

Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

MAY/JUNE 2017

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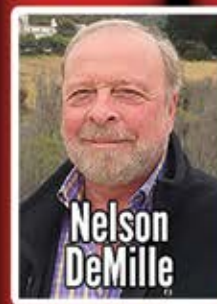
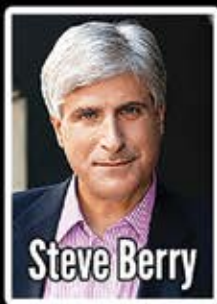
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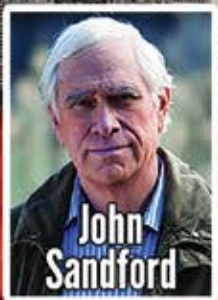
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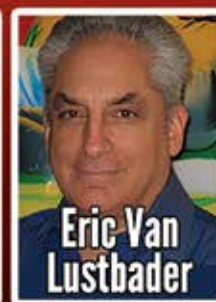
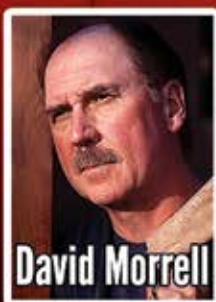


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FROM THE EDITOR

One thing that's very tough for most people to do is leave their comfort zone. In books, it's the same thing. With so many books being published every day, and more new authors releasing in digital formats, as a consumer of this product we tend to grab books that give us comfort. I'm not saying that's a bad thing; hell, books aren't exactly cheap, if you still get your books in hardcover. Spending upwards

of \$35.00 for a book is expensive, but you want to grab an author or series that makes you feel good.

My challenge is for you to jump out of that zone. Find an author or a genre that has piqued your curiosity, but you haven't jumped into yet. Take a chance; just like that time you tried liver and onions. I know it looks scary, but don't knock it till you try it.

Let's say that you're a military thriller fan. You pick up Brad Thor, Brad Taylor, Dale Brown and so on. You can't get enough of those SEAL and Delta teams destroying the bad guys and saving the world. We know you love these stories and we get it, but why not try something with a supernatural twist? Maybe a cozy mystery where you can put your skills to the test and figure out who the killer is? You might just remember why stories drew you in in the first place.

If you remember back to when you first started to read, you probably had to search to find tales that gave you that warm and fuzzy feeling. But what you did back then was explore—new lands, new characters, the library shelves. Remember the excitement when you picked up an author for the first time? Maybe you grabbed a soda, kicked people out of your space, and curled up for the night, flashlight at the ready. You didn't know what to expect, you just knew that you'd be transported to a different place and a different time.

Now that feeling isn't the same; it may get you close, but it's simply different. You know pretty much what you're going to get when you pick up the tenth book in the same series. You're in the same place with the same characters—maybe meeting a new one here and there, but still very much of the same.

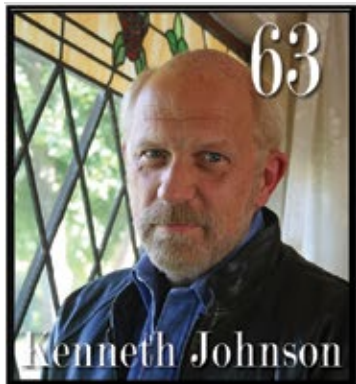
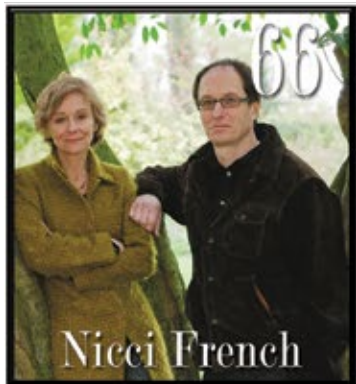
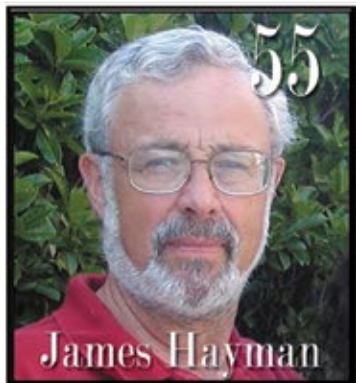
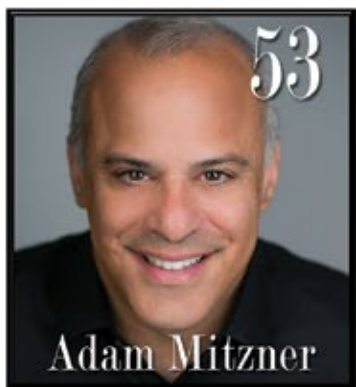
Go on, remember that feeling that made you a reader in the first place. Try something new. Or, at the very least, check to see what else your favorite may be writing. Your go-to political thriller writer may have released a series of mysteries that are just as exciting. The good news is that you don't have to spend a lot of money at all. Many e-books are under \$5.00 and a lot are free. Sign up for newsletters that give you book deals of the day.

In the words of '80s metal band, Mr. Big, go get *Addicted To That Rush*.

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine ■



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ALBUQUERQUE

By Sam Wiebe

Chen's first inkling that Travis McCallum was bent came at the Peace Arch Crossing. The guard looked up from her monitor long enough to ask when was the last time they'd crossed the border.

"You mean ethically?" McCallum had asked. He'd held out their passports, flashed her his best good-old-boy smile.

Chen told her no fruits or vegetables, no livestock. She looked at the two men, asked what business they were in.

"My buddy's a security consultant," McCallum said. "Me, I'm retired, King County Sheriff's, six years now." Grinning again. "They let me off for good behavior."

"Nature and purpose of your trip?" she asked.

"Flying out of SEA-TAC," McCallum said. "New Mexico. See some old friends."

Once they were into Washington, McCallum whooped and fed one of his Alan Jackson CDs into the rental car's sound system. He said to Chen, "You got to lighten up, Jeff. You're not having fun, what's the point of doing this job?"

* * *

Their contractor was a man named Marty Dunn. He stood by the coffee maker in the portable office, a silver-haired man in a concrete-gray dress shirt and dungarees. He presided over the half-dozen ex-cops, security experts and PIs, all large middle-aged white men with the exception of Chen.

The others were eating donuts, going over the map and their photocopied list of objectives.

The four farms were all about a half hour's drive. Three-man teams, two farms per. The farms were owned by Carlos Chavez, Elaine Garcia, Jan Hinchell, and the Lucero brothers Co-Op. Mugshot-like photos flashed on the wall as the projector blinked.

All four were guilty of violating, or encouraging others to violate, the seed patent on the Taurus Corporation's genetically-modified corn seed.

As Dunn explained, most farms in the area signed contracts with Taurus for seeds immune to Taurus's industrial herbicide. A perfect system: buy the seeds, plant the seeds, spray Bush-Kill and watch everything but your corn wither and die.

But some farmers would rather steal from Taurus. Seed pirates, Dunn called them. By not buying Taurus seeds, not signing a contract, they were reaping the benefits of a hundred million dollars' worth of research. It didn't matter if the seeds had blown onto their property. Stealing is stealing.

Chen, neck aching from the flight, knew it was all bullshit. Why else hire PIs from out of town? They were here to intimidate. To frighten the underdogs. To break the last four holdouts.

It didn't sit well with him, but fifteen grand for a week's work sat nicely. With Marie pregnant they could use the cash.

He ended up on a team with McCallum and another jowly, heavy-shouldered man named Ross. They rode in a rented Econoline, Ross driving, the back seats clanking with tubs of Taurus seeds, axes, ammunition.

The Co-Op was first. Taurus's legitimate investigators had already served lawsuits, demanded access to the farm's records and receipts. The Luceros had counter-sued. This would be phase two.

Ross ran the van off the road, over a culvert and onto the edge of the farm. It was March, the dusty *penistaja* soil still barren. Ross drove over a thin mesh boundary and parked facing the farmhouse, his highbeams on.

It was dusk. They waited. McCallum and Ross jawed about cases they'd solved, about women. Chen watched the windows of the farmhouse. Lights went on and off. Ross brought up Asian pussy, the old horizontal slit jokes. He nudged Chen. Chen didn't respond.

"I seen his wife when I picked him up," McCallum said. "Redhead. Must like those Asian dicks, or else Jeff here is packing wood. That true, Jeff? You packing?"

"Only hung Asians I've seen are in gay porn," Ross said.

"And how'd you see that, 'zactly?"

On the lawn of the farmhouse, Chen made out a pair of figures. He trained his binoculars on them. The Lucero brothers: Frank in T-shirt and shorts; Tomas barechested, work boots and jeans.

Ross climbed out and went around to the back doors. McCallum took the binoculars. "Guess we woke 'em up, uh? They comin' towards us?"

"Looks like they're scared."

"That's the whole point, dipshit."

Ross came abreast of the passenger's side, clutching a large-bore hunting rifle. "Jeff, do me a favor, pick up the brass."

Chen stood behind him as Ross sighted on the farmhouse. The rifle had a large red-dot scope, and Ross made sure to dance the laser over the two frozen figures on the lawn. Then quickly he pulled the barrel away towards the field and fired, staggering his shots so each could be heard separately. Chen saw the figures fall to the dirt, covering their heads.

Ross stowed the rifle and lit a cigar. McCallum laughed. Chen knelt on the spongy soil and picked up the shell casings. He could hear the Luceros cursing at them, threatening to call the cops.

"We should go," Chen said.

"Relax," said McCallum. "They're phoning nine one one and talking to the operator. She'll direct it to the Sheriff's. She's got her hands full tonight, won't send a deputy till morning."

"Full with what?" Chen asked.

McCallum grinned. "Case of Glenlivet, courtesy of Mr. Dunn."

As Chen climbed into the back he smelled alcohol. "Case minus one," McCallum said. "Want a pull?"

Chen declined. As Ross took his spot at the wheel, McCallum thrust the bottle at him. Ross drank, wiped his mouth and lit another cigar.

"Gentlemen," he said. "On to Mrs. Garcia."

The Garcia farm was forty minutes through town and over the county's thoroughfare. They passed pickups and station wagons, families out for onion rings at the Red Robin. Trucks bound for Santa Fe or Las Cruces. The town seemed prosperous but bled of anything resembling soul. Heritage houses between rows of strip malls, some monument to

fallen soldiers graffitied and lit by a neon Esso sign. Chen missed his wife.

On the road they passed an identical van and stopped, window to window, the road dark, no traffic besides them. Dunn was driving the other car.

McCallum leaned over and admonished him, "We finished before you. Getting slow, Marty."

"No trouble on your end?" Dunn leaned out to look at Chen. "They treatin' you all right, Jeff?"

Before he could answer Dunn chuckled and Chen realized the man was as drunk as McCallum.

"Ain't but one left apiece," Dunn said. "Race you boys home."

As they drove, Chen asked what Mrs. Garcia was like.

"Haughty," Ross said.

McCallum had been sipping the whiskey like a marathoner. "If she is a little hottie, might have to introduce myself."

"Haughty, idiot," Ross said. "As in stuck up."

"Well either way, we got the cure for her."

The Garcia property was hour-glass shaped, slashed and bisected by the highway, by irrigation ditches. Very small-time. Only one corn field, the rest barns and pasture, staked vines for tomatoes or beans.

The house and barn had a baked, paint-stripped look, lit by prowler lights. Ross drove to the on-ramp and pulled onto the shoulder. He three-pointed so the headlights cast their beams towards the house. There were lights on already, no signs of people stirring.

Ross lit a cigar. Chen looked for a handle on his window but there wasn't one, just a dial to tilt the small panel out. He declined the bottle.

"We're too high," McCallum said. "See? Lights won't reach the house."

"It's not that." Ross rolled his window down—*thank God*, thought Chen—spat and rolled it up. "Their lights're on 'cause they know. They expect us. Which means someone told 'em."

"Think it's the Luceros?"

Ross pointed. "See how the barn's locked up? See how the sprinklers're on? They're expectin' a torch job."

They sat for a moment, Ross smoking, alternating the bottle with McCallum; Chen in the back seat like a forgotten child. Ross put his cigar out in the ashtray. He turned the keys and pressed in the cigarette lighter, fished out a handful of fresh stogies and offered the tubes around to no takers.

He bit off the end of one, touched the coil to it. It didn't light right away. "Fuck this," he said, opening the car door, slamming it shut.

Chen sat sideways and watched Ross take out his rifle from the bed of the van.

"Haughty bitch thinks I got all night."

McCallum giggled. "There he goes."

Chen watched Ross feed cartridges into the box clip,

slam it hard and pull back the bolt. He sighted the house, unlit cigar still bobbing in his mouth. This time he didn't aim wide. The first bullet hit the roof of the barn. The next broke an upstairs window.

Chen climbed out and put a hand on the still-warm barrel. "You sure Dunn wants you risking a casualty?"

"Get your hand off my rifle." Ross wasn't even looking at him. "Don't know how it works wherever you're from, son, but not down here."

"Then don't fire at them." Chen removed his hand.

Ross fired again, this time looking in Chen's direction, not even sighting. He shot off the clip. Ross tossed his cigar so it bounced on Chen's pant leg.

"Stand down, Tofu."

He was holding the gun two-handed, at attention. Chen stepped back as the butt end flashed out. Ross followed through and rushed into Chen's elbow, Chen side-stepping, Ross staggering, his nose broken, dropping the gun.

Ross wheeled around, mumbling about, 'none of that karate shit, boy.' Chen held his hands up placatingly. Ross threw a big right, a stupid punch, lost his balance. Chen clipped the side of his face again, and when Ross's hands went up to ward off a third, he doubled him over with a right to the stomach.

The stink of McCallum hit him before the big man crashed into his side, both of them colliding with the front panel of the van. Chen pried him off, made to twist the big man's arm behind him. He felt his collarbone explode and realized he was now kneeling in the mud.

He looked up and turned his head as Ross swung the butt of the rifle, glancing his cheek.

He felt fists pound his ribs, kidneys, the gun butt colliding with his shoulders.

He was clouted and stomped until he was out—
—out—

—awake on the wet carpet, the floor of the van. He had that nightmare feeling of trying to move his fingers and feeling them unresponsive. His arm couldn't wipe the blood from his eye.

They were talking. The sound washed in and out. The van bumped over dirt. Alcohol, sweat. McCallum's drunken chatter, happy with whatever their plan was.

And smoke. He willed himself not to groan. His one-eye vision hovered over McCallum's hands, tearing something, threading it into the neck of the bottle.

The door opened, engine still running. Chen felt the revelation of movement. A wag of broken fingers. Ross shifted to look at him, flicked ash onto his hands.

He heard Ross fiddle with the radio. Tensing, Chen yanked on the length of Ross's seatbelt. As Ross reared back, Chen snaked his arm out, sinking a choke hold around Ross's neck. He caught the lighter and swung it up to orbit Ross's eye.

"Call him back," Chen said.

"Kill you for this," Ross was saying. Chen inched the red coil, darted it closer and felt Ross struggle, flinch then freeze.

He'd dropped his cigar. Hands up, he slowly rolled down the window. He coughed and Chen slackened the hold slightly, kept the eye of the lighter close to Ross's own.

"Roy," Ross called out. "Stop. I said don't, Roy. Please."

McCallum came back into the headlight glow, shoulders slumped, disappointed. Ross told him to uncork the bottle, pour it out. Then take off his clothes.

McCallum balked and then saw Chen, his arm around Ross, holding something close to Ross's face. McCallum took a step forward, and Ross pleaded, "Do what I say now, Trav."

McCallum stripped to his underwear and backed away, the high beams lighting his pale hairy back.

"Run," said Chen. "Run or I burn your friend's eye out."

McCallum ran.

"It'll be coolin' off soon," Ross said. He was alone now and he knew it. "Coil's not even bright red anymore."

"Still might hurt, don't you think?"

Ross tried to nod. "So what next?"

Chen jabbed at Ross's right eye. Ross screamed.

Chen felt the man's eye socket with the knuckle of his thumb. Before Ross realized he wasn't blind, that the lighter had fallen into his lap, Chen had brought the man's temple down into the steering wheel.

When he felt the man go slack, he opened the door and let Ross tumble out. Chen climbed over the seat and stood over the unconscious man. He patted him down and found two more cigar tubes, house keys, a wallet with four twenty-dollar bills.

Eighty minus fifteen thousand, minus the cost of gas to get here—

He didn't bother to finish the calculation. Chen tossed Ross's things on the passenger seat and eyeballed the freeway, back the way they'd come. He swung the van in a U-turn around the unconscious man. The van shuddered and the wheels spun but they climbed out of the dirt and onto smooth blacktop.

He wondered if the Garcias would find Ross, and what they'd do. Where McCallum would end up.

The glove box yielded a three-state map and a Clorets box with two rolled joints and a roach. Normally Chen didn't partake. He fanned out the map on the seat next to him and eased the lighter back into the socket, pushed it in till it was red.

He lit up and held the smoke in, then tried to see what the next closest city was. Not that it mattered. He'd drive there, maybe get breakfast, try to phone his wife.

He was pissed about the money but as he drove he felt better. The tension left his shoulders. Maybe McCallum was right. He did need to lighten up. ■

Paul

By C.R. Berry

November 9th, 1966

Sixty-five. Seventy. Seventy-five. Alyson Ramirez's foot hit the floor and her 1964 Ford Cortina screamed, straining for speeds it wasn't used to. She felt the deep shudder that rose from the core of the car grind against her foot, palms and fingers, through the accelerator and steering wheel.

But she had to push this feeble bucket of bolts to its limit, otherwise she'd never keep up.

A shrill ringing cut into the Cortina's reverberant roar.

"Not now!"

She had to answer. Being dead was the only acceptable excuse for not answering her boss's call. Twitching with the usual flutter of fear, she pressed the call answer button on her hands-free kit.

"Have you found her?" Her boss's half distorted voice hissed and crackled from the car's 1960s speakers.

Ramirez swallowed. She saw Nina O'Brien's blue Alfa Romeo Spider surge round a blind corner up ahead. "Yes. I'm in pursuit of her now."

"Don't lose her. A lot of important things happened in 1966. We can't let her interfere with any of them."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll call you when—"

It all happened before Ramirez's mind could register it. At three times the speed limit, she turned round the same blind corner, half on the other side of the road. Being nearly 5 a.m., her brain had adjusted to the solitude of suburban West London's roads, so she didn't expect to meet the dazzle of oncoming headlights.

Tyres howling, the other car swerved. So did Ramirez. A reflex by both. Head-on collision avoided, the rear of the other car still clipped the front of her Cortina, the crash and squeal of metal assaulting her ears.

Foot on the brake, Ramirez came to an abrupt stop. She glimpsed the other car in her rearview mirror. Then it was gone. Spinning in her seat, she realised from the continuous thumping, rattling and crunching that it had careened off the road and was lurching down the tree-strewn embankment.

Smash.

All the noise stopped. Ramirez guessed that a tree had broken its descent. She flew out of the car and dived across the road to the embankment.

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.

What have I done?

The white Austin Healey's one operational headlight spilled some light upon the scene in the embankment. Most of the front of the car was crushed against a thick oak tree with low sprawling branches, some of which had shorn through the car.

A woman in a blue dress with bloodied legs was floundering towards the car from a little further up the embankment. It looked like she'd been tossed from the vehicle, or had jumped out as it careened towards the oak tree.

"Ma'am!" hollered Ramirez, hurtling down the bank towards her. "Stop! Get away from the car!"

The woman stopped and faced Ramirez. Her blue dress was ripped and streaked with blood. Her brown locks were in disarray, rain-wet and tangled. Her face, too, was smeared with what looked like a mix of blood, tears, mud and purple mascara.

"W-we have to help him!" the woman screamed.

"Ma'am, what's your name?"

"Rita. R-Rita Northam."

Rita Northam. Rita Northam. Nope, don't know that name. Can't be important.

Oh, who am I kidding?! She might be the most important woman in the world!

