp towel in a westerly direction. "Across the bridge on Mateos highway, near the dam."

"We'll find it," Slate growled, standing and leaving a crumpled ten-dollar bill on the table. "You forget, Wade. I've been there before."

Outside and to the east, the sky was turning lavender and deep blue. A few early stars were showing. "The sky really does turn purple at twilight out here," I said.

I wondered what caused it. Norman would know the scientific reason. I'd have to ask him—if I got back.

#

It was full dark as we motored slowly past a few houses scattered outside of town like a handful of dusty dice. As we neared a low building set back from the road, I saw a hand-carved sign swinging on simple door hinges, informing us that this was the St. Anthony Clinic.

Slate shut off the engine and we coasted over popping gravel. As we rolled to a complete stop, the silence of the night

became populated with the sounds of crickets, a distant coyote and the tiny tones of a cornet rippling from a radio somewhere inside the single-story medical facility. At night, the lonely place did little to encourage thoughts of health and wellness. I made a mental bet with myself that the majority of the operations performed here were abortions.

I figured that we had done enough now, having located the Chinese guy and Dr. Z. We could come back in the morning or send someone else to investigate. But the Wrangler of Fire had other ideas. "Let's move."

"Let's not."

"We're here."

"We're leaving."

"I'm driving."

"Pretty soon, you'll be walking."

"Try it, cowpoke, and you'll be on your ass." He got out and let the driver-side door click quietly shut, while pocketing the ring of keys.

This would've been an excellent time to have a gun. Since this was to have been a simple reconnaissance mission, mine was still in my suitcase back in Brackettville. In lieu of any other weapon, I picked up a softball sized-rock and hefted it as we crouched nearer to the darkened side of the facility. Brambles crunched beneath our boots, sounding to me like gun shots. Something small in the bush scampered away in fear. I didn't blame it.

We came up on the building from the rear, where pale light poured from a pair of dingy windows. I was hoping for a storeroom or maybe a kitchen, but what I saw through the semi-clouded glass was more like a mad laboratory from a cheapie monster movie.

The interior walls of the room were white porcelain blocks and the floor was grey linoleum tile. A row of lift-top freezers ran along one side of the room and a black countertop, complete with dripping faucet and steel sink, stretched along another wall. On the countertop were beakers, test-tube racks, a microscope, and one of those centrifuges, spinning a humming like a child's top. As research labs go, CalTech probably wasn't as well equipped as this place.

On a file cabinet next to an exam table sat a device that churned out a strip of paper covered with squiggles. The operating table, itself, was in the center of the room under a cantilevered lamp, and it cradled a dark-haired oriental woman, asleep or dead, legs held high and wide in metal stirrups, under a light blue sheet.

Slate growled deep in his throat like an anxious junkyard dog.

I thought he was going to sniff the air. "So, where's this Dr. Z?"

"Right behind you, gentlemen. Turn around slowly, or my bodyguard will shoot you as the trespassers that you are."

Yep, real nice town.

#

"Oh, hey there. No need to get excited." I grinned like a Hollywood charmer...which was sort of true. "I'm Jimmy Joe Meeker from up Houston way. Oil's my business. Do you know your place is sitting on one of the finest deposits of natural crude within four hundred miles?"

I offered a friendly hand, hoping the guy wearing the white lab coat would take it. He also wore a slim, oddly handsome face with thinning, slicked back hair and a pair of wire-rimmed glasses over a straight nose. His shoulders were trim compared to the burly man beside him wearing the gun.

Both men took instead a step back as I ambled further into the faint square of light from the barely translucent windows. That's when the gun guy started firing.

I ducked at the sight of the muzzle flash and heard another shot fired over my head from behind me. Slate had gotten his gun out, but it went spinning from his hand, struck by the other man's bullet, the same way I'd seen happen in countless westerns.

All the night sounds of nature stopped, waiting for our next move.

I slowly rose. "Ah, that's damn fine shooting."

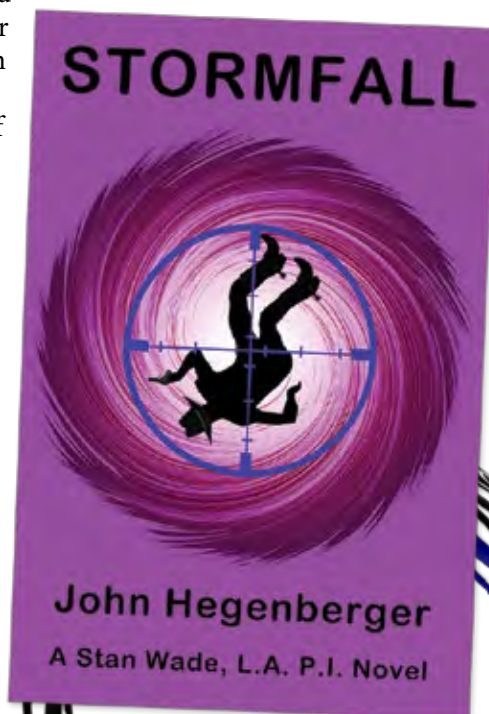
Slate was holding his right hand in his left, letting the blood trickle from and between his fingers. I'd half suspected that my faithful companion had led me here; a lamb to slaughter, but now that idea had been proven false.

Lab Coat moved in closer to the light, and I could see the hard expression in his flinty eyes. "Turn around. Both of you."

I couldn't stop myself from moaning slightly, knowing what probably came next.

I was right. Something solid struck the lower right side of my head and I struck the dark Mexican soil.

Vaya con Dios. ■



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