"Okay, Rita," said Ramirez gently. "You're hurt and this car could explode at any moment. I'll go. You head up the

embankment and get to a safe distance.”

Rita’s eyes darted up and down Ramirez’s black suit. “Are you the police?”

“Of sorts.”

Sobbing, Rita nodded, murmured, “O-okay,” and began climbing towards the road.

Ramirez clambered over rocks, bushes and uneven, muddy ground to reach the car. Tiny shards of shattered windscreen flecked the mud all around it and shone like silver coins.

Her stomach turned when she saw the carnage inside the car. Leather seats, formerly white, now pink with smeared blood. Tree branches inside the car, sprayed red and dripping blood. Blood splashes all over the dashboard and glove compartment. Blood, blood, blood. It was like someone had exploded.

As it happened, someone almost had. She retched when she saw the driver’s body, head missing, a thick branch mashed against the bloody, sinewy remnants of his neck.

Ramirez glanced around, hand over mouth. In the faint glow from the headlight, she saw the head. There was a large wound to the right side, probably from the impact with the branch, but the facial features were still intact, if twisted in an awkward grimace.

“Shit,” she whispered, recognising the face immediately. “Shit, shit, shit.”

Ramirez hurtled back up the embankment, dashing past Rita, who was sitting crying in the fetal position. She heard Rita call, “Is he okay?! Is he alive?!” She ignored her and leapt inside her car.

Her phone call still active, her boss’s voice whirled from the speakers as she got in: “Ramirez! Alyson! What happened? Ramirez, are you there?”

Ramirez released an inaudible sigh. That flutter of fear she felt when talking to her boss was gone. Yes, she’d feel the sting of her boss’s wrath over this. Yes, she’d lose her job. None of it mattered.

“Ma’am, we have a problem,” she murmured.

“What problem? What have you done?”

“I think I’ve just killed Paul McCartney.”

January 3rd, 2031

Bailey pulled into the gravel driveway of her grandfather’s Buckinghamshire mansion and parked. From her car she gazed at the three story’s of redbrick gable walls, bay windows and dressed granite quoins—a lavish picture of her grandfather’s wealth. Lessening the picture was the veil of dirt, bird muck and Sahara sand that covered her windscreen. No rain for two weeks, and she kept forgetting to fill up her screen wash.

She smiled. Her grandfather used to make fun of her for only washing her car once every three years. He used to leave little messages in the dirt.

That is, he used to. He used to cook her bacon sandwiches every time she visited too. Always fried, never grilled. Always smoked. The healthier the better.

He *used* to do that. Before he got so old. Before cancer began its recurring and relentless assault on his body.

Bailey fought a tear, sighed deeply, willed the knot in her stomach to loosen, and got out of the car.

Looking back at her brown, formerly green Mazda Dimension, she smiled again, remembering a note her grandfather once left on her bonnet: *I’ll play nothing but the Frog Song till you clean me.*

Nancy, Bailey’s step-grandmother, greeted her at the door. “Do come in, my love. He’s been looking forward to your visit.”

Bailey made her way to her grandfather’s bedroom. There he was, sitting up in bed, watching the news on his holobox. Sinking eyes, thinning hair, pale, leathery skin clinging to every point and curve of the bones in his face. Now just a wisp of the former Beatle and rock legend Paul McCartney. Yet his eyes were wide and alert, and when he saw Bailey, some pink glowed on his cheeks. Very, very old—yes. But you wouldn’t have guessed that his doctor had given him just days to live.

“Bailey, my darling,” he said. His voice was breathy, strained. “Come closer. We must talk.”

Bailey kissed her grandfather’s head and pulled up a chair next to his bed. “How are you, Grandpa?”

“No time for that. Did you bring a recorder like I asked?”

“Yes, Grandpa.” She removed the Eccles Mark 4 voice recorder from her pocket.

“Good. I need you to record everything I say.”

“Okay...” Bailey set the recorder down on her grandfather’s bedside table. “What’s this about, Grandpa?”

“Bailey, I need you to use the information I’m about to give you. Use it to expose them.”

“Grandpa, you’re not making any sense.”

“Bailey, decades before you were born, in 1966, there was a horrific car accident. A white Austin Healey with a man and woman inside collided with another and crashed into a tree. The man was decapitated.”

Bailey threw her hand over her mouth. "Oh my God," she mumbled through slightly parted fingers. "Who was he?"
"Paul McCartney."

Bailey and her grandfather stared at each other for a moment. Though his face was drawn and tired, his eyes were alive and vehement, like they belonged to someone else—a person who wasn't dying. Nothing in his eyes suggested he was mad.

Bailey played devil's advocate and said gently, caressing his withered hand, "No, Grandpa. *You're* Paul McCartney."

"I haven't lost my mind, Bailey," he insisted, still with the same poised expression. "This is the God's honest truth. I've been covering up something terrible for more than sixty years."

"Grandpa..."

"Have you heard of the 'Paul is dead' conspiracy theory that circulated at the end of the 60s?"

"I—I've heard of it. Don't know much about it. You know me, Grandpa. I've always hated all that crap."

"It's not crap."

She released a small, nervous titter. "Oh, Grandpa. Don't be silly."

"Bailey, I'll tell you what I remember about my childhood. My teens. My early twenties."

"Okay..."

"A white room."

"What?"

"That's what I remember. A white room. Bare walls. The odd visitor. Doctors. Tutors. Men and women in dark suits. I never knew anyone's name. But I remember overhearing conversations between them. Talking about Paul McCartney, about him being in a car crash with some lady called Rita. Obviously they saw no need to be particularly tight-lipped about anything."

"Why?"

"Because they were going to rewrite my memory. I was going to become Paul McCartney."

Sighing, Bailey stood up. "Grandpa, I'm going to go and get Nancy."

"No. There isn't much time. I could be dead tomorrow."

"But Grandpa—"

"Bailey, I'm not going to use that clichéd line you always hear in movies and say, 'I know this sounds crazy,' because none of it does. Not to me. I know there are people out there who operate from the shadows, secretly manipulating our lives. I know because I spent the first twenty-four years of my life with them."

Bailey sat back down. She could tell he was getting agitated. "So these people, they—they rewrote your memory?"

"Well, they tried." Her grandfather's voice seemed to grow coarser, more broken, as he spoke. It was difficult to imagine he was once a great singer.

"It never worked, the memory rewrite. Not properly. I remember, they did it and I had some of Paul's memories. Enough to pass their little tests before they released me. But I still had all of my own, too. I still remembered everything they'd done, everything they'd said."

Bailey humoured him. "What did you do?"

"I went to meet the others. George, John, Ringo. They were recording with Paul—the real Paul—at Abbey Road Studios that night, the night of the crash. Apparently Paul had an argument with John and stormed out. I told them everything—as much as I knew at that point anyway. They thought I was mad."

Well, that didn't surprise Bailey.

"I encouraged them to investigate. They were Paul's friends, so they did. And while the people who did this had tried to hide all the evidence, they couldn't hide everything. We were able to track down this Rita woman. Rita Northam. She was a meter maid—what we called a female traffic warden in those days. She was reluctant at first, said she'd been threatened into silence. When we agreed not to go public, she told us about the crash, how Paul had spotted her on his way home and offered her a lift. She blamed herself, wondered if she'd distracted Paul from the road. George, John and Ringo were devastated."

"Are you two all right in here?" said Nancy from the bedroom doorway.

Her grandfather's grave face loosened as he shifted his gaze to Nancy. His eyebrows bobbed and a smile formed on his thin, blue-grey lips. "Yes, my darling. Fine."

"Would either of you like tea? Bailey, you look chilly."

"No, thank you," her grandfather answered for her. "We won't be long."

When Nancy turned and started in the direction of the staircase, her grandfather whispered, his grim frown re-formed. "Go and close the door."

Bailey did as asked, before returning to her chair by her grandfather's bed.

"I don't want her to find out like this," he said. "I will tell her. But I want to make sure it's all properly recorded first."

“Grandpa, I really think—”

This time he simply ignored her, and continued, “Nothing really happened after that until the ‘Paul is dead’ conspiracy theory went public. That’s when they visited us. Men and women, dressed in black, like when I was a kid. Said they were from some department of the government that looked after ‘public feeling.’ Said that conspiracy theories were a source of unrest, so they liked to investigate them.”

“Doesn’t sound particularly legit,” Bailey commented, still humouring him.

“Course not. It was bullshit. But they didn’t know the memory rewrite never worked. As far as they knew, I thought I was Paul.”

“So what did they do?”

“They interrogated us about the ‘clues’ about Paul’s death that people had been seeing on our album covers. On the *Abbey Road* cover—that picture of the four of us that was like a funeral procession, with me as the corpse. And the back cover, the girl in the blue dress—‘Lovely Rita’—as we called her in the song. They asked us about the hidden metaphors people had been spotting in our lyrics. The secret messages in our songs that you could only hear if you played them backwards. Like at the end of *I’m So Tired*, you can hear ‘Paul is a dead man, miss him, miss him, miss him!’ when you play it backwards. We persuaded them that we’d heard the rumour back at the beginning of ’67 and thought it was amusing. So we deliberately inserted the clues as a joke.”

“So you actually did insert clues? That wasn’t just a paranoid assumption made by the conspiracy theorists?”

“Some of those clues were real, yes. Some were made up by the conspiracy theorists, but some were real. But John—he was the main one behind the clues—he wasn’t doing it as a joke. It was his way of dealing with it. He hated that we were covering it up. He wanted to somehow let the fans know the truth.”

“And did they believe you? These men and women in black? That it was just a joke?”

“I think so. They went away. The conspiracy theories died down. We heard nothing more of it. Until...”

He reached towards his bedside table, pulling open the top drawer and lifting out an envelope, his face creasing with pain as he did so.

“Here. Read it.”

He handed the envelope to Bailey. She scanned it briefly. It was addressed to Paul McCartney at an address she’d never heard of. Not a surprise. Her grandfather had lived in a lot of places.

She slipped the letter out of the envelope and read it:

Dear Paul,

I’m sorry, but I’ve had enough. I know we’ve all been living with this for a long time, but it’s wrong. I will not continue to defile the memory of our friend—the real Paul McCartney—any longer. It’s been coming between me and Yoko. She’s been pleading with me for years to tell the truth, and she’s right.

I’ve decided to put an end to this. It’s time everyone knew the truth. Not through guessing silly clues in our albums. It’s time people heard the full story of the night Paul died, and how we helped cover it up. I’ve been speaking to Rita. It’s been eating her alive for years too. We’re going to do it together. I’ve arranged for us to have a meeting with a journalist next week.

Please understand that I don’t blame you for any of this. I know there have been times when I made you feel like I did, and I’m sorry for that.

Let’s talk soon.

Your friend,

John.

When Bailey looked up, a single tear was teetering on the brim of her grandfather’s lower left eyelid. When he blinked, the tear fell, rolling down his craggy cheek and into the corner of his mouth.

“There was no meeting with any journalist,” her grandfather said dismally. “I got that letter two days before John was shot dead outside the Dakota in New York.”

“You think they got to him?”

“No doubt in my mind. And they got to Rita too. She went missing shortly after John’s death. I tried contacting her.” Bailey could see that he was starting to break into sobs. “I went to see her. There—there was evidence of a break-in, but—”

A sudden *clink* and heavy *thud* startled the both of them. Paul flinched. Bailey jerked towards the sound. A vase of flowers, still intact, rolled on its side on the carpet, its water spilled in a growing pool around the rim and starting to seep into the pile.

Evidently, from the continued flailing of the curtains around the windowsill where the vase had stood, a sharp draught

through the partly open window was responsible. It was becoming increasingly grey and storm-like outside. Finally some rain was on the way.

Fitting.

Bailey lurched from her chair to pick up the vase and place it back on the windowsill, closing the window as she did so. "I'll go and get something to clean this up," she said.

"No, it's only water. We need to finish this." Her grandfather's breathing had quickened and each word fell off the edge of a breath. A start like that was the last thing his frail, failing body needed.

Bailey sat back down.

"Where was I?" he asked.

"Er—you were saying—you think they got to Carolyn—sorry, Rita."

He opened his mouth to speak, but stopped. His thick, unkempt, grey eyebrows dipped low over his eyes.

"Carolyn? Where did you get Carolyn from?"

"Sorry—slip of the tongue."

"No, but...Carolyn was her first name. She went by the name Rita, but that was actually her middle name. How could you know that?"

"Like I said, Grandpa. Slip of the tongue."

He bent his emaciated body stiffly and awkwardly towards the bedside table, leaning over the Eccles Mark 4 voice recorder she had placed there.

"You haven't recorded anything. This thing isn't even switched on."

Bailey's heart thumped. A dry swallow lodged in her throat. "Oh, Grandpa. I'm so sorry."

His face, drawn into a pointed frown, unfurled into a wide-eyed look of horror. "Oh my God..."

As he opened his mouth to cry out for Nancy, Bailey sprang forward, swiped a pillow from next to him and plunged it over his face, forcing his head against the bed. She pressed down with both hands till she could feel all the bones in his face. His arms flailed. His skeletal hands grasped her forearms in a futile attempt to pull her off, but his upper body strength was negligible. It was no more difficult than restraining a child.

When he stopped squirming and his arms fell limply at his sides, Bailey lifted the pillow and placed it back where it was. She fixed his dead stare, lowering his eyelids and closing his mouth so he looked asleep. Then she kissed his forehead, whispered, "I'm sorry," took the recorder and left the room.

"Is he all right?" said Nancy, sitting with a cup of tea in the kitchen as Bailey entered to say goodbye.

"He fell asleep while he was talking to me," said Bailey. "Bless him."

Nancy uttered a faint gasp. "He isn't—? You—you checked he was—?"

"He was still breathing when I left, yes. I'd leave him for a bit—let him rest. He seemed to get so exhausted just talking to me for a few minutes. But when he wakes up, tell him I said goodbye. And that I love him."

"I will."

Bailey departed. A fierce squall of rain-filled wind pelted her face and whipped her hair as she dashed towards the car. Once inside, she took out her phone and called her boss.

"What happened?" he asked.

"It was as you suspected, sir."

"A deathbed confession?"

"Yes. Turns out he's been deceiving us for years. The memory rewrite never worked. He always knew he wasn't the real Paul McCartney."

"Mmm. Thought as much. Well, despite Alyson Ramirez's monumental fuck-up, at least we've kept history more or less intact. I trust you sorted it?"

"Yes, sir. He—" She felt a small tremor of emotion spiral up her throat. She swallowed, forcing it back down. "He won't be telling anyone else. ■"

C.R. Berry is a British author whose main preoccupations are mysteries, urban legends, conspiracy theories and time travel. His forthcoming novel, "Million Eyes," is a mash-up of all of them. Think Doctor Who meets The Da Vinci Code meets 24. He's also working on a series of short stories set in the Million Eyes universe.

Berry has been published in Scribble, Tigershark, Storgy and Metamorphose and is soon to be published by Indie Authors Press. He won second prize in the To Hull and Back Humorous Short Story Competition 2014, was shortlisted in the Aeon Award Contest 2015, won 3rd prize in Scribble's quarterly story contest in 2015, and was highly commended by Writers' Forum in 2016.

You can follow C.R. Berry at crberryauthor.wordpress.com, or find him on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) (@CRB).

ENVY



By Dennis Palumbo

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I want to talk about something nobody wants to talk about. No, not money, religion or politics. But something much more problematic, the bane of every writer's existence. Envy.

I'm thinking about a patient of mine, a mystery author that I've been seeing for some months. Despite the gains he's made in therapy, he felt his work was continually undermined by his envy of other writers.

He told me he had to stop reading his Author's Guild bulletin, as well as publishing websites, because seeing the deals being made by other writers angered and deflated him. He'd grown increasingly self-critical about his work habits—normally a source of pride and satisfaction—since hearing rumors about a best-selling author's penchant for “knocking out a new thriller” every six months. It had reached a point where learning of a friend's having lunch with a potential new agent could trigger a depression.

None of these feelings were unfamiliar to me. During my former career as a Hollywood screenwriter, it seemed as though envy was the unspoken constant in almost every conversation with other writers. The dirty little secret of the writing life. Except it was the worst-kept secret I'd ever known.

For some, of course, hearing of another's success can be a spur to greater efforts. An example of what can be accomplished with hard work and tenacity. But for others, the result can be a crippling paralysis.

It took me a long time to understand, and to accept, that envy is a natural by-product of the achieving life. Throughout our childhood experiences in our families, and then our schools, and ultimately in the adult world, we strive to achieve in a matrix of others who strive to achieve—such that comparison is not only inevitable, but often the only standard by which to measure that achievement.

With time and maturity, we hopefully develop the self-awareness (and self-acceptance) to measure ourselves by more internal monitors; to enjoy the expression of our creative talents for their own sake.

But we also live in the real world and need the validation of that world. For a writer in a commercial marketplace, that means enduring intense competition and the almost daily spectacle of others enjoying extravagant rewards, like fame and money, all while negotiating the often gut-wrenching peaks and valleys of one's own career.

In other words, that means living with envy.

The key to surviving envy, as is the case with all feelings, is to acknowledge it. By that, I'm not referring merely to the fact that you're envious, but also the meaning that you give to it.

For example, if a writer sees envy as a sign of some kind of moral lapse or character weakness—a view possibly engendered

**The key to surviving envy,
as is the case with all feelings, is to acknowledge it.**

You can deny your envy,
or use it to
re-double your efforts.

and reinforced in childhood—the effect on his or her work can be quite debilitating.

Equally harmful is seeing your envy as a disparaging comment on your work, a confirmation of a lack of faith in your own writing. “If I let myself feel envy,” one patient told me, “it means I don’t believe in the possibility of my own success.”

Another patient bravely insisted that “envy is counter-productive.” So terrified of anything that might derail his firmly held belief in “positive thinking,” the meaning he gave to envy—as well as any other “negative” emotion—was of an insidious obstacle on the tracks of his forward momentum.

Only by investigating what envy means to us can we risk acknowledging it. The plain fact is, it’s just a feeling, like other feelings—which means it’s simply information, merely data about what’s going on inside of us.

If nothing else, envy informs us of how important our goals are. It reminds us of the reasons we undertook the creative life in the first place, and challenges us to commit once more to its rigors and rewards.

Moreover, in my own case, I find that I’m rarely troubled by envy if I’m writing well, if I’m truly engaged with my current project. When I’m fully “caught” by what I’m working on, intrusive thoughts about the creative and/or career triumphs of others usually don’t enter my mind. (Usually.)

So the choice is yours. You can deny your envy, or use it to re-double your efforts. You can talk it to death among your friends (also a great procrastination ploy, by the way), or you can suffer in silence. Or, hopefully, you can accept it with humor and self-acknowledgment, and perhaps explore what its meaning is for you.

But one thing I know for sure. For a writer, to coin a phrase, nothing’s certain in life except death and taxes. And envy. ■

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

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

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SUSPENSE
PUBLISHING

Delivering More Than “Faith”

Meet Thriller Writer Catherine Finger

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
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When it comes to faith-based thrillers, author Catherine Finger and her character, Jo Oliver, have become beloved by fans everywhere. Her goal as a writer is to paint very real stories packed full of hope and truth, inspiring readers to dream and dream big. Able to take readers to the edge of their seats, Catherine examines the desires of each and every person's heart, and also receives an added bonus when her thrilling tales keep fans up all night.

Catherine was kind enough to take some time and speak with *Suspense Magazine* about her brand new book, and her long menu of other jobs and projects she's a part of that help the youth of this country.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Chief Jo Oliver is a fantastic character and her stories have become a much-loved series by fans. Can you tell us a bit about how Jo first came into being?

Catherine Finger (C.F.): *Thank you! I love me some Jo Oliver! I created Jo as a symbol of hope and restoration. I wanted to create a flawed, lovable, unpredictable heroine that readers will root for, even as they question—and sometimes judge—her choices and behavior. Jo isn't perfect, but she is perfectly suited to the life she leads. I like that her strengths buoy others and her weaknesses propel her into what may look to the outside like pointless struggles, but serve on the inside to craft her into a more perfect version of herself. I believe God uses the 'messy' parts of our lives*

to manifest His nature and His power to make all things new.

Part of the fun of the Jo Oliver Thriller series is watching Jo's life unfold. I personally love her! Even her name is precious to me. My maternal grandmother's name was Josephine, and my paternal grandmother's maiden name was Oliver. As I write, it is easy for me to channel my inner Josie, though I confess to being surprised by her time and time again.

S. MAG.: Fiction that leans toward the 'inspirational' has caused some difficulties for writers in the past. As we move forward, the genre is becoming more widely accepted. Did you meet up with any walls, per se, when you first walked down the path of inspirational suspense? Would you categorize your books in that way?

C.F.: Oh gosh, yes! No one 'got it' in the early days! Literary folks from the 'non-Christian' publishing industry didn't understand why I had to have the spiritual pieces and thought it made my series 'too soft.' On the flip side, I often heard that my writing was 'too edgy' and my topics 'too harsh' to appeal to tender-hearted 'Christian' readers. I confess to having re-written my earliest work to better suit the tastes of both groups, and being completely disenchanted with myself and the writing process. After a season of discouragement and confusion, I turned my back on those urging me to change and honored my inner voice. The Jo Oliver Thriller series was born the moment I chose to trust myself, my own voice, and my own journey.

I personally describe my work as faith-based thrillers, or as thrillers with faith-based themes running through them. I'm not sure that's really a 'thing' but it feels true to me. My passion is to tell great stories, write and publish the best books possible, and to instill a sense of hope in the midst of a fallen world. Bonus if I keep my readers up at night, turning pages and double checking locks!

S. MAG.: Does being a high school superintendent bring more to the writing table for you? Such as, are there facets of that particular job that allow you to be a better writer?

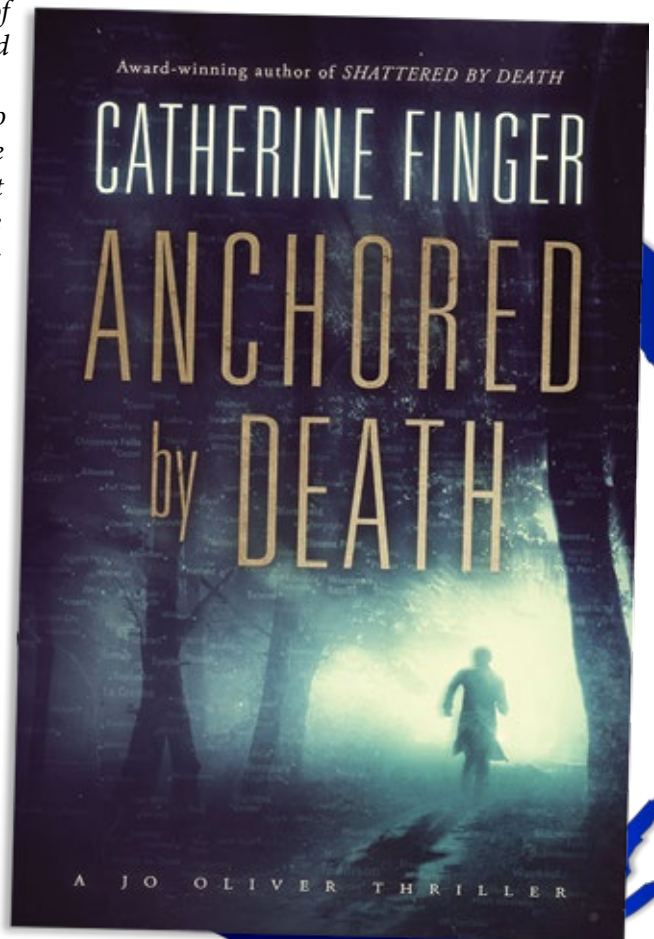
C.F.: My role as a high school superintendent offers me glimpses into many worlds, including police investigations. It also affords me the opportunity to interact with a great variety of individuals. I have heard and witnessed such glory and heartbreak in the hearts, homes, and lives of students, staff, and families over my years as a public school educator. My commitment to telling stories that include the grittier side of life springs in part from these relationships.

People are inclined to judge themselves inadequate based on completely fictitious understandings of the lives of others around them. There is no perfect family; there is no perfect relationship; there is no problem-free life. I like to paint those truths in my stories, and honor the struggle that helps transform us into the men and women we were designed to be, and to become.

Lastly, my journey as a writer and into the publishing world coincided with my twelve year tenure as Superintendent of Grayslake Community High School District 127. I cut my teeth and presented my first book from the stage of our high school auditorium. I met with student writers after school for four years, just for fun, and we celebrated new genres, laughed, and encouraged each other in our writing. I exposed them to writing skills and contests, and they exposed me to zombies, alternative universes, shapeshifters, and vampires. We created Writers Weeks at both schools, and I have proudly introduced each book from our stage. My school community has been wildly supportive of the Jo Oliver Thriller series and I will be forever grateful for our shared history.

One unexpected benefit of bringing my superintendent self to the writing table: I am used to facing criticism in every form! While I don't love receiving harsh feedback or reading negative reviews, it doesn't devastate me. It's taken some of my writer friends a long time to separate themselves from the critical voice of others and that was a hidden blessing to me. As a public school leader, I've been harshly criticized and had a lot of horrible things said about me in just about every medium through the years, so I have a tougher skin than some of my author peers. You learn as a leader that people don't necessarily

"There is no perfect family; there is no perfect relationship; there is no problem-free life. I like to paint those truths in my stories, and honor the struggle that helps transform us into the men and women we were designed to be, and to become."



love change, and if you keep pushing for doing the right thing for kids, you will encounter challenging pushback.

S. MAG.: Do you, in your work, see teenagers reading more? Should we thank writers for that...or the new phone and iPad technology that seems to appear every week? In addition, is there something that could 'call' teenagers back to reading that the industry hasn't done as of yet?

C.F.: Yes! Teens love to read good books. As much as a distraction as technology presents, I believe it facilitates readers by expanding access to literature. Teen readers are just like any other, they appreciate the good stuff and are easily offended by artifice and inauthenticity. Today's teens have generous hearts and are far more aware of, and in tune with the suffering and needs of others, both around the world and at home. I love teen angst and drama—always have, always will. While their own voice remains laced with the power and pain of change, there is also a love for alternative worlds demanding strong characters with tender hearts—and a super human power or two doesn't hurt.

Write books reflecting real people that teens can identify with and then toss them into a ton of trouble. That's pretty much my formula for readers of all ages. Fun fact: I intend to venture into a YA series featuring Samantha as the protagonist at some point.

S. MAG.: With the success of things like the *Twilight* series and others that called for kids to read when it hit the big screen, do you think more movies would cause children to head to that library or bookstore again? And what specific authors 'called' out to you while you were growing up?

C.F.: Children of all ages love stories and story telling, so yes, more great stories related in multiple avenues will generate more readers. Some people tend not to read a book after seeing the movie, while others may be drawn in by the love of the story. I think the gift that creative people bring to this world is a fresh story told in a unique voice. That is what brings readers back to the page.

I've loved to read since the beginning of time. My earliest love was "Black Beauty," followed closely by Walter Farley's *Black Stallion* series. Marguerite Henry's books lined my shelves for decades. I fell in love with C.S. Lewis as a young teen, and when I was twelve years old, I read a book called "Madame Guyonne" that changed the way I looked at myself and my place in this world.

S. MAG.: The third in your *Jo Oliver Thriller* series, "Anchored by Death," released on June 1. Can you share a little information about the plot that isn't already out there with our readers?

C.F.: Sure! There are two surprising characters in this book—that I unofficially refer to as a 'murderous romp through Wisconsin.' I wanted to introduce the state of Wisconsin and several key locales as characters in their own right. Lovers of Wisconsin, Midwesterners, the outdoors, and small town living will especially love this book.

In the early pages, we meet Lisa Bhatt, a character I had intended would serve a singular purpose at a crime scene, but she would have none of it. Bhatt returns with a 'bang' near the end of the story, developing an unbreakable bond with Jo Oliver. I am deep into writing the fourth book in this series and Bhatt is right there with me.

S. MAG.: It is stated that you work with a variety of volunteer projects and organizations. Can you tell readers a bit about what some of those are?



C.F.: *I have been privileged to work with a great variety of organizations and projects over the past several years. My volunteer gigs have included working with and serving as a board member for a local teen center; creating and participating in a variety of fundraisers for our teens; working with a local women's shelter; serving with my local church; and serving as leader and volunteer for a number of community organizations. Professionally, I serve on a number of boards at the state and national levels, and participate as a presenter and volunteer for many of them. My latest volunteer gig comes as a result of being elected to serve as a trustee for the College of Lake County.*

S. MAG.: How do you juggle such a large job while also maintaining a writing career? Can you give a few hints to other authors who are working that full-time job but also want nothing more than to sit in front of the computer and create their next work of fiction?

C.F.: *Sure. It's hard—but it's a labor of love. I'm a writer, and writers write. I believe that writing and publishing is a part of the master plan for my life and I always feel happiest and best about myself and my entire world when I engage in my daily writing practice. My personal goal while working full-time is to write 500 words before I go to work, which for me is between 5 and 6 a.m. Unfortunately, that is also my prime exercise time, and I joke that you can tell where I am in my current novel by whether or not I am up ten pounds! You really can't do it all at the same time and choices have to be made. That said, writing feeds my soul and I become a better version of myself when engaging in the process of writing.*

I am retiring from my career as a public school educator on June 30, 2017, and I look forward to being able to devote more time to writing.

S. MAG.: Is there a specific genre you wish to delve into with your writing that you haven't yet tried?

C.F.: *Yes! I have a few things I'm working on and a few I'm dreaming of. I've been dreaming about an aging professor meeting a retired international spy posing as an insurance salesman at a conference in Manhattan. Both of them are sixty-something, and I love the idea of having them longing to ravish one another over a quartz kitchen island while worrying about breaking a hip. I'm almost embarrassed to say that I've been working on two leadership books for the past few years—and I just haven't been able to finish them yet. I am on the verge of signing contracts for both of them so you will see them out, maybe in 2018.*

Lastly, read through the book of Hosea in the Old Testament. I'm a few chapters into a modern day thriller based on that fabulous story.

S. MAG.: What is next up for Chief Jo Oliver? And when it comes to Catherine Finger, what is upcoming that you would like your readers to know about?

C.F.: *Jo Oliver continues to grow and explore new parts and pieces of herself through new roles. I'm deep into Book 4 of the series and I can honestly say it's going to be the best book yet! The killer in Book 4 is pretty fabulous and is based on a person I met during an afternoon of kayaking and snorkeling in Maui. Josie's journey takes place entirely in Maui in the next book—at least so far—and she's keeping the 'thrill' in thriller!*

One of my 'dirty little secrets' is that I have started and finished each book in the Jo Oliver Thriller series in Hawaii. It is only natural that Maui would take center stage in one of my books at some point. She has captured my heart and soul completely and I would move there in a New York minute if all the stars in my life aligned in that direction.

As for Catherine Finger, I am navigating personal changes as I retire from a career I love. Being able to choose how to spend my time in this second half of life is a privilege and I am cobbling together a simple, beautiful life around meaningful work, life-giving love, and soul-enriching relationships. In addition to joining the team of the Illinois Association of School Boards as a consultant, I am pleased to be joining NaviGate Prepared, where I will serve as a sales rep for their virtual safety response tool designed to develop and execute an effective school safety program. Both groups are very supportive of, and excited about my writing, and I look forward to expanding my author's horizons through my new adventures with them.

I've added a six-year-old American Quarter Horse mare, "Clara," to my family and my life is reverting back to the things I love best: horses, travel, writing, family and friends.

Although it will certainly be a transition leaving the career of Superintendent behind, readers everywhere will be delighted to know that this author's amazing writing talents will be continuing! For more information on Catherine, head to www.catherinefinger.com. ■

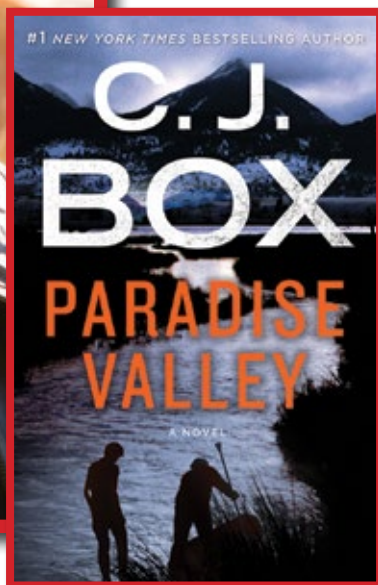
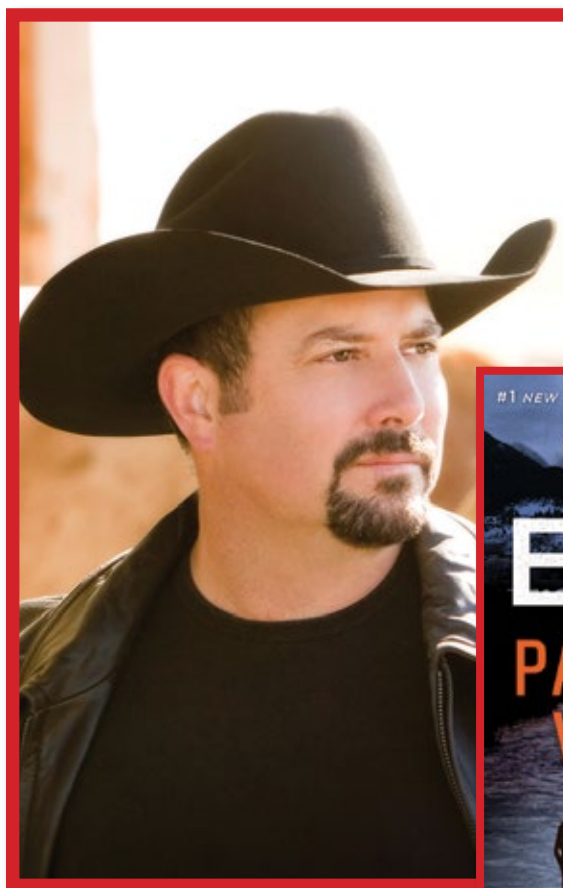


America's Favorite Suspense Authors On the Rules of Fiction

THE COWBOY WAY: C. J. BOX TALKS WRITING

By Anthony Franze and Barry Lancet
Press Photo Credit: Roger Carey

In this series, authors Anthony Franze and Barry Lancet interview other suspense writers about “the rules” of writing. This edition, Anthony talks with #1 New York Times bestselling author C. J. Box.



If you ran into C. J. Box on the street—or on his Wyoming ranch—you probably wouldn't expect that he's one of the country's preeminent suspense writers. Box wears a large black Stetson and the humble demeanor of someone who'd rather spend his time outdoors on horseback than hobnobbing with New York literary types.

But behind the cowboy exterior is a literary powerhouse. Box is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of nearly two dozen novels, has won more awards than he likely can keep track of, and has millions of books in print. Like Box himself, his novels aren't conventional. The hero in his *Joe Pickett* series isn't your typical detective with a dark past who can fight his way out of any situation, but instead, a grounded game warden.



“I NEVER INTENDED IT TO BE A SERIES. I MEAN, WHO WOULD HAVE EXPECTED A GAME WARDEN TO CARRY A SERIES?”

And while Box could have made a career out of Pickett, the author also has penned acclaimed standalones, including his Edgar Award winning “Blue Heaven.”

Box’s upcoming novel, “Paradise Valley” (St. Martin’s/Minotaur, July 25, 2017), could well be his best yet. The story follows investigator Cassie Dewell, who for the past three years has been hunting a serial killer known as the Lizard King, a predator who skulks the highways and truck stops for runaways and prostitutes. Box described this fourth book in his Highway Quartet simply: “Cassie versus the Lizard King in the ultimate conclusion to the series.”

I caught up with Box recently, in between his book tours, where we discussed his advice to up-and-coming scribes.

READ WIDELY

“I often get questions from aspiring writers,” Box said. “They want to know the magic trick to writing a bestselling novel. There is no magic trick, of course. The best advice I have is for them to read—and read widely.”

Box said he’s constantly surprised at how many aspiring authors tell him they don’t read. “Some are so in love with their own voice that they don’t think they need to read anyone else. That’s a mistake.”

Box said there’s no writing class, no MFA program, no training he can think of that is better for teaching writing than reading. “Read in the genre you like and analyze works from writers you love. See how authors who have made it do it. That’s what I did.” Box said he was trained as a journalist, but he learned fiction deconstructing his favorite novels. “I asked myself how the authors made me want to turn the page, how they made me feel a certain way, how they surprised me. I taught myself by trying to understand how others did it.”

For Box, his go-to book was Joseph Heller’s “Catch-22,” which he’s read at least four times and “deconstructed back to front.” If you don’t read, he said, you won’t have the tools to write.

USE DISCIPLINE WITH POINT OF VIEW

“One of the biggest errors I see with newer authors,” Box said, “is not effectively using point of view.” A mistake he sees over and over again is authors starting out in first or third person, but slipping into omniscient point of view—suddenly having the narrator know the thoughts of *all* the characters rather than just those of the point-of-view characters.

“Staying with the point of view makes a story more authentic and adds tension,” Box explained, “because the reader knows only what the point-of-view characters know.” When writers slip into omniscient, “they end up telling the reader something, rather than having the reader, like the point-of-view character, discover the information as the story progresses.” Pick a POV and stick to it.



DON'T HOLD BACK

Box said he's noticed that many aspiring or debut authors write their first book with an eye toward it becoming a series, and as a result "they hold back, perhaps waiting to give readers what they might otherwise give them in a standalone with the excuse that it will come in later books."

That's wrongheaded, he believes. "They should give the book everything they have and not focus on the next book or book after that, but put it all on the table. These tough days in publishing it's even more important to make your first book everything it can be. If it doesn't make a splash, there may not be a second book."

Box followed his own advice for his blockbuster *Joe Pickett* series. "I never intended it to be a series. I mean, who would have expected a game warden to carry a series? It only became one because the first book did well enough for the publisher to order more. And I think that's because I didn't hold back."

LISTEN TO ELMORE

Regular readers of this series know that we're big fans of Elmore Leonard's famous "[10 Rules of Writing](#)." Box is too. "I go back to the rules often and re-read them. They keep me on track." Box particularly likes Leonard's advice that writers should "leave out the part that readers tend to skip." He encourages all newer authors to read Leonard's ten short rules.

But Box said there's one important part of Leonard's rules that writers should keep in mind. "Elmore Leonard qualified all of his rules. They all have exceptions. Which is good advice because at the end of the day, every rule can be broken—if the writer does it well." ■

* * *

* *Anthony Franze* is a lawyer in the Appellate and Supreme Court practice of a prominent Washington, D.C. law firm, and author of thrillers set in the Supreme Court, including "The Outsider" (St. Martin's Press, Mar. 21, 2017) and "The Advocate's Daughter" (St. Martin's Press, 2016).

* *Barry Lancet* is the author of the award-winning international suspense series featuring Jim Brodie. The latest entry is "The Spy Across the Table" (Simon & Schuster) and sends Brodie careening from Washington, D.C. and San Francisco to Japan, then on to South Korea, the DMZ, and the Chinese-North Korean border. An American expat raised in California, Lancet has lived in Japan for more than twenty years.

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HARLEY MAZUK

With a Modern-Day Nod to the Past

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist



After studying English at both Hiram College in Ohio and at Elphinstone College in Bombay, writer Harley Mazuk's colorful career encompassed a variety of trades—from music salesman in New York to public affairs specialist for the federal government in Washington, D.C.

It's no wonder he was able to put together a series detective named Frank Swiver who seems to be a name on everyone's lips. Having been inspired by the amazing stories of Cain, Hammett, Chandler and more, Harley's very first novel, "White with Fish, Red with Murder," brought back that perfect noir style to the page that mystery writers love. Now, with book two starring the down-and-out private eye who loves women and wine being released, Harley Mazuk has once again brought to life that black-and-white world where Bogart seems to speak from every corner. *Suspense Magazine* was able to sit down and get to know this author better, whose P.I. is quickly carving a niche in the mystery world all his own.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Harley, you've created a memorable character in Frank Swiver. How did you come up with the idea for Frank?

Harley Mazuk (H.M.): *There are many private eyes in literature. You would have to be a very good, very clever writer indeed to out-deduce Sherlock Holmes, to have more little grey cells than Hercule Poirot, or to be tougher than Sam Spade. So, if you're an author creating a new P.I., you should make him distinctive in some way from the most popular or the most archetypal. Frank Swiver may be unique in the genre as a pacifist. I probably developed the idea because I'm non-violent. Growing up, I was influenced by Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Now, ask yourself: What if such a person were to be a private eye?*

S. MAG.: Do you consider Frank a hero, a flawed protagonist, an antihero, or a combination thereof, and why?

H.M.: *Frank has turned out to be my series character, and I've struggled with this question as he develops in the series. First off, we know he drinks too much wine, and second, he is amoral in his relations with women—clearly, he's not a white knight hero like Phillip Marlowe; he's a tarnished knight at best. He certainly has character flaws that affect his motives and interpersonal relationships. He can be driven by his lust. Yet he's courageous, willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the weak, and often becomes*

“I’d say he’s a noir character, consumed and drawn down by his dark urges, but always looking up at the stars.”

a defender of women in the stories. I’d say he’s a noir character, consumed and drawn down by his dark urges, but always looking up at the stars. Frank’s a combination of flawed protagonist and antihero.

S. MAG.: How are you most similar to Frank Swiver? Least similar?

H.M.: *Frank and I are similar in our non-violence. We both have a strong work ethic, and I hope I’m as courageous as I like to portray Frank being. We both enjoy wine. Least similar? I’m married; Frank’s not. I just don’t seem to fall into the arms of beautiful dames like he does.*

S. MAG: What do you think is Frank’s best quality? What do you think is his worst quality?

H.M.: *Well, obviously I like Frank’s use of peaceful means to solve his cases, to achieve a positive outcome or gain justice for his clients. I like it that it takes courage, another positive quality, to be non-violent in a violent world. I think that perhaps his worst quality is a bizarre offshoot of this—despite his philosophy of non-violence, he still (unintentionally) manages to hurt people, particularly women in his life.*

S. MAG: With regards to your writing process, which comes first: characters or plot?

H.M.: *I used to think in terms of scenes when I was writing, and try to tie the scenes together with the principal characters’ arcs, so when I was writing “White with Fish,” character came first. Recently, I’ve been trying to figure out where the story is going to end up, and then write my way there. So, in stories like “Pearl’s Valley” or “Courvoisier and Coca Tea,” I was focusing mainly on structure. That approach increases the importance of plotting to the process.*

S. MAG: What’s next for you? Any additional books in the works?

H.M.: *I have a couple potential follow-ups in the Frank Swiver series in the can. One is called “Last Puffs,” and looks at another aspect of Frank—his time in the Spanish Civil War, and the connections he formed there, including his closest friend, Max Rabinowitz, a red (communist) attorney. But I realized that Vera Peregrino should be in any sequel, and in the years since I wrote “White with Fish,” I have written about Frank and Vera in short stories and novelettes. I’d like to put some of those together into some sort of “Frank and Vera: A Novel in Stories,” or “Old Vine Detective Agency: A Novel in Stories.”*

In the more immediate future, there’s a short adventure Frank had in Utah, in 1950. I call the case, “Pearl’s Valley.” It should be coming out as a stand-alone novelette in April, from Dark Passages Publishing.

No matter which comes along next, it will be extremely interesting to jump on the bandwagon with this P.I. and see where he takes us. For more information about Harley Mazuk and his upcoming projects, head to www.harleymazuk.com. ■



GUILT GAME

THE EXTRACTOR

By L.J. Sellers

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Roxanne MacFarlane watched on the monitor as three people approached the building. A bearded fifty-something man, a thin eager woman, and a pensive teenage girl. *Damn!* The reverend had come along. This could get sticky. Rox hoped she didn't have to resort to kidnapping, but she would do whatever it took to help her client. Every case was personal for her.

The trio disappeared inside the building, so Rox glanced at the second monitor. The view of the lobby was a little distorted, but she could clearly see her partner—her stepdad, Marty, in a fake security uniform—scoot out from behind a small counter. He blocked the access door and gestured for the man in the black cloak to step aside for a weapons search. The reverend looked annoyed but complied.

That was her cue. Time to put on the act. Grabbing the girl and dragging her out would be easier, but at forty years old, Rox was finally learning to pretend. After a deep breath, she bolted down the short hall, opened the door to the lobby, and stepped partway in. “Mia Bankston? You’re late for your appointment.” Rox focused on the girl, a slender fourteen-year-old.

“I am? I’m sorry.” Mia bit her lip and turned to her mother. The woman shrugged and glanced at the phony spiritual leader and polygamist she’d married. Reverend Jonah was arguing with the security guard, who had his hands under the cult leader’s robe. *Nice touch, Marty.*

Rox stepped forward, holding the door open. “Let’s get this done right now, or we’ll have to reschedule. I have another appointment soon.”

“I’d like to wait for my husband.” The mother’s voice was soft and uncertain.

“I just need Mia to sign.” Rox paused, then projected her voice. “If she wants her money *today*.” She had lured the girl and her mother—who rarely left the polygamist’s home—with a letter about a phony inheritance.

“Go ahead,” the self-appointed reverend said. “I’ll be right behind you.” He was pulling ID from his wallet.

Greed had overruled his usual control and caution.

The girl stepped past Rox and through the opening. Rox quickly followed and shut the door behind her, locking the mother out. Rox grabbed Mia’s arm and steered her down the hall. She had rented the small building for a week just for this assignment.

“What about my mother?” The girl seemed surprised but not alarmed.

So far so good. Ideally Mia’s actions should be voluntary. “Your great-aunt left the money specifically to you. I just need a signature so I can release the funds.” Rox kept moving. She’d done her best to disguise herself with a wig and oversize reading glasses, but she still wanted minimal exposure. During her time at the CIA, they’d never let her do fieldwork, but she’d learned a lot from the operatives anyway.

Behind them the mother screeched, “Why is this door locked?”

The girl stopped.

Damn! Two more steps. Rox gave a small shrug. “Don’t worry, it’s just stuck. Happens every day, but I don’t have time to deal with it right now.” She tugged on Mia’s arm. “Come get your money.”

For a moment, the girl hesitated, her eyes wary.

Rox gave her another charming smile. She was dressed in her only lawyer-looking clothes, a navy skirt and jacket, and she knew she had a trustworthy face. One of the reasons they’d hired her at the CIA—that, and her analytical skills.

Mia shrugged and moved forward. Rox opened the door at the end of the hall, and they entered the room where her

client waited.

The girl let out a shocked cry. “Dad?” She stepped forward, confusion and joy playing out on her innocent face. “I thought you were dead!”

“No, honey. No . . . I’m . . .”

They ran toward each other and embraced in a tight hug.

Rox smiled. This was why she did this work—to reunite people with their families.

The man and his daughter stepped apart and started crying. Tears of joy had always confused Rox. Why did people cry when they were supposed to be happy? It wasn’t logical. But she’d become used to not being able to read people correctly. Except for Marty, whom she’d had a lifetime to figure out.

Rox took a photo of the two, then stepped out of the room to give the family some privacy. Her part was done. Now it was up to her client to convince his daughter to go with him—rather than stay in the polygamous cult and end up as a child bride for a man who already had six wives and fourteen children he controlled with an iron fist. Mia’s father had joint custody, which had been established at birth with his name on the certificate, and never altered in court. But Mia’s mother had taken the girl and gone into hiding.

Rox was careful about custody issues and had done her homework. At fourteen, the girl was free to choose who she wanted to live with. Her client had hired her to find the girl, then get her out. He hadn’t trusted the legal system to help because he had a criminal drug record. But he’d turned his life around and started a business that was doing well enough to afford her twenty-thousand-dollar fee. The second half was being held by a bank that would release it when she showed them the photo. She’d learned early not to trust people to follow through with the final payment, or as she liked to think of it, her success bonus. Her very first client had stiffed her once she had her son back, giving a sob story instead.

Rox left through the back of the building to avoid drama in the lobby with the reverend. Her client would do the same. Marty had probably already escorted Jonah from the building. Her stepdad was an ex-cop and could take care of himself, but she called him anyway. “Are you out?”

“Yep. That bastard came at me when he realized the girl wasn’t coming back, but I hit a few of his pain centers, and he decided to cooperate. I’ll be at the meet-up spot in five minutes.”

She walked a few blocks to her car, then drove another three to join Marty, who was already in his own car. They usually took both in case circumstances called for it. He got out, gave her a high five, then burst out laughing. “I dig the adrenaline rush of messing with assholes to rescue someone in need.”

“Me too. See you at home.”

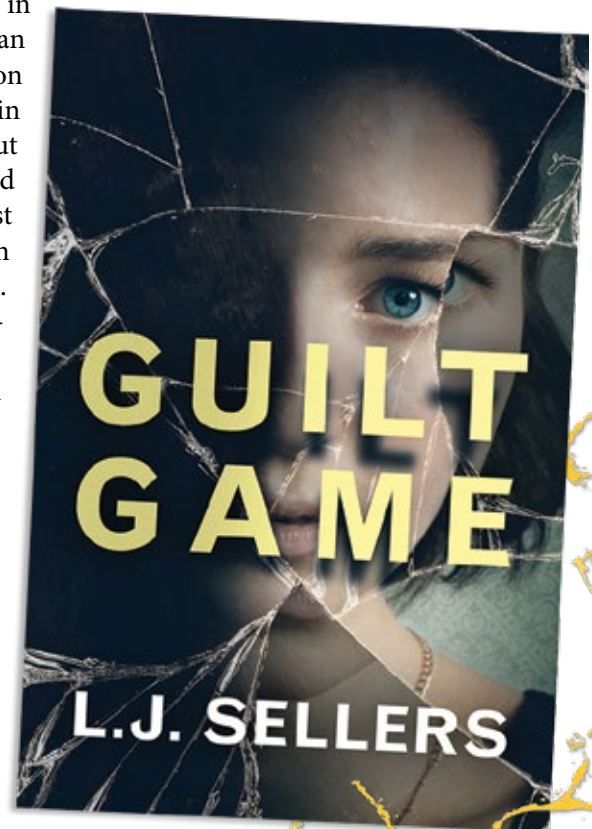
Marty gave her a mock salute and drove off. She’d loved seeing him in uniform when she was a kid and followed him into law enforcement as an adult. But the department had stuck her in tech support after a year on the street. She’d been disappointed but not surprised. The way her brain worked, with its atypical neurologics made her a great data cruncher. But after six years spent cyber hunting addicts and thieves, she’d gotten bored and joined the CIA. Hoping for fieldwork, she’d ended up as an analyst again. After her sister, Jolene, died, Rox had left the agency and started an investigation firm. Now she was her own operative and doing pretty well. With any luck, the treatments she was about to start—a new form of magnetic brain therapy—would make her even better.

Successful missions were essential. She’d failed to rescue Jolene when her sister was in a cult-like multiple marriage. Rox had taken an overseas CIA assignment instead, and Jo had been murdered by the cult leader while she was gone. Rox would never forgive herself. But she was doing her best to make up for it.

Twenty minutes later, she parked at the bank as her work cell phone rang. Assuming it was her current client, she picked up. “Is everything all right?”

“No. Is this Karina Jones?” The woman’s voice was tentative and stressed.

Jones was the code name she used with clients. Another one already! “Yes. Who is this?”



"My name is Jenny Carson. My husband, Dave, and I need your help."

"Who referred you to me?"

"Detective Scott Monroe."

Rox didn't know Monroe personally, but she knew of him. She and Marty had put out the word about her services among certain law enforcement people with the understanding they would pass it along to others they could trust. Only her first circle of close friends knew she conducted extractions. Beyond that, clients knew her fake name and paid in cash deposits, including some that went directly into a bank account.

"What kind of help do you need?"

"Our daughter joined that charity cult, Sister Love, and we haven't seen her in months. We're worried sick." The woman choked back a sob.

Another extraction so soon? Rox didn't feel ready. And she was supposed to start her therapy tomorrow. But the woman sounded so desperate. Plus, the group mentioned was local, so she wouldn't have to travel. "What specifically are you worried about?" A rescue target had to be at risk for her to take the case.

"We think the leader is keeping her captive. Other girls work in their soup kitchen, but Emma doesn't, and we haven't seen her since she joined." The mother burst into tears.

This grief she understood. "Have you been to the police?" *Of course they had.*

"They won't help us. Emma is eighteen, and she joined Sister Love willingly." Jenny Carson had to stop and take a deep breath. "After we didn't see her at the soup kitchen, we asked the police to check on her. But even if they knew where the cult members lived, they can't go in there without a search warrant, and they say we don't have a real reason to think anything is wrong."

Rox understood the legal limitations officers faced. "Do you have any evidence that your daughter is being abused or restrained?"

A telling pause. This time, Dave Carson spoke, and she realized they were on speaker phone. "No, but they prey on vulnerable girls. We think the leader trolls online for conversations about suicide."

A flash of rage burned in Rox's chest. This was a new low. "That's deplorable. Do you know his name?"

"Yes." Mr. Carson was still doing the talking. "We called the state office where charities have to register, and it was founded by Deacon Blackstone and Margo Preston."

Deacon? She hoped that was his name and not his religious title. The other person, Margo, might not even exist. "How did he contact your daughter?"

"Online." Mrs. Carson was still fighting for control of her emotions. "Our girl was in a car accident, and her best friend died." Another sob. "Emma was devastated, and she joined the group out of guilt. I'm afraid he'll ruin her life."

Rox knew she would take their case. "Okay, I'll meet with you, but I have conditions. Such as, you can never tell anyone where my office is or discuss the details of my services—unless you're sending me someone who needs my help. Did Detective Monroe mention my fee?"

"He said you were expensive, but money is no object."

Good to know. "I'll need ten thousand in cash up front. Bring it with you when we meet. If the case has unexpected expenses, we'll discuss them at the time. If I'm successful, I get another ten grand. Are you fine with that?" Rox sometimes reduced her fee for clients who couldn't afford her rate, so she had to get full payment from those who could.

"Of course. We just want our daughter back."

"Come to my office tomorrow morning at ten. Bring photos of your daughter, a large one and a wallet size. I'll text you directions and instructions later today." At the moment, she was still in Salem, fifty miles south, and had to pick up her payment from the bank, drive back home to Portland, and wrap up the details of her current case.

It was unusual to have another extraction so quickly. She often went months without a call and had to supplement her income with other investigative work. But she itched to get started. After six years as a cop and ten with the CIA, she loved the thrill of the chase, even when it was all on paper. Plus Deacon Blackstone seemed like a dirtbag predator, and she couldn't wait to extract Emma from his clutches. ■

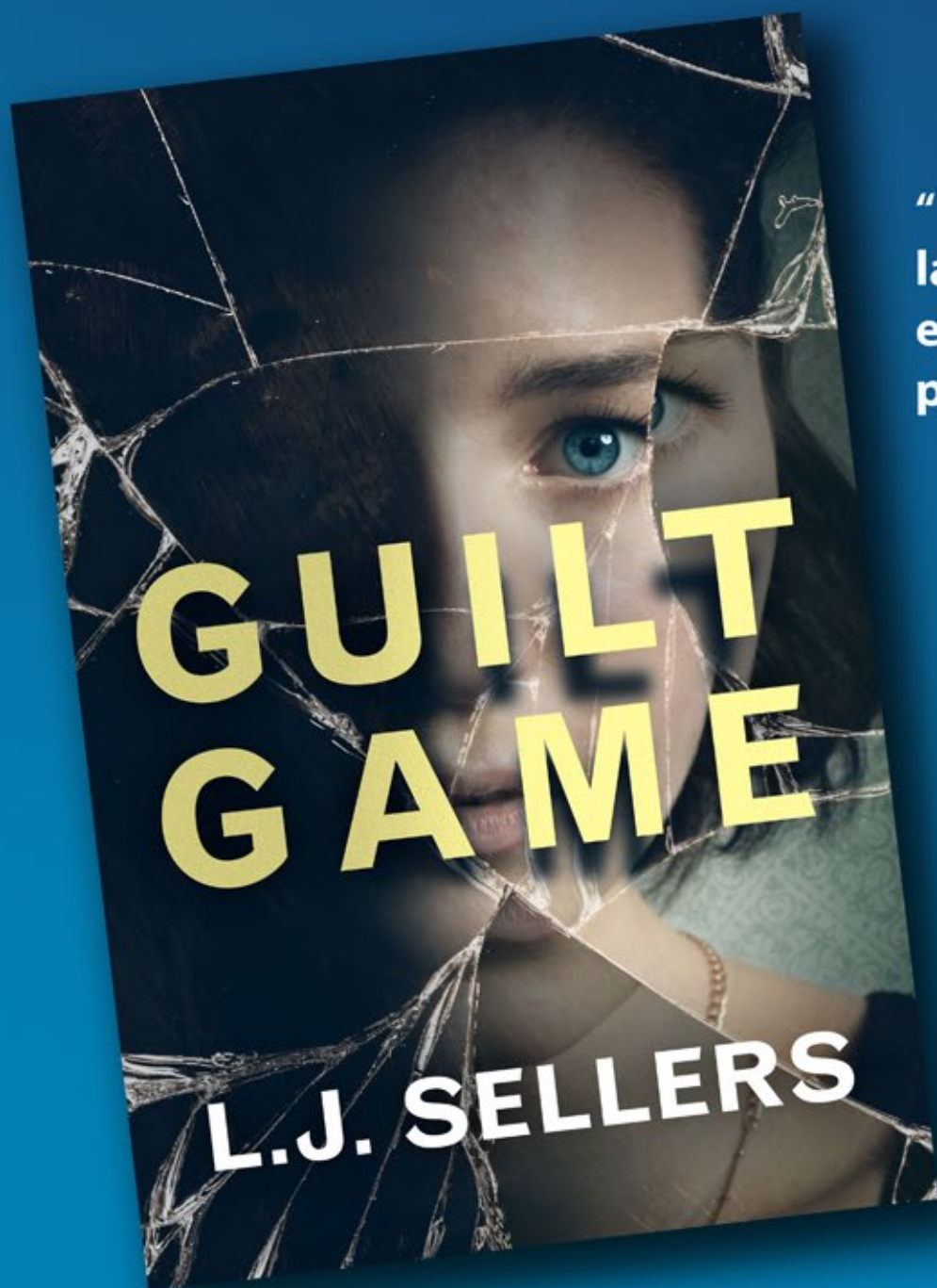
Excerpted from "Guilt Game" by L.J. Sellers. Copyright © 2017 by L.J. Sellers.

L.J. Sellers writes the bestselling Detective Jackson mysteries—a four-time winner of the Readers Favorite Awards. She also pens the high-octane Extractor series and provocative standalone thrillers. Her 21 novels have been highly praised by reviewers, and she's one of the highest-rated crime fiction authors on Amazon.

L.J. resides in Eugene, Oregon where many of her novels are set, and she's an award-winning journalist who earned the Grand Neal. When not plotting murders, she enjoys standup comedy, cycling, and zip-lining. She's also been known to jump out of airplanes.

From the author of the bestselling Detective Jackson mysteries:

***The Extractor**—a former CIA agent
who rescues people with no hope*



"A briskly paced series launch with a shocking ending that packs a real punch."

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"A brilliant, hard-hitting thriller that never lets up. I loved every minute of it!"

**—J Carson Black,
NYT bestselling author**

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SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

AUNT DIMITY & THE WIDOW'S CURSE

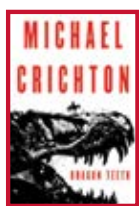
By Nancy Atherton

Lori Shepherd, the woman who's privy to the ghostly Dimity Westwood's written communications from beyond, hears something disturbing from elderly quilter Annabelle Craven—a fellow resident of the English village of Finch. At a quilting bee held inside the old schoolhouse, Annabelle casually confesses to murdering Zach Trotter, her first husband, in the nearby town of Old Cowerton many years earlier.

At Aunt Dimity's suggestion, Lori travels to Old Cowerton accompanied by her quirky friend, Bree Pym. Once there, the women find opinions on the murder sharply divided: former neighbor and massive gossip Minnie Jessop, and her group of friends, accuse Annabelle of killing five men, including Zach; Penelope Moorecroft, the current "lady of the manor," along with the members of her circle, say Annabelle is entirely innocent. Lori returns home more confused than anything else in order to confront Annabelle, whose heartbreaking explanation prepares the way for a mystery of monumental proportions.

Previously, Dimity's letters consisted of stories from Aunt Dimity to Lori. Now Lori is compiling the stories and writing introductions to them. While the murder is unfolding, fans get even more information about Aunt Dimity, including romance, humor, and an extreme amount of emotion as Lori walks through Dimity's past. Although this is the twenty-second installment of this incredible series with a truly beloved character at its core, Lori, her ghostly Aunt, and the amazing mysteries they find themselves pulled into just keep getting better and better.

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



DRAGON TEETH

By Michael Crichton

Everyone should give a shout of thanks to Mrs. Sherri Crichton, seeing as that she has discovered and shared with readers a wonderful, previously unpublished story by her husband that's along the same path as the incredible, "Jurassic Park."

Here, readers return to the world of paleontology. It is the year 1876, when many Indian tribes still inhabited the American West. This is the time where gold rush towns emerged and many began to kill and be killed over the promise of a true treasure, while also trying to dodge the Indians. Against this backdrop, two extremely obsessive paleontologists plunder the Wild West hunting for their own type of gold. They are on a mission to find dinosaur bones, while misleading each other in a competition that will come to be called, "The Bone Wars."

Into this country comes the reckless and self-important William Johnson, a student from Yale University with more advantages than brains. The reason for his little trip is to survive a summer in the American West in order to win a bet. William doesn't know what he's getting into when he joins a paleontologist of great renown named Marsh.

Soon Marsh becomes convinced that William is spying on him for the other paleontologist, Edwin Drinker Cope. His beliefs come true when William jumps ship and goes to work for Cope. Together, these men soon make a discovery that will change history. Problem is, this discovery also brings intense danger to all involved, and William will soon be forced to protect what he has found from some of the West's most famous and infamous characters.

This is definitely a Crichton discovery that draws the reader in and offers a plot that reminds us all of how truly brilliant this writer was... not to mention, how much he is missed.

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

CHILD'S PLAY

By Merry Jones

Elle is ready for the new school year and her new life to start. The last couple years have been tough after her husband's death but this year is going to be better. She has put the home they shared up for sale and the new teaching semester is just about to begin.

A former student is released from juvenile detention and bodies start appearing. Elle finds the first one. Each of the incidents can be linked back to the newly released student, but is it just a coincidence? Elle wants to believe the best but that could just be the end of her. Elle has her own issues that she's dealing with and good friends that help her, but delving into the mystery brings more danger to her door.

This story was darker than I was expecting, but oh so good. There are plenty of twists and turns to keep you wondering. The author develops the characters and makes them so real that you feel like you know them.

Reviewed by Ashley Dawn, author of "Shadows of Pain" ■



UNSUB

By Meg Gardiner

This is one of those perfect serial killer fares that bring on the nightmares only a fantastic writer like Gardiner can create.

Twenty years ago, a determined serial killer called The Prophet terrorized the Bay Area. Not only were innocent lives taken, but the killer also destroyed Caitlin Hendrix's father who had been the lead detective back then hunting this maniac down. Detective Mack Hendrix failed to solve the mystery of who had done these eleven brutal killings. All that was ever known was that the victims were all unconnected, but each corpse was left with the ancient sign of Mercury etched into their chests. Because of The Prophet's ability to outrun and outsmart the law, the killer became the FBI's UNSUB (unknown subject) that continues to haunt Caitlin no matter how old she gets.

Not following exactly in her father's footsteps, Caitlin Hendrix is a detective but with San Francisco's Narcotics Task Force. In her path, however, is a visit to a crime scene that involves a double murder. The frightening part is that after all this time bodies are now once again reappearing with that familiar Mercury symbol. She talks to her father who gives her warnings to stay as far away from all this mess as possible. But The Prophet has turned his attention on Caitlin and she will have to walk into the unknown in order to face this UNSUB dead on. Can she make up for her father's failure two decades ago? You must read to find out.

This story is one of those "too good" to review tales. Nothing can be given away when it comes to this plot. All that can be said is Meg Gardiner is an amazing writer and this is yet another book that proves that point to a "T."

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

IF THE HAUNTING FITS, WEAR IT

By Rose Pressey

The adorable store called, It's Vintage Y'All, has to live a few days without its colorful owner, Cookie Chanel within its walls. You see, Cookie has to head out on a trip after landing the assignment to provide classy vintage hats for party-goers who are attending a highly swank Kentucky Derby event. Before Cookie can get out on the road, however, she is joined by the astral presence of Maureen Weber, a well-heeled ghost who is desperate to get Cookie to help her solve her own murder.

Cookie sometimes wishes she was just a little more surprised by these ghostly forms, but she's had to deal with them for so long, it literally just feels like normal, everyday life. So, being joined by her familiar Charlotte Meadows, this new ghost named Maureen, and her cat, Wind Song, who is the supernatural spirit of her deceased Grandma Pearl, Cookie heads to the Derby in order to provide the perfect vintage fashions for Derby-goers.

As Cookie and her odd bunch arrive in town for the race, the group soon discover the corpse of jockey Ramon Gooden. With both Ramon and Maureen's murders to solve, Cookie's plate is overly full. When her understanding beau, Dylan, comes all the way to Louisville to make sure Cookie stays sane, the fast pace of suspects, ghosts and mysteries give the horses at the Derby a run for their money.

Pressey has already penned four humorous, extremely cool and thrilling books in this *Haunted Vintage Mystery* series, and each and every one of them are first-rate fun.

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



THE CORRUPTIONS

By Vincent Zandri

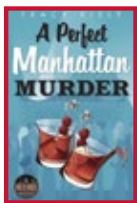
In this fourth thrilling tale featuring Jack Marconi, Private Investigator, readers once again are provided with a character who's the definition of the word "tough."

This time out, the governor of New York asks Jack, a former prison warden turned P.I., to capture two psychopaths/convicted cop killers that have escaped from the Clinton Maximum Security Correctional Facility in Dannemora, NY, twenty miles south of the Canadian border. The governor wants Jack and his sidekick Blood to find these escapees before NY troopers or the FBI can lay hands on them. In fact, he wants Jack to deliver the men directly to the front door of the governor's mansion.

After some straight talk with State Trooper Vincent D'Amico and a few nicer conversations with Sheriff Bridgette Hylton, Jack begins to see that something far more rotten than just two men wanting out of prison is going on here. As he starts investigating even further, information regarding a secret operation running hand-in-hand with this old, creepy prison begins to come to light, causing Jack and Blood to find themselves in the middle of something far more devious than they originally thought.

Zandri does a fantastic job with this story. Not only does he scare the reader, but the horror show he presents also scares the man who is the definition of the word "tough." The back-and-forth between Jack and Blood is, as always, thoroughly enjoyable and offers those moments of must-have relief when the violence grows just a bit too much to bear. It is clear that there will be a fifth, sixth, and more where these books are concerned, but jumping on the Marconi train should happen ASAP, considering how great these plots are.

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



A PERFECT MANHATTAN MURDER

By Tracy Kiely

When Nic and Nigel Martini and their Bullmastiff, Skippy, arrive in Manhattan for the Broadway opening of a play written by one of Nic's college classmates, they expect to have a fabulous time, celebrating non-stop. (Not Skippy, of course.) Opening night gets off to a rocky start when Nic and Nigel join another of Nic's friends, Harper, for dinner, along with her universally disliked husband, Dan. Over the past few years, Dan has become the lead drama critic for an important Manhattan magazine, and has received the nickname "Bastard of Broadway" for his consistently negative reviews. Harper and Dan are also recent first-time parents, but because Dan finds the baby's occasional crying disturbing, he's spending more time in a separate apartment "to write" than at home. Harper's had enough of his selfish behavior and confides to Nic during dinner, while her husband is table-hopping, that she's filing for divorce.

The play is a rousing success and the New York theater critics love it. Except, of course, for Dan, who has not only written and filed his review in advance of the play's opening, but used the opportunity to skewer the play's leading lady. The actress-in-question, learning what Dan has written, expresses her anger at his review by slapping his face and humiliating him at the opening night party. Dan storms out, announcing he's going to his apartment, and no one tries to stop him.

When Dan is found dead in his bachelor apartment the following morning, and the police decide he was poisoned, there's no shortage of suspects. Unfortunately, his wife Harper is at the top of a very long list, which makes no sense to Nic and Nigel. Why would Harper murder him? The married sleuths are determined to prove she's innocent, even as the evidence against Harper continues to mount.

"A Perfect Manhattan Murder" is a smart, sassy, sophisticated mystery with snappy dialogue and a fast-moving plot. Great fun!

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

SINCE WE FELL

By Dennis Lehane

This extremely well-written book follows Rachel Childs, a former television journalist who now lives like a shut-in after having a mental breakdown.

Said breakdown happened on the air as a result of a huge earthquake that horrified Haiti in the year 2010. Happily, however, life isn't too bad for Rachel. She lives a good life with her husband, who is very supportive and understanding of the situation. But (and there always is a 'but') an encounter one afternoon changes everything and allows Rachel to see that she has been involved in a very big conspiracy.

Deception abounds, and everything that Rachel could not possibly have expected is thrown at her, allowing her fears to grow mammoth. Having to conquer everything in order to save her own mind and make things right allows this plot to become a thriller of astronomical proportions.

It is not a surprise to say that the anxiety-level of this book is off the charts. After all, we are talking about an author responsible for masterpieces such as, "Mystic River" and "Shutter Island." Calling any of Lehane's books 'page-turners' is simply not enough. As readers follow Rachel through the mazes of her own mind, the dark places we all enter together are more than frightening.

The only advice that can be given for this one is: remember to breathe in deeply as you come closer and closer to the end!

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



DEADLY DESIRES AT HONEYCHURCH HALL

By Hannah Dennison

This is the third fun mystery in a series about Honeychurch Hall. This time around, a new story of deception, theft, and death is embarked upon in the remarkable house set in the Devonshire village of Little Dipperton.

The former host of "Fakes & Treasures," Kat Stanton, is planning to go back to London. She's convinced that her mother, Iris, will be able to manage on her own in her new home on the Honeychurch Hall estate. Iris being Iris, however, decides to protest a high-speed train coming into the area that will apparently zip through the entire valley. This has made Kat hang around just a little bit longer; she knows that Iris has a great talent for trouble making, and wants to make doubly-sure that her mother will be okay.

Iris also has other talents, such as writing books known as 'bodice rippers' under the name Krystalle Storm, while looking for a new boyfriend for her daughter. And wouldn't you just know it...a tall, handsome man comes along and introduces himself as Valentine Prince-Avery. Downside is, the man turns out to be a consultant for the new train line and Kat meets him when she's pulled into the protest meeting that her mother is at the very core of.

Mr. Prince-Avery runs from the meeting leaving his car behind; a car that just happens to be holding the body of an elderly person. Soon more bodies begin to pile up and the village folk are suspected. Not only is Kat in the center of it all, but she's also trying to track down a missing bundle of cash, keep an ex-boyfriend away, and live down a scandalous story.

Readers will have a ball with Kat as she runs into a haunted chair, a dangerous dog named Coffin Mire, a velveteen mouse, and a creepy black figure, all as her own ending seems to be around the corner. These stories about Honeychurch just keep getting better.

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

BAD TO THE BONE

By Linda O. Johnston

Dog lovers (not to mention lovers of great mysteries) will be thrilled to see this third book in the fantastic series, *Barkery & Biscuits*.

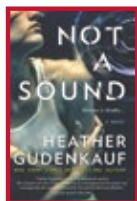
The feature player in this book is Carrie Kennersly, part-time Veterinary Tech and the proprietor of Icing on the Cake bakery for humans, as well as the adjoining Barkery & Biscuits that sells organic pet treats for dogs. Business is booming in both of the shops, and on a personal level Carrie is thoroughly enjoying her new romance with veterinarian Dr. Reed Storme.

Carrie is about to discuss a contract with a major pet food manufacturer called VimPets, when the company's rep, Jack Loroco, tells Carrie that her business would grow by leaps and bounds if she would simply sell her recipes to them. It also helps Jack's cause that he has started up a romance with Carrie's friend Billi Matlock.

But there is trouble just waiting in the proverbial wings for all of the people involved. Someone else has decided to set their sights on Jack Loroco, a fellow VimPets employee. This woman named Wanda Addler is not exactly all about love, by the way. She actually threatens Jack to love her back whether he likes it or not and dump Billi ASAP. What happens instead, of course, is that Wanda is the one who ends up dead and the top candidates to be the killer and/or killers are Jack and Billi. So what does good, old Carrie do? She works her behind off to find out who, exactly, put Wanda Addler into an early grave.

The parade of fun and interesting characters continues to grow with each book in this series. Carrie is still a whole lot of fun and the animals who are all about spreading warmth and friendship come alive on every page. If you haven't gotten into this series yet, now is the time to begin.

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



NOT A SOUND

By Heather Gudenkauf

Imagine having a fairy tale life: great job, loving husband and step-daughter, friends that adore you. Then imagine having it all taken away. Taken away by a hit-and-run accident that left you deaf and unable to cope. That was Amelia Wynn's life. In order to deal, she turned to alcohol, and lost everything and everyone in her life. Now recovering, she has turned to exercise and the great outdoors for her sobriety and peace of mind. Along with her *special abilities* dog, Stitch, she spends her mornings kayaking along the Five Mines River, her own little bit of heaven. Just as she seems to be piecing back together her former life, her heaven turns to hell when she and Stitch discover a body floating in the river, stuck among the brambles. She soon realizes the deceased was a friend and fellow nurse.

Through the investigation, Amelia draws closer to Jake Schroeder, police detective and childhood friend. Amelia, an ER and sexual assault trauma nurse, finds herself drawn to the case, investigating "leads" on her own, despite Jake's warning to leave it to the police.

What follows is a twisted tale of trust, mistrust, greed, fear, bravery, and ultimately, the perseverance of the human spirit.

Heather Gudenkauf has written a spell-binding thriller which reminds us just how strong the human spirit can be, and yet how fragile life is.

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

DUPLICITY

By Jane Haseldine

Julia Gooden, a crime reporter from Detroit, is still trying to find any information she can in regards to a tragedy that began thirty years ago. That was when her brother disappeared off the face of the earth when he was just nine years old. Life changed drastically when this happened. Julia's family was split apart and Julia, herself, was left more than a little paranoid which stayed with her as she grew older. She even lives in a state of fear and anxiety when it comes to her own two sons; she is always watching out for their safety.

Although she had left her husband, David Tanner, a prosecutor for the District Attorney's office, Julia decided she'd made a mistake and wanted her husband back. But as they attempt to rekindle their relationship, a conflict of interest comes about between her reporting and David's case against Detroit's major crime boss, Nick Rossi.

The case grows even more terrifying when a bomb explodes inside the courthouse, claiming victims that were going to testify against Rossi, as well as injuring David critically.

The reporter takes it all on. Knowing that Rossi has to be behind all the bloodshed and the pain that her own husband is feeling, Julia works with her former boyfriend, Police Detective Raymond Navarro, and his partner, Leroy Russell, to find out the truth.

Readers are given a platter full of crimes from blackmail to murder, as Julia uncovers affairs of the heart as well as murderers from the past. Julia Gooden is an amazing character for the world of suspense and this, her second tale, proves she's exciting enough to be around for a good long time to come.

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





OUTPOST HELL

By Jake Bible

This is a highly entertaining, futuristic novel, featuring an off-beat group of Galactic Fleet Marines, getting themselves in trouble trying to steal from a Skrang outpost now that the war between the nations has come to an end. During a high-speed pursuit, they end up at a destination where few have ever survived.

It is easy to see this novel in comic book form. The character mash-ups would put H.G. Wells' creations on "The Island of Dr. Moreau" to shame. I can even hear John Wayne's voice from *The Green Berets*, as I walk along with these characters. Just as it is in real life, no Marine leaves another behind in this book; with their craft under repair, their AI works hard to keep all of them updated on the new planet, and they soon find themselves in a pitched gun battle.

Fighting an enemy that wants to commandeer their ship to leave this god-forsaken hell, the Marines partner with some very strange inhabitants, once the captors of what is now a common enemy. But just when escape appears inevitable, the Skrang's reappear looking to get even.

In a darkly comical sci-fi battle for survival, author Jake Bible brings to life this tough group of commandos and makes the reader care about strangely configured lifeforms that only a mother could love. I can't wait to jet out with them on their next mission!

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

UNPUNISHED

By Lisa Black

The first thing I love about this thriller is the dedication to the newspapers of America. I, too, would miss my morning paper if it disappeared. "Unpunished" is the second in a series.

The two main characters are Gardiner and Renner: Maggie Gardiner and Jack Renner, she a forensic investigator, he a law enforcement officer with a vigilante-killer streak that he keeps well concealed. But not from Maggie, who has her own secrets.

The initial crime, a copy editor at the *Cleveland Herald* being hung above the noisy, churning printing apparatus of the newspaper, sets the stage. The rest of the plot involves digging deep into the news business, finding out why the next murder happens, and trying to stop them before the newspaper is decimated.

If you want to read "That Darkness" first, it wouldn't be amiss for a grounding for these complex, appealing characters.

Read carefully. Every page counts in this tightly plotted adventure.

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



SNITCH

By Dharma Kelleher

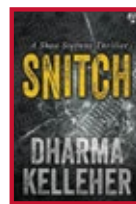
In a gritty and dramatic police procedural, uniquely told from the point of view of the confidential informant and protagonist, tough biker chick Shea Stevens finds herself having to go undercover to help Detective Rio discover who is selling strychnine-laced hex—a new party drug—and killing several locals.

Rumor is that a newly-formed all-female radical motorcycle club, the "Athena Sisterhood," is fronting the sale of the drug, and Shea is forced to turn snitch or face charges. Trying to walk a straight and narrow line so she can help her dead sister's daughter, Annie, and keep her respectable motorcycle repair shop, Iron Goddess, in business, she becomes a prospect in the club to work with the police.

It doesn't help that her ex-old-lady is the club leader, a fact that Shea's current lover is not too keen on; or that Shea's own dad was a founding father in the "Confederate Thunder," a local men's bike club, who is not above wiping out this female upstart club for good measure.

Kelleher has a great plot and her characters are well fleshed out. The pace of the book keeps the tension mounted and the end 'right around the next corner.' As the bullets and firebombs fly, you'll have no choice but to turn that page to see who dies next.

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



KILL DEVIL FALLS

By Brian Klingborg

After an ominous beginning, the action escalates with plenty of brutality to go around. Each denizen of Kill Devil Falls is more bizarre than the last.

U.S. Marshal Helen Morrissey gets an unwanted, but not particularly difficult-sounding assignment—to drive to Kill Devil Falls and pick up a felon who is being held there. The sheriff who was supposed to take her, Rita Crawford, back to Sacramento, has been called away on another emergency. Helen doesn't realize that she has made herself a target just by driving north to that desolate mountain spot, now almost a ghost town.

And no wonder! The town has been declared an environmental disaster area, sink holes and a tainted water supply, prompting the government to attempt to move everyone out. The people who remain have their own dark reasons for being there, some of them deeply hidden. Nothing is quite what it seems when she gets there and she is given the run-around by nearly everyone. Not knowing who to trust, she wonders if she'll make it out alive.

A rocky ride! I loved it!

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



FALLOUT

By Sara Paretsky

Detective V.I. Warshawski is back and better than ever!

This new case will take her out of Chicago and into the state of Kansas, as she trails a vanished film student and a faded Hollywood star. Taking her dog Peppy along for the ride, V.I. must deal with a University town, Kansas fields where missile silos once rested, and a place that is still deeply rooted in racial tension that may just be hiding a past that holds the answer to crimes being committed in the present day.

Funny and sarcastic as ever, V.I. is originally hired to hunt down an elderly cinema icon and a young film director that are said to be travelling together. V.I. learns that they are headed to this small town called Lawrence, Kansas, in order to film the star's early beginnings. Trouble is, they literally have disappeared and no one in town will talk to V.I. about anything. It doesn't take heavy-duty intuition to understand that these people know something they're not admitting to, and it's also highly clear (and a little disconcerting) that they are watching every move V.I. and her puppy Peppy make.

Readers and fans of Paretsky will love the hornet's nest that's uncovered with this V.I. case. Only this author and this incredible character could go to small town Kansas and end up discovering something even cooler than a "yellow brick road." We are talking the military, the scientific community; heck, even Russia is a character in this one. Yet again this author and her character deliver a first-rate tale that does not disappoint.

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

THE FIX

By David Baldacci

A series beginning with the fantastic title, “Memory Man,” this is the third in Baldacci’s cases featuring Detective Amos Decker. This time out, Decker and his team members land a new case—one that has Decker, himself, as the star witness.

Standing just outside the doors of FBI headquarters, Detective Decker watches the murder of a woman. She is shot execution-style on a crowded sidewalk by a man who then turns the gun on himself. Decker immediately goes into detective mode, once the shock wears off. Trouble is, as he and his team uncover more and more information, there is far more shock to come.

Apparently the man and woman involved in the murder-suicide did not know each other. In fact, Decker can find no connection between them whatsoever. The shooter was a decent family man with a good job and many supporters who simply can’t understand how this possibly could have happened. The victim was a school teacher with no oddities, alliances or protests in her past. In other words, this one simply doesn’t make any sense.

The case gets even stranger when Harper Brown of the Defense Intelligence Agency gets involved. First he attempts to get Detective Decker to back off. Apparently the killing is part of a classified Defense Intelligence Agency case; they are looking at it as a matter of national security that could provide critical information in regards to a terrorist group.

As intricate as always, Baldacci puts together a thriller for Amos Decker that invokes all of Decker’s powers of observation and his ability to break down crime scenes and ferret out those intricate details that bring justice to all the right people.

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

EXPECTING TO DIE

By Lisa Jackson

Readers and fans must wonder when on earth this writer gets a chance to sleep. It seems that fantastic books just shoot from her incredible mind each and every second of the day, and this—the seventh book featuring detectives Selena Alvarez and Regan Pescoli—is yet another to be added to the “thrilling” column.

We are back in Grizzly Falls, Montana, where this duo of detectives are dealing with a case that involves a “bigfoot” sighting, teens with secrets, and murders that seem to multiply.

One night, around midnight, Pescoli’s daughter Bianca joins up with a group of other teens who are playing hide-and-seek in the forest. But this game is a bit different in Grizzly Falls; there, while the teens play, someone watches them from afar waiting for just the right victim to claim. During the games, Bianca sees a huge monster. When the beast comes towards her, she takes off and stumbles over a decomposing body in a creek. Sometime later, Pescoli, who thought that her daughter was spending the night with a friend and not out in the woods, receives a phone call from the police who ask her to come to an old lumber camp where Bianca has shown up and other game players have gathered.

Detective Pescoli is counting the days until her maternity leave. She is tired and emotional and she certainly doesn’t need a suspected serial killer showing up in her life. The body is soon identified as a teen that went missing a week before. But, as always with this type of creepiness, another body appears... then another... and Pescoli’s hope for peace and serenity goes out the window.

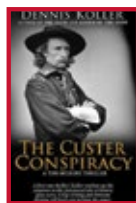
Nightmares strike close to home as author Lisa Jackson takes readers to a dark location with scads of hiding places. This twisted plot pulls no punches and continues to prove that Grizzly Falls is aptly named, and not because it houses a species of bear.

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



THE CUSTER CONSPIRACY

By Dennis Koller



My review has to be almost as much of a mystery as the story Koller has subjected us to, inasmuch as to not give away too much of the plot. Suffice it to say that the questions the investigators stumble over after the death of history professor, Matt Conroy, are hard to digest given the history we have always been taught.

Conroy had arranged to meet up with his lifelong friend, Homicide Inspector Tom McGuire at the site of the Battle of Little Bighorn to explain to him the newest discovery about General Custer, a man whose life, or rather death, was already questioned by a variety of conspiracy theorists. When McGuire arrives, he finds his friend with the back of his head blown off, and a sniper’s bullet almost hits him too.

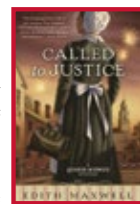
Calling in the authorities they find Conroy’s wife also murdered. When McGuire starts digging into the facts, he finds he has been shut down at every turn, including being closed down by the FBI for national security reasons. The detective, however, is doggedly stubborn, and can pull in some friends working in the shadows of the government—agencies that the public is in the dark about—and assembles a team of shadow warriors to get to the bottom of the reason his pal was killed.

Conspiracy theorist or not the final result will blow your mind—though hopefully not the top of your head off. But *shush*, keep it to yourself. You never know who might be listening.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of “Kettle of Vultures” ■

CALLED TO JUSTICE

By Edith Maxwell



It’s the Fourth of July 1888, in Amesbury Massachusetts, and Quaker midwife Rose Carroll is looking forward to celebrating the holiday, especially since it means that she’ll be spending time with her suitor, Dr. David Chase Dodge. When young Hannah Breed, a close friend of Rose’s niece, Faith, confides to Rose that she is pregnant out of wedlock and begs for her help, Rose agrees, although she’s very concerned about the girl’s reluctance to name the father of her child. And the night of July 4, amid the noise and excitement of a fireworks display, Hannah is found shot to death.

One of Rose’s fellow Quakers, freed slave Akwasi Ayenou, is accused of the murder. Rose is certain he’s innocent and is determined to find out who had a real motive to kill Hannah. Not everyone in Amesbury is pleased by Rose’s efforts to help a person of color, including the owner of the factory where Hannah was employed, Lester Colby. The hatred many feel toward Akwasi is turned onto Rose and her niece, with tragic results.

The one bright spot for Rose during all this heartache seems to be her relationship with David Chase. He supports her fully in her efforts to clear Akwasi, and asks her to marry him. She readily agrees, although she is concerned that his family may object to the union. Her worst fears are realized when she is confronted by David’s mother, who says she forbids the marriage, and if it should take place, David will be disinherited. Rose receives a note from David indicating that he will never give her up, but when Rose sees him squiring around the woman his mother has pre-selected as an acceptable match, her heart is broken.

“Called to Justice” is the second in the prolific Edith Maxwell’s *Quaker Midwife Mystery* series. The book is an intelligent, well-researched story with compelling characters and a fast-moving plot. Excellent!

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

THE SPY ACROSS THE TABLE

By Barry Lancet

Jim Brodie, San Francisco P.I., is determined to find the soulless individual who took the lives of two of his personal friends: Michael Dillman, a Japanese Theater Designer; and Sharon Tanaka, a Production Designer for American movies. Of course, this is no ordinary case; this is one of those completely far-fetched, yet believable investigations that has Jim rubbing elbows with the high-up politicians in China, North Korea and America all at the same time.

The murders take place backstage during a production at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. After the horror, Jim finds himself summoned to the White House; the First Lady was the college roommate of one of the victims and she wants no one but Jim to work expressly for her and track down this vicious killer.

As Brodie dives into the mess, he is told that the head of Homeland Security, Tom Swelley, is extremely upset because of Brodie's presence. But Brodie stays on the case, flying to Tokyo to attend Sharon's funeral. Unfortunately, even more horror occurs when, during the ceremony, Sharon's daughter Anna is kidnapped by a gang wearing black and sent to North Korea. Seems that Anna is a software scientist who created an information-gathering program for the National Security Agency and, if the North Korean's gain access to her, they will also gain top-secret information regarding America's military.

Going up against spies, thieves, ruthless killers and some of the biggest 'shots' America has, Jim Brodie works for the biggest shot of all to bring a killer to justice, eliciting the help of his cop girlfriend and his own seven-year-old daughter.

The action, as always when it comes to this fantastic character, never stops. Readers who have been waiting for the next *Jim Brodie* thriller to appear will not be disappointed.

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



A DEATH AT THE YOGA CAFE

By Michelle Kelly

In this fantastically written cozy, readers meet back up with Keeley Carpenter, a lady who is balancing her new eatery, The Yoga Café, with the illustrious job of solving yet another murder.

Keeley has come back to her little part of the world that she called home years ago, an English village by the name of Belfrey, to open up her dream. The Yoga Café is part yoga studio, part vegetarian café, and Keeley has worked hard to make this dream come true. She is also dating the very handsome Detective Ben Taylor, and her life is looking and feeling good. But, sadly, with Keeley's track record things never seem to run smoothly for long.

Getting involved with the community, Keeley builds a booth at the annual Belfrey Arts Festival along with fellow small business owner, Raquel, who is not exactly Keeley's favorite person. Nevertheless, Keeley is prepared to 'play nice' but is extremely upset when Raquel's love interest, the town mayor, is found dead after a very public spat.

Ben is determined to keep Keeley out of the case. Trouble is, she's sure that Raquel didn't have anything to do with the killing even though she is seen as suspect number one. Trying to help Raquel, who is not all that helpful, Keeley runs her own investigation and immediately catches the interest of the killer.

This series began with the well-received, "Downward Facing Death," and continues to pull readers and fans into Keeley's world. And, for the cooks out there, recipes from The Yoga Café are included along with a mystery that will keep you riveted until the very end.

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



THE LIBRARIANS AND THE MOTHER GOOSE CHASE

By Greg Cox

Cox delivers another amazing novel featuring The Librarians: a group of people who each have unique skill sets and are responsible for making sure magic does not overwhelm the earth. The TV series airs on the TNT network and has been recently renewed for a fourth season.

In print, this is a follow up to "The Librarians and the Lost Lamp," and it is even better. Stories can be powerful, and what if the words of Mother Goose were the strongest of all? Almost 300 years ago, her stories were compiled, but the result of this process was chaos and havoc. The original book was divided into thirds and dispersed. Now someone wants to resurrect this power and will find the three missing pieces at all costs. Not only are the distant relatives of the original woman who was Mother Goose in danger, but so is the entire world.

Cox nails the individual nuances of all the characters to make this a wonderful addition to the world of The Librarians. Fans of the series must read this one.

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

GHOSTAL LIVING

By Kathleen Bridge

Meg Barrett, the protagonist in Kathleen Bridge's *Hamptons Home and Garden* mystery series, is finally settling down to a good life in Montauk, Long Island, after ditching both her unfaithful fiancé and her high-powered job as an editor at a glossy home decorating magazine. Her interior design business, Cottages by the Sea, is thriving, largely due to her unique take on decorating—she finds most of her treasures by scouring local garage and estate sales in the nearby, oh-so-swanky, oh-so-wealthy Hamptons.

Meg is excited about her newest assignment, decorating rooms at the Bibliophile Bed and Breakfast for wealthy rare book collector Franklin Hollingsworth, who is also the guiding force behind Sag Harbor's upcoming first Antiquarian Book and Ephemera Fair. Because her home is under renovation, Meg has moved into the B and B with her diva cat, Josephine, to continue decorating the suites, each of which is named after, and decorated in the style of, a famous American author. So, she has a first-hand look at the ever-unfolding dramas there, most of which are more intense than anything she anticipated.

Rumor also has it that Franklin is in possession of "The Heiress and The Light," an unpublished manuscript written by the great F. Scott Fitzgerald, which he plans to read from at the opening of the book fair. When the manuscript's authenticator is found dead, questions begin to swirl around the provenance of the manuscript. And valuable rare books begin to disappear from the B and B. Meg is sure there is a connection between the books' disappearance and the authenticator's death, and tries to prove it before the book fair opens. With deadly results.

"Ghostal Living" is another delightful sneak peek into life in the Hamptons, with intricate plotting and a likeable, down-to-earth protagonist. I especially loved the atmosphere of this book, and the background information it provides about many of America's best-loved authors. Check it out for yourself and you'll see what I mean.

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

THE RIDGE

By John Rector

Megan Stokes has just moved from the big city of Chicago to Willow Ridge, a not so big city, where her husband Tyler has just taken a job at The Institute—a research center that's Willow Ridge's largest employer.

A short time after the new couple moves in Megan calls on Rachel Addison, a neighbor who has been flirting with Tyler. Sadly, the visit ends with Megan throwing a tantrum and Rachel falling and breaking her neck. Megan tells her husband what happened and he goes to see for himself. Odd part is, when he calls on Rachel, she answers the door—very much alive. Megan is sure that Rachel was dead when she left her home just a few minutes ago. But as things begin to change all around her, Megan starts to notice other oddities. It seems that the town's manicured lawns, beautiful houses and quiet, tree-lined streets may all be nothing more than a mirage.

According to Tyler, this is the perfect place for them to start a new life. But as far as Megan is concerned, the community is not all about being welcoming. Something is sitting beneath the surface of Willow Ridge; something that chills Megan to her very core.

She finds a friendly ear in David Mercer, a neighbor who listens to her as she talks about her suspicions. Mercer begins to tell her about experiments being done and documents related to said experiments that he has hidden in the woods, just in case he needs them. As Megan finds herself trapped between the town and the folks in it, including her own husband, she's desperate to expose Willow Ridge and find out the truth. Problem is, will she be able to do that before the lies and madness get turned on her?

Rector has brought forth a new type of chill that once again proves small towns are not the peaceful little worlds they claim to be.

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

ABIGALE HALL

By Lauren A. Forry

Talk about your perfect creepy Gothic thriller!

It is at the end of World War II when readers meet Eliza Haverford, seventeen years old, and her twelve-year-old sister Rebecca. The two girls have had their share of tragedy, losing their parents and having to live with their Aunt Bess, who is definitely not mother material, in a rundown apartment in London.

Even though the battles are over, jobs, food, housing, and clothing remain hard to come by. Aunt Bess, always the opportunist, decides to rid herself of her nieces and make a little money in the bargain. The girls are sent to Wales where they are to work for Mrs. Pollard, a housekeeper at a desolate old estate known as Thornecroft.

Once there, Eliza finds everything from blood-spattered books to photographs and portraits of a woman which starts Eliza looking into the vast amount of mysteries hidden within the house. But when her sister's health begins to decline, getting out of the halls of Thornecroft becomes the main goal.

Thornecroft is beyond odd, and Mrs. Pollard as well as others in-residence add to the sinister setting. Eliza is a strong girl but her questions are never answered by the people in the house. As Eliza tries to pry information out of other residents in the town, only one person, Ruth Owen, is willing to talk to her. But Eliza uncovers clues about something evil going on and must find out what it is in order for her and her sister to survive and find a way to freedom.

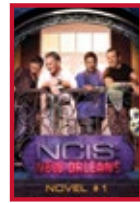
This debut is sheer perfection, with the threat of death lurking around every corner. The atmosphere is dead-on, from the creepy London streets to a true Gothic landmark. This ghostly story feels so real it would be better to read it in the backyard surrounded by a whole lot of sunshine. Forry is one debut author to most definitely keep both eyes on!

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



NCIS NEW ORLEANS: CROSSROADS

By Jeff Mariotte



The first original novel to feature the characters from the CBS procedural *NCIS: New Orleans* opens in the midst of Mardi Gras and starts running from there. The cover is a bit misleading since a character that left at the end of season 2 is featured, but is not even mentioned in the story. That aside, except for an occasional hiccup with someone doing or saying something out of character, it still works as reading a lost episode of the third season.

A soldier appears to have jumped to his death from a hotel balcony onto a parade float, but evidence shows that his trajectory was impossible without someone assisting him. Toss in some voodoo and the wonderful New Orleans setting, and you have an exciting mystery with those NCIS Federal Agents from the top-rated series.

Hopefully this is only the start of a series of novels with them.

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

MARRIAGE IS PURE MURDER

By Staci McLaughlin



Planning a wedding under any circumstances is super stressful. There are so many details that must be attended to, like the venue, the food, the guest list, the dress, the flowers. To say nothing of those pesky little last-minute crises that seem to pop up, threatening to put a damper on the proceedings. Or, even worse, cancel it completely.

Just ask Dana Lewis, who is finally marrying the love of her life, Jason Forrester, in the sixth title of the *Blossom Valley* mystery series. Everyone at the O'Connell Organic Farm, where Dana works, is pitching in to be sure Dana has the wedding of her dreams. Even sometimes prickly local florist Bethany Lancaster is going above and beyond, making sure Dana has just the right flowers. But when Dana returns to Bethany's shop for a final consultation and finds Bethany shot to death, it puts a crimp in the wedding plans, especially when the local police add Dana to their suspect list. It seems that a mysterious witness claims she overheard Dana and Bethany arguing right before Bethany's death, and since Dana is the one who was first on the scene, well...the police add two and two and come up with five.

Dana knows she's innocent, and decides to find out who really dunnit, and why. It turns out that, in addition to arranging flowers, Bethany had a lucrative side business—she was blackmailing several people, and kept a ledger recording the payments.

Bethany's daughter, Violet, who has inherited the flower shop from her mother, also had a motive. She really wants to be a professional writer, but her mother poooh-pooed the idea and told her she had no talent, forcing her to continue working in the shop. As the suspect list gets even longer, Dana knows she has to sort out the real killer if she's going to get to the church on time.

"Marriage is Pure Murder" is pure fun!

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

MAGPIE MURDERS

By Anthony Horowitz

Susan Ryeland is an editor at Cloverleaf Books Publishing. She is all set to read the latest manuscript of the *Atticus Pund* series written by one, Alan Conway. She doesn't see any problems; after all, this new manuscript should follow along naturally with the rest of series. Main character, Atticus, is a German refugee who has assisted the police in many murder cases and, sadly, this will probably be his last seeing as that he's dying from a terminal illness.

As Susan begins to read, Atticus is in Saxby-on-Avon, helping Inspector Raymond Chubb.

They are looking into two cases that seem to be interwoven: the murder of a cleaning woman named Mary, the village gossip who knew the entire town's secrets, and the beheading of Sir Magnus at Pye Hall. Much like Agatha Christie, there are umpteen suspects that vary from the vicar to Magnus' sister, and the book's hero, Atticus, is just at the point of naming the murderer when the manuscript dead stops. There are three missing chapters, but that's not the worst of things. Writer Alan Conway has been found dead as a doornail, apparently committing suicide.

Cloverleaf Books is in financial trouble and Alan was their best author. Editor Susan is convinced that Alan was murdered. Susan goes out into the real world and plays detective as she searches for Alan's killer as well as the missing chapters. She feels that those lost pages might contain clues to Alan's murder. What she doesn't remember is that a dangerous killer may be out there on the loose and heading directly at her.

This is a spectacular book by Anthony Horowitz who has written a tale that will have avid crime readers hanging on every word. The characters and plotlines are fantastic and will draw readers in from the very first page, making this a "5-Star" read.

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



DEAD COLD BREW

By Cleo Coyle

This sixteenth *Coffeehouse Mystery* opens with a scene from July 1956, inside the walls of the cruise ship, *Andrea Doria*, near the coast of Nantucket. A wife by the name of Angelica Campana is in a stateroom with her abusive husband as the boat begins to sink. What occurs there was kept a secret from that day on.

Now, in present day, Clare Cosi, Coffeehouse Manager, and her business partner, ex-husband Matteo Allegro, are discussing a new business opportunity. Matt and Clare have been asked to prepare a new coffee blend for a competition being held among coffee houses. The winner will have their blend sold and stocked on the new cruise ship that has been built; this ship is a revival of the first *Andrea Doria*—the 'super ship' that met with tragedy back in 1956. To get added background, Matt suggests to Clare that she talk to his godfather Gus who had been on the old ship when it sank.

While working on the blend, Clare receives an engagement ring from her boyfriend, Policeman Mike Quinn. The ring has special coffee-colored diamonds in the setting, and her life goes from good to absolutely fantastic.

Like the plot, Clare's luck and experiences begin to move at a rapid pace in more than one direction. Right in the middle of their engagement, an attorney interrupts her day with a letter that gives Clare a treasure for her daughter. Then, the jeweler who designed Clare's lovely ring is poisoned, and both of these events are connected to the sinking of the cruise ship, an Italian curse, and a jewelry thief.

This book is a wonderful addition to this author's magnificent series. Fast-paced, not only is the story great and the characters outstanding, but there are also amazing coffee and pastry recipes to make some great treats to enjoy while reading this tale.

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



THE RED LINE

By Walt Gragg

"The Red Line" is a very interesting war saga that sets the stage for World War III.

It is the very near future, and a revived Soviet Union continues to battle with NATO. Russia's very vicious dictator, Comrade Cheninko, has built his power after being schooled under former dictator, Vladimir Putin. Cheninko is focused on bringing back the Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Pact began in 1955, when the Soviet Union was put in command of armed forces of member states. This came about when NATO voted to allow West Germany to remilitarize, causing the Soviets to believe that this action was a threat—a threat that would one day have to be taken care of personally.

This new "Cold War" by the Soviets soon turns hot when General Vovanovich comes up with a plan to deceive a Soviet enemy and take Germany out in five days. Between the American and Russian sides, politics, military, anger and old wounds that remain festering come to a boil, giving readers a horrendous look at the ultimate destruction made by modern war machines and the possible situations that would result in the killing of Planet Earth. The Americans have come up with their own hero in the guise of Army Staff Sergeant George O'Neill, a communications man who might be able to find some ways to aide American troops and stop Russia in their tracks.

This is a war story that will have your blood running cold, because as we all know by now, the line between victory and defeat is extremely thin when it comes to battle.

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

THE SILENT CORNER

By Dean Koontz

Jane Hawk is a woman who works hard. Everyone who knows her, likes her, and everyone is upset for Jane because her husband took his own life. Odd part here is the fact that there was absolutely no reason for him to commit suicide. And he's not the only one.

Jane knows something bad is going on here. Not paranormal, mind you. The fact is that there are others in America committing suicide. All ages, from various walks of life, and notes are being left behind by these apparent self-destroyers that make no sense to anyone.

Why this rash of suicides? Jane receives threats to back off and stop asking questions: her child's life is at stake. Jane decides to "hide" her son with friends and go out on this personal mission to discover what's going on and why people are dying. What she discovers is monumental and more than frightening.

Jane rides a full-on action-packed wave as she gets chased by criminals, goes after those who are doing bad things in order to get information, teams up with a man who dresses like a homeless person, yet has his own backstory, gets chased by "armed" drones, and even finds a way into a "house of ill-repute" where the girls would make the Stepford Wives extremely proud.

If that isn't enough of a teaser for you, I don't know what is. This is fantastically written (as always by Mr. Koontz), and is a different tangent than normal. This is not supernatural and all the demons are extremely human. You are riveted on page one and you will not stop being riveted until you get to the end, and then... you'll want more. Which Mr. Koontz has delivered. There is a "sneak peek" for the next book in the series and it is incredible. The man who gave us unbelievable characters in the past ("Miss you, Odd Thomas") has now given us a brand new one that will, hands-down, become another fan-favorite. 5 Stars!

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

DEATH IN THE ABSTRACT

By Emily Barnes

Many can agree that finding a sequel just as good, if not better than the original book in a series, is awfully difficult. Well, when it comes to this one, author Emily Barnes should be congratulated because this sequel is one you will not want to miss.

When readers first met Katherine Sullivan, she was the chief of police and a close-knit member of a group of officers that worked in Minnesota. When two of the four met with tragedy, friends Katherine and Nathan Walker were left behind. Katherine subsequently retired and moved on to New Mexico where she wanted to explore a more creative side of life, yet kept in touch with Nathan as the days moved forward. But when she receives a call one day informing Katherine that Nathan has gone missing, soon this retired policewoman is racing back to Minnesota to look for her pal.

Her confidence is high that she'll locate Nathan. However, it doesn't help that the new chief of police is not exactly a huge fan of Katherine's and the last thing he wants to do is help her. The chief feels that a missing persons' case is not important, seeing as that he has a murder to solve and a killer to find.

Katherine thankfully has other friends and employees of Nathan's that jump on board to help her. But the further she investigates his appointments and information Nathan left behind, the less Katherine understands. All she comes across is one home he had visited the day before he disappeared. When she pays a visit to see what she can find, she discovers a person fleeing out the back, and Nathan, bound and gagged but very much alive upstairs. This is one case that has just sprung wide open.

A fantastic story, these characters are once again a delight, the writing is suspenseful and fast-moving, and readers will want a third book as fast as can be.

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

DEATH IN DARK BLUE

By Julia Buckley

Life is good for budding novelist Lena London. A fan of bestselling suspense novelist, Camilla Graham, for years, she's been hired to help Camilla craft her latest suspense novel. And, as a bonus, Lena is now living rent-free in Camilla's home in the quiet town of Blue Lake, Indiana. Camilla is equally delighted to have Lena as her new assistant/houseguest, as Lena has a special affinity for the successful novelist's work. It seems to be a perfect match for both.

Lena has also met the love of her life, Camilla's handsome neighbor, Sam West. But the course of true love rarely runs smooth, and such is the case for Lena and Sam, as their romance is complicated by the fact that Sam's wife, Victoria, disappeared a year ago under suspicious circumstances. After being under attack by the police, national media, and his neighbors as the chief suspect in Victoria's disappearance and possible murder, Sam has recently been cleared when the industrious Lena discovers a recent photo of a very-much-alive Victoria partying on a wealthy man's yacht. Journalists and locals alike are remorseful for their vicious accusations against Sam, especially Taylor Brand, a blogger with a wide following who was Victoria's best friend. Victoria comes to Blue Lake to apologize in person to Sam, but before she can see him, she is murdered on Sam's property and Sam is once again thrust into the national headlines.

"Death in Dark Blue" is the second entry in the *Writer's Apprentice* mystery series. It's a real page turner and the author sets up the third book in the series at the climatic end of book two. I hope Julia Buckley writes the third one quickly. I can't wait to find out what happens next!

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



THE THIRST

By Jo Nesbo

When I read the title, I hoped that Nesbo hadn't taken the popular commercialized path and brought us another vampire plot, even if it did feature his well-worn detective, Harry Hole. I worried needlessly. Although Nesbo gives us plenty of gore, and has victims dropping like Renfield's proverbial flies, his serial killer turns out to be a vampirist, not Dracula's return.

Detective Inspector Katrine Bratt, Hole's final protégé before he retired, heads up the case, along with a crew of up-and-comers. The killer is striking out at girls he meets on the popular dating website, Tinder. Puncture marks on the neck and a missing quantity of blood from each victim brings to mind a modern-day vampire.

It's time to call Hole out of retirement. He has been leading a quiet life with his new wife, Rakel, and stepson, Oleg, but even he knows that his intervening in the case will be the only way to stop more young ladies from a fate worse than death itself; that of being killed off in one of Nesbo's deliciously despicable murders.

Devoting his time, and perhaps his life, in a hunt for what he recognizes as his nemesis—the one he failed to catch—Hole drags the reader along with Oleg, now a student at the police academy in tow, into a descent into Hell to bring justice to the dead women of Oslo.

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

THE INHERITANCE

By Charles Finch

"The Inheritance" is the 10th tale in this fantastic Victorian-era series featuring a member of Parliament turned private detective. This time out, Charles Lenox gets the chance to solve a thirty-year-old mystery that involves his boyhood friend.

Charles hasn't seen his friend from Harrow, Gerald Leigh, in many years. Last time he set eyes on him was when Gerald got happily expelled from school and set off on a life of travel which eventually turned to one filled with scientific fun and games.

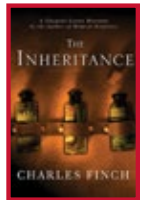
Suddenly hearing from Gerald after all this time generates a sense of excitement; his letter reveals that his return to London is related to his "mysterious benefactor." Lenox and Leigh started their unusual friendship back at school when Leigh explained that his tuition was paid by an anonymous "friend" whose identity he desperately wanted to figure out. It was Lenox's first mystery, and it still hasn't been solved.

It becomes clear quickly that this is much more than child's play when Gerald goes missing and Charles must track him down. Once he does, Gerald reports that attempts have been made on his life. The descriptions of the attackers are at once familiar to Lenox, who recognizes the pair as Anderson and Singh, part of the notorious Farthing Gang. This is when Gerald reveals that the "mysterious benefactor" has recently left him a rather large sum of money, enough to make him a target.

While in London, Gerald is also persuaded to speak at the Royal Society, which has been encouraging his visit for a long time. To Lenox's surprise, his old friend has become quite the sensation. But when Leigh's solicitor, Ernest Middleton, is found murdered, Charles Lenox is reminded that the target is still very much on his friend's back.

It's time he consults with his partners who have been working a break-in case at Parliament. Deceit and surprisingly sinister twists and turns commence, as author Finch raises the stakes in this unforgettable tale.

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



THE GIRL BEFORE

By JP Delaney

Psychological suspense? Only if that category includes an extreme amount of suspense. This begins as a story of two women and one bizarre location: One Folgate Street.

Emma, whose chapters are labeled “Then,” needs a new place to live after a traumatic burglary during which she was threatened with a knife. The rental agent has just the thing, One Folgate Street, a fantastic property, even though the landlord is a bit particular. Jane, whose chapters are “Now,” is looking for a new place with an agent named Camilla, who wants to show her the property first, then explain the drawbacks.

Emma doesn’t have too much trouble getting used to the ultra modern place, where the lights and heat are automatic, and nothing is to be changed. No wastebaskets, no coasters, no cushions, are just a few of the prohibitions. The staircase is a series of stone slabs with no handrail. Emma’s friend Simon likens the sparse, stark place to an upmarket prison cell. Soon Emma realizes that she hasn’t had any panic attacks or flashbacks since moving in. Jane thinks the application process is a bit odd, submitting answers to intrusive questions in order to be approved, although most applicants are rejected. The landlord, she’s told, is looking for honest people.

The questionnaire is given in the book, bit by bit. I had fun trying to answer them as I went. The first one: Please make a list of every possession you consider essential to your life.

The house affects everyone who lives there, molding them and shaping them—changing them. Besides filling out the long list of questions, I found myself wondering who “The Girl Before” really was. Both women delve into the history of the building and the builder. What they find leads to deadly discoveries of birth, death, and terror. I hope you will enjoy this as much as I did. A real edge-of-the-seat read!

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of “Requiem in Red” ■



TRUMPET OF DEATH

By Cynthia Riggs

Martha’s Vineyard’s favorite nonagenarian is at it again. This sleuthing adventure begins innocently enough, when ninety-two-year-old poet-sleuth Victoria Trumbull takes her city-bred tenant, Zack Zeller, on an instructional nature walk around one of the island’s conservation areas. During the walk, Victoria points out different varieties of mushrooms native to the Vineyard, including one called the ‘black trumpet of death.’ Zack files that information away for future use—he plans to use that mushroom to get rid of his troublesome girlfriend, the very spoiled Samantha, who has just announced that she is pregnant with his child. Samantha is a consummate liar, but Zack doesn’t want to take any chances that this time she’s telling the truth.

When he delivers mushrooms to her as a special present, Samantha suspects he’s up to something, and gives the mushrooms to her wealthy father to serve at his Friday night dinner party. Then, Samantha disappears, telling Daddy that she’s going off-island to party with some friends.

Meanwhile, dead bodies begin to appear on the Vineyard. First, a mysterious fire at an abandoned building claims the life of a high school student. And the authorities determine the fire was deliberately set. Next, the bludgeoned body of Samantha is found under a pile of leaves on the local bike path. Victoria has been an honorary deputy on the police force for years, and she is asked to assist in the official investigation.

“Trumpet of Death” is the thirteenth in Cynthia Riggs’ *Martha’s Vineyard Mystery* series. Like the others in this series, it is rich in atmosphere, with well drawn characters and a fast-moving plot that makes it impossible to put down until its satisfactory conclusion. Intelligent writing at its finest.

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



BLACKLIST: THE DEAD RING

By Jon McGoran

McGoran’s dive into the world of NBC’s *The Blacklist* starts a bit off, but quickly gains steam and then does not let up.

Raymond Reddington has vast knowledge, and him not knowing details about a blacklister is just not acceptable. In his criminal world, he should know everything without question, as he does on the show. The Dead Ring, run by someone known as the Ringmaster, creates a real world version of a deadly game where many start and only one finishes to win the prize.

Collateral damage and innocent bystanders getting hurt or killed only adds to the Ringmaster’s fun. Elizabeth Keen resembles one of the latest contestants that they are able to track, so she takes her place. Will she survive long enough to uncover who is responsible for such a diabolical set of challenges?

The TV series continues to go in unexpected ways led by the amazing acting of James Spader as Reddington, and his manipulation of the FBI Task Force he “works” with is gratifying to watch. This story would have made a great episode!

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



THE ULTIMATUM

By Karen Robards

This fantastic tale is the kick-off to what will most definitely be a thrilling series. Beginning in a house where a four-year-old girl loses both her memory and her mother, this story fast forwards to a woman all grown up by the name of Bianca St. Ives.

Raised and taught by a man Bianca thought was her father, she is turned into a successful thief and con artist who is seen as being one of the best in the business by both rivals and friends. Bianca becomes known as The Guardian, and runs a firm with her father where they make a living out of tricking con men and bad guys out of the money they have stolen from others. However, when their latest job goes bad, Bianca finds herself in desperate need to get out of the country of Bahrain. But when she finally does, she is given the news that her father is dead.

Turning away from the seedy side of life, and the company business, Bianca and her love, a computer specialist, make their way to the United States and start a security company, living free without ever having to worry about the long arm of the law. Once in a while, however, she glances at her father’s email account that still has the occasional buyer requesting their old company’s services.

It soon becomes apparent that the U.S. government thinks her father is still alive and they want her to get Richard St. Ives for them, even though Bianca is sure he is dead. Knowing her own past can be held against her, and realizing some unwelcome enemies of her father are keeping an eye on her, Bianca starts to wonder who the good guys really are.

“The Ultimatum” is riveting, mesmerizing, and does not stop for a breath at all. Cliffhangers, action—you name it—Karen Robards has brought it to the page.

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

YOU WILL PAY

By Lisa Jackson

Yet another incredible read coming from the mind of Lisa Jackson, "You Will Pay" takes one and all into the suspense-filled world of Camp Horseshoe.

This is one summer camp that holds a great many secrets. Here, a prank was played that ended with the complete vanishing of two young girls. When the situation played out, there were a list of beliefs as to why these particular girls went missing and what happened to them—rumors circulated that covered everything from drowning to being killed by an escaped convict in the woods. The real story is only known by certain people, and those people decided to keep it silent.

We now jump ahead twenty years: Lucas Dalton, a detective with the Sheriff's Department, has been called upon to check out the discovery of human remains in a cave that was once part of the property known as Camp Horseshoe. Lucas knows the land blindfolded, considering his father was a preacher who ran the camp, and the fact that Lucas worked at the camp during the horrific summer when these two girls went missing.

Lucas should step down from the case, seeing as that he was there twenty years ago, but he can't bring himself to. The past is coming back to life before his very eyes. Not only have bones been found inside this cave, but various female camp counselors are on their way back to town who each own information regarding what really happened that fateful summer.

When a message is found stating: "You Will Pay," new killings begin and it seems quite clear that someone has been waiting a good long time to exact their revenge.

It is never a surprise to say Lisa Jackson has written a thrilling book, but this one is a plot that cannot be missed if you're one of those readers who desperately crave thrills, chills, and justice.

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

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE LAB

By Bethany Blake

Daphne Templeton loves dogs. So it's no surprise that she's a dog walker and pet sitter in her hometown of Sylvan Creek, Pennsylvania, a quaint lakeside community in the Pocono Mountains. A love of animals runs in Daphne's family. Her only sister, Piper, is the local vet. Piper is also the Templeton sister with a head for business, and owns a piece of prime local real estate, Winding Hill Farm, where Daphne and her assortment of dogs also live. Piper's only weak spot is her terrible taste in men. Case in point is her on-again/off-again romance with the arrogant Steve Beamus, who teaches canine agility classes at his Blue Ribbon K9 Academy.

Piper has opened up Winding Hill for a weekend canine agility trial, and handlers are coming from all over the area with their dogs. The weekend event comes to a standstill before it begins when the bludgeoned body of Beamus is found inside a long red tunnel on one of the obstacle courses. There's no question that he was murdered and, unfortunately for Piper, she was overheard having a loud argument with him shortly before his death.

Daphne can think of a long list of other people who hated Beamus, including another spurned ex-girlfriend, Giulia Alberti, and mild-mannered bookstore owner Tom Flinchbaugh. Beamus was responsible for the death of Tom's sister several years ago. But Police Detective Jonathan Black seems convinced of Piper's guilt, and even a surprise confession by Beamus's son fails to take Piper off the suspect list.

When Beamus's Labrador retriever, Axis, disappears, Daphne realizes he could be a canine witness to the crime. Aided by her intuitive basset hound Socrates (Daphne has a Ph.D in Philosophy, hence the dog's name), and a one-eared hyperactive Chihuahua named Artie, Daphne sets out to find Axis and unmask the true killer.

"Death by Chocolate Lab" is a promising start to a series that will entertain both cozy mystery lovers and dog lovers. Woof!

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



MATCHUP

Edited by Lee Child

The latest International Thriller Writers anthology combines wonderful female thriller writers and their signature characters, with terrific male thriller writers doing the same in collaborations that sometimes defy explanation, but are tons of fun.

Some examples of colliding universes include the time travel aspects of Diana Gabaldon's Jamie Fraser with Steve Berry's Cotton Malone; Lee Child's Jack Reacher meeting Kathy Reich's Temperance Brennan; and Lisa Scottoline's Bennie Rosato meeting Nelson DeMille's John Corey. It's also awesome to see David Morrell's Rambo back to meet Gayle Lynds's Liz Sansborough, in a story that uses a clever method to make everything work. Familiarity with the characters and the authors helps make the festivities more amusing, but the stories themselves are also enjoyable even if an author or character is unknown.

This is clearly a bunch of writers having a good time by sharing their toys with each other. Readers will have a blast as well.

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



THE BIG HEIST

By Anthony M. DeStefano

"The Big Heist" is a terrific book that tells the very real story of the Lufthansa Heist, the Mafia, and all-out murder.

The author goes into detail, going back to the year 1978, in order to give readers the full, sometimes brutal account of how the Lufthansa Heist was carried out. For those who do not know, one of the biggest robberies in Mafia history was the Lufthansa Airlines robbery that ended up becoming a huge part of Mafia fact and legend.

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, Anthony DeStefano, takes the time with this book to shed new light on the case that remains unsolved to this very day. This new light comes from new evidence that was brought out during the trial of eighty-year-old Mafia Don Vincent Asaro, who finally spoke out about his role in the robbery.

This account takes readers inside the ranks of America's crime families, with not only new details of this robbery but also other robberies being planned, some that were carried out, who was involved, how they got away with it, and what really happened to the loot. The reporter unveils why Vincent Asaro was found Not Guilty of all charges after being observed by the FBI for three decades. Not to mention, the discovery of human bones in a home in Queens that belonged to another crime family, and dives into the Mafia code of silence known as, Omerta.

The fact that this particular crime was able to be done is amazing in and of itself, but for all these years to still remain unsolved seems absolutely impossible. This book is extremely thorough and this highly-respected journalist has definitely put together a thriller you will not want to put down.

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





TAKE THE BAI ROAD

By Erika Mitchell

Mitchell's follow up to 2015's "Bai Tide" continues the fun adventures of CIA Case Officer Bai Hsu. Readers unfamiliar with him or his previous adventures have nothing to worry about; Mitchell guides the reader into the story and background with ease.

Bai is still dealing with the aftermath of his previous mission in North Korea when he's asked by his boss to investigate a Mexican group called the Ghost Cartel. Before he can even begin to strategize moves however, someone tries to kill his boss. Shortly after that, he's on board a vessel with no backups or knowledge of who to trust. Elements that he has no control over are in play, and to say his life is in danger is an understatement.

What makes this series so pleasurable to read is Bai himself; his somewhat snarky attitude and self-doubt make him more than the mere superhero jumping into chaos to save the day. Seek out the previous books as well.

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



THE LOST WOMAN

By Sara Blaedel

This is a deliciously dark Danish crime thriller, the third in a series featuring Inspector Louise Rick, head of the elite Special Search Agency.

The story begins with a woman being murdered in England—shot through the kitchen window by an unknown killer. Her death uncovers her true identity as a Danish citizen who has been missing for almost twenty years. Rick's lover, Eik, sneaks over to England and ends up jailed for her murder! The relationship between Louise and Eik has been about to cause some problems in the department, but she finds she has much, much bigger problems now. She doesn't know if she can trust what Eik says—or does. She doesn't even know that he didn't kill Sophie, the woman in England, who turns out to have had a past relationship with her.

Louise Rick's world turns to quicksand when she doesn't know who to trust. She encounters mysterious bank accounts and transfers, and more dead people. She also runs headlong into the controversial subject of assisted suicide, and the aspects are examined through different characters, pro and con.

Great tale! Scandinavian through and through.

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

TURBO TWENTY-THREE

By Janet Evanovich

Stephanie is a bounty hunter. Her latest hunt is for a guy who, while on the run, commits the same type of crime again, only this time leaving a body behind. The body is in a freezer along with ice cream. Stephanie goes undercover to help Ranger figure out who is sabotaging a job he is working.

She's in a relationship with Joe, but also has a thing for Ranger. There's a whole love triangle that, I'm under the impression, has been going on for quite a while. The supporting characters cracked me up and were a fun distraction throughout the book. I love the scenes that just make you laugh out loud.

The ice cream factory mystery is more dangerous than Stephanie expects, but the question I am dying to have answered is, Ranger or Joe?

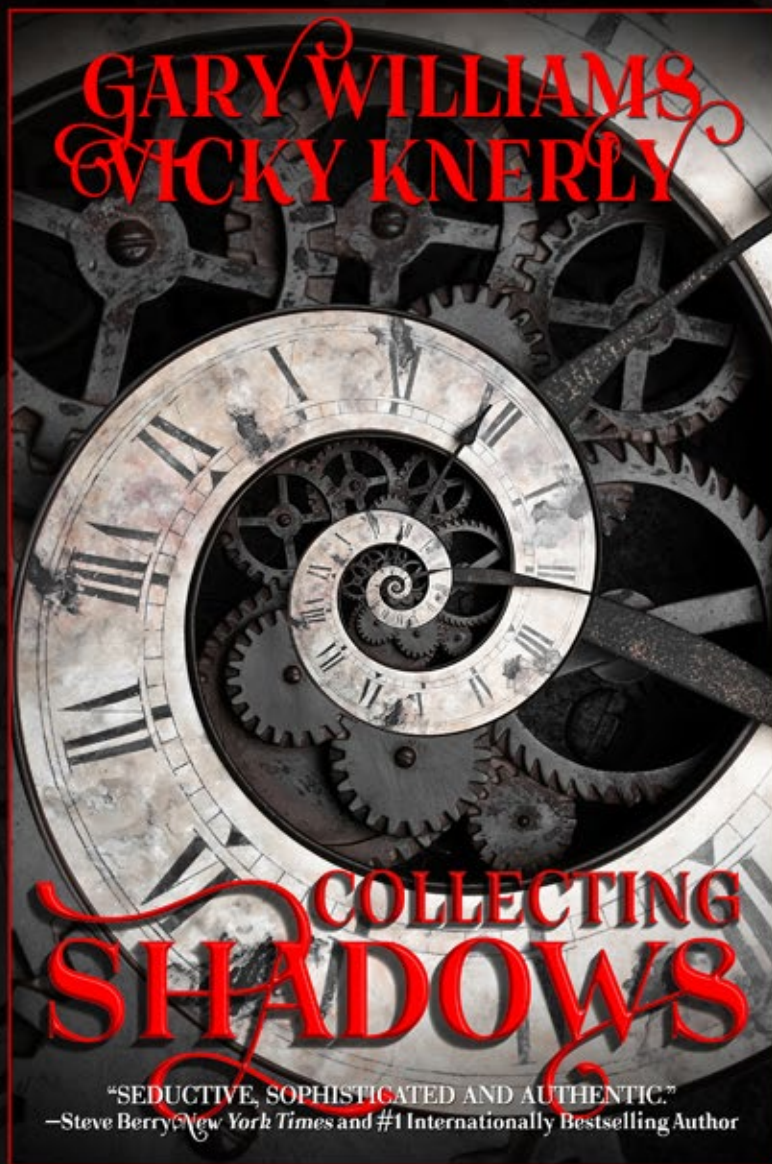
"Turbo Twenty-Three" was my first book to read in the series and I was entertained!

Reviewed by Ashley Dawn, author of "Shadows of Pain" ■



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**SUSPENSE
PUBLISHING**

PEKOE MOST POISON

By Laura Childs

When Theodosia (Theo) Browning, proprietor of Charleston's popular Indigo Tea Shop, and her tea sommelier, Drayton Conneley, are invited to a "rat tea" by Doreen Briggs—one of the city's wealthiest women—they are intrigued and eagerly accept. Although when the door to Doreen's mansion is opened by a server dressed as a rat, Theo and Drayton immediately wonder if attending the party was such a good idea. But they soldier on, getting into the spirit of the event, despite the fact that all the servers are dressed the same way. How many rats does it take to serve tea? Apparently, quite a lot.

The rat tea goes from odd to chaotic when a fire starts at one of the tables. Then Beau Briggs, Doreen's husband, keels over. At first it seems as though he's choking, but Theo, no stranger to murder scenes in Charleston, suspects Beau's been poisoned. Despite all efforts to help him, he dies before the paramedics arrive.

Not satisfied with the police's handling of her husband's odd death, the distraught Doreen asks Theo and Drayton to do some discreet investigating on her behalf. The more questions Theo and Drayton ask about Beau, the longer the list of suspects who wanted him dead becomes. Especially when it appears that Beau has been using his wealthy wife's money for his business dealings without her knowledge or consent.

One of the servers at the rat tea is also found dead, an apparent suicide. And an attempt is made on Theo's life, then on Drayton's. It seems there is a real rat stalking them who won't stop until they are both silenced for good.

"Pekoe Most Poison" is the eighteenth in the prolific Laura Childs' (Gerry Schmitt) *Tea Shop Mystery* series. This series just keeps getting better and better. I loved it.

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



THE ART OF MURDER

By Elaine Viets

Florida private investigator Helen Hawthorne and her chain-smoking landlady, Margery, have decided they are long overdue for a "girls only" outing. Wanting to add a touch of culture, the two choose to spend their day at the gorgeous Bonnet House, a Fort Lauderdale mansion turned museum. A docent-led tour of the museum allows the pair to observe an art class, and they're both impressed with the talent of Annabel Lee Griffin, an up-and-coming local artist who is much too thin to be considered healthy by anyone's standards. Helen has some extra time on her hands, so she signs up to join the class the following day.

The tour ends, and Helen and Margery, along with Annabel and other members of the art class, all walk out of the museum together. The group is barely outside when the frail Annabel begins to sway and says she feels terrible. Is it the heat? Or is something more sinister going on? Annabel collapses and the paramedics are called. Despite efforts to save her, Annabel dies at the hospital.

Annabel's friend, Jenny, a student in the same class, is convinced that the artist was murdered by her crass ex-husband and hires Helen to prove it. Under usual circumstances, Helen works on cases in partnership with her hunky husband, Phil. But Phil is involved in another case—he's busy setting a trap for a thief who's been stealing gold coins at the Silver Glade Condominiums, luxury condos in Fort Lauderdale's "Little New York" neighborhood. The thief has been nicknamed "The Gold Ghost" because he slips in and out of the buildings like a phantom, and isn't ever caught on the security cameras. Is it possible that the couples' two cases are linked somehow? Maybe, but I won't tell you how.

"The Art of Murder" is the fifteenth (yes, you read that right) in Elaine Viets' *Dead-End Job* mystery series. It's a cover-to-cover treat for cozy mystery fans. I loved it!

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

DEADLY SPIRITS

By E. Michael Helms

Mac McClellan, P.I., has been advised by his girlfriend Kate that he is going to have to go to a meeting of the Palmetto Paranormal Society that she wants him to join.

In truth, Mac is quite a character himself. He decides to go to the meeting to amuse the woman he loves, yet begins to feel a little strange about the whole situation as he follows Kate up the dusty stairs of the attic, wiping cobwebs out of his face and beard. When the president of the society is found dead at the bottom of the stairs with a broken neck, things begin to get interesting.

Mac puts on that P.I. cap and starts to wonder how the man could have fallen without anyone hearing him. But when the secretary dies of an apparent suicide, again not issuing a single noise, the more Mac digs the more dirt he discovers. Are these paranormal deaths, or is there a human killer on the loose with some sort of point to prove or score to settle? It is Mac who must find out the facts, and he suspects that there is much more going on than some vengeful ghost.

"Deadly Spirits" is a fine mystery where readers will have to reach the end before finding the answers to all the murderous questions afoot. And readers will be extra happy when they get to that final page and realize that their guesses were completely wrong. Prepare yourself for a whole lot of action and a big revelation during a storm, as a killer is delivered that you will never forget.

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



ILL MET BY MURDER

By Elizabeth J. Duncan

This creative, delightful book is the second in Elizabeth J. Duncan's *Shakespeare in the Catskills Mysteries*.

Up in the stunning surroundings of the Catskills Mountains, lies the Catskills Shakespeare Theater Company. They are about to have their annual fundraising performances to be held at the country estate of wealthy widow, Paula Van Dusen. When Paula asks for the help of Costume Designer Charlotte Fairfax, Charlotte is happy to help out with the current production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It seems that Mrs. Van Dusen is using the play as a background for her daughter's wedding.

Everything is going swimmingly until the body of one of the groom's bitterest business rivals is found dead during the performance. The corpse is found wearing a stolen prop—the head of a donkey.

There are many, many suspects where this one is concerned, starting with the bride, one of the bridesmaids, and a suspicious real estate broker looking hungrily at the property next to the theater that he wants to have as his next big sale. An old scandal for the bride and groom reappears and a killer with a whole lot of revenge in his/her heart keeps readers guessing until the very end.

There's a lot to be said about a cozy with many characters and clues galore. This new tale is just as good as the previous one, and proves that these *Shakespeare* mysteries are going to be a whole lot of fun to follow.

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

TIGHTENING THE THREADS

By Lea Wait

When Angie Curtis returned to Haven Harbor, Maine, to take over running the family business, Mainely Needlepoint, she anticipated a life filled with good friends, family, and designs of beautiful needlework for decorators and other high-end clients. She was happy to give up her old job as an assistant to a private investigator in Arizona for quiet, picturesque Haven Harbor, Maine. But every town has its secrets, as Angie quickly finds out.

Angie's dear friend, antique dealer Sarah Byrne, has never shared much with Angie about her past and what drew her from her native Australia to Haven Harbor. But she finally confides that she's come to town looking for her long-lost family, and discovers that wealthy old artist and gallery owner Ted Lawrence is her uncle. Ted is thrilled with his newly found niece, and decides to throw himself a birthday bash and announce their blood connection. He invites his adult children, whom he has not kept in close touch with—daughter Abbie and her husband, Silas, as well as sons Michael and Luke—to come for his birthday weekend, along with his gallery manager, Jeremy, Angie, and Angie's boyfriend Patrick. At dinner the first night, Ted reveals that he is dying of cancer, something no one had suspected, that Sarah is his blood niece, and that he is leaving all the valuable paintings in his collection to her. The children are shocked, and very suspicious of Sarah and her motives. When Ted is poisoned to death at a lobster bake on the beach the following night, suspicion immediately falls on Sarah.

Lea Wait keeps the surprises coming in "Tightening the Threads," the fifth in her *Mainely Needlepoint* mystery series. Like all of Wait's previous mysteries (she also writes the *Antique Print* mystery series) it offers a wonderful sense of place and characters right from the very beginning. Highly recommended!

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



LOLA

By Melissa Scrivner Love

At the start of this extremely interesting debut, Lola is the host, along with her boyfriend Garcia, of a neighborhood barbecue being held at the house where they live. Garcia seems to be the boss of a South Central L.A. gang known as "The Crenshaw Six." When a man known as El Coleccionista arrives at the barbecue without an invitation to meet with Garcia privately, Lola makes sure to be right on hand to provide anything the men may need.

At first, Lola is surprised that their visitor, a man from the drug cartel they work for, isn't upset that she stays there. Instead of sending her away, he simply sits down and begins to talk about a job he has for Garcia. This job involves interfering in a huge transaction going down between a rival gang and a supplier in order to find out the identity of some distributors on the street.

Lola starts to realize that the reason why she's still there is that this man doesn't believe she's important enough to even bother sending away. What's funny, of course, is that readers are soon told that Lola is not the least important person in the room, so to speak, she is actually the most powerful and dangerous. Lola knows how to exact revenge. Garcia is simply a figurehead; Lola is the cold-blooded killer running "The Crenshaw Six" show, and is the one who shot their last leader (her previous boyfriend) in order to take over the gang in the first place.

Surprises are around every corner and this author does a brilliant job of writing harsh, horrific life on the streets of L.A. and what gang violence is all about. It will definitely be interesting to see what's next in this author's career.

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



SONG OF THE LION

By Anne Hillerman

At the start of an alumni basketball game being played at Shiprock High School, a bomb goes off in the parking lot. One of the people at the game, Officer Bernadette "Bernie" Manuelito, is just ready to grab her hotdog and head for the gym when all heck breaks loose.

Heading to the parking lot, Bernie finds a gravely injured man at the scene, but it's soon realized that the actual target of the bomber was Aza Palmer, a lawyer who is scheduled to mediate a meeting among Native Americans, environmentalists, and various other groups as they discuss a proposed resort to be built on Navajo land.

The job of Bernie's husband, Police Sgt. Jim Chee, is to guard Palmer and navigate the collection of protesters and residents with different tribal groups, languages, and concerns. Bernie and Jim have come across a plan to mess up the negotiations between two tribes in order to make a little trouble, and Joe Leaphorn, a retired police lieutenant, thinks that the bombing might be linked to an old cold case that he handled many years ago. As Joe, Bernie and Chee start looking into the crime, they find that they are up against far more than ecoterrorism; they are actually dealing with a very patient killer just waiting to get revenge.

Author Anne Hillerman is a terrific writer and magically brings to life the beauty of the Navajo customs. The three main characters are intricate, yet feel almost like best friends or neighbors. The plot is extremely well-written and touches upon many areas of life, from dealing with racism and bias to finding a way to discover peace in a world that is highly bent on destruction.

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

TREBLE AT THE JAM FEST

By Leslie Budewitz

"Treble at the Jam Fest" is the third in the *Food Lovers' Village* mysteries by Agatha Award-winning author Leslie Budewitz. Like the first two in the series, the book is set in Jewel Bay, Montana, a town known for promoting homegrown and homemade local fare in every way possible.

Erin Murphy is now the manager of her family business, Murphy's Mercantile, a.k.a. The Merc, which has been a staple in Jewel Bay for over 100 years. Always on the lookout for a way to promote her beloved town and her thriving business, Erin readily agrees to help with Jewel Bay's annual Jazz Festival. The event gets off to a rocky start when it's obvious from the opening notes that all is not well between festival headliner, jazz guitarist Gerry Martin, and several other musicians, including his own protégé, Gabby Drake. After a heated argument with festival director Rebecca Whitman, whom he accuses of lying to get him to appear at the event, Martin stalks off. When his body is found the following morning at the bottom of a ravine, it appears at first that Martin lost his footing and fell onto the rocks. But damaging evidence, and no shortage of people who hated Martin, convince authorities that the musician was murdered.

Like it or not, Erin is pulled into the investigation as first one, then another of Jewel Bay's residents is suspected of the crime. Her stress level increases when her sweetheart, Adam, announces that his best friend has been diagnosed with cancer for the third time, and he must leave Jewel Bay for an indefinite period to help.

"Treble at the Jam Fest" has all the necessary elements to satisfy cozy mystery lovers: likeable, believable characters, a fast-moving plot, and a logical ending. Great fun!

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

GOLDEN PREY

By John Sandford

The *Prey* series by John Sandford now extends through 27 books, which is an accomplishment itself. However, Sandford has managed to keep his hero, Lucas Davenport, fresh and interesting by regularly throwing him into different jobs and situations. Davenport's newest incarnation, as a U.S. Marshal, rips him out of his familiar Minnesota and sends him traversing the South.

Garvin Poole has been a ghost to the Marshal Service for years. The robber has operated throughout the South, working with a loose network of similar men, and has been tied to an armored car heist and the murder of a state trooper. However, he's been invisible for five years. Part of his success in avoiding detection is his complete ruthlessness. Witnesses to his crimes don't survive to tell their stories.

Poole and his long-time girlfriend, Dora Box, have lived in Dallas, protected by a web of false IDs and sustained by the profits of Poole's robberies that he'd put into gold coins. However, no cover is completely safe, and they're debating where they'll run to next. The gold, though, is a problem in that he can only cash in the coins slowly without arousing suspicion. When an old friend brings him a potential job, Poole's ready to work.

They hit a counting room for Honduran drug lords, netting them millions. They also leave behind five bodies, including a child who happened to come to work with her grandpa. The violence of the offense, as well as Poole's long run as a fugitive, attracts Davenport's attention, and he sets about tracking them down. But he's not the only one. The Hondurans want their money back, and they've sent a team after Poole and Box who start by interrogating the fugitives' families—using power tools.

"Golden Prey" returns Davenport to the front lines of crime. Outside of Minnesota, cut off from his network of snitches, he must go back to his investigational roots. It blows a deep breath of fresh air into the series, and will make longtime fans anxious for Sandford's next *Prey* novel.

Reviewed by David Ingram ■

TOM CLANCY'S POINT OF CONTACT

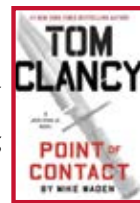
By Mike Maden

Just as Jack Ryan, Jr. is celebrating the success of his last mission, he is asked to begin a different kind of assignment. Usually working with the black ops group called The Campus, which take orders only from the President of the United States, this time out Jack is being called to the table by the firm Hendley Associates, where he is employed as an analyst.

Former U.S. Senator Weston Rhodes has hired Hendley Associates to help with a business deal that's about to go down. He asks specifically for Paul Brown, a forensic accountant, and the best analyst Hendley has on staff, which just so happens to be Ryan, for the job. The deal will be for Rhodes' company to acquire Dalfan Technologies, a business which specializes in some high-tech tracking and weapon systems. Rhodes wants someone to 'crunch the numbers' to make sure there will be no surprises, and for that reason a third party accounting firm is necessary.

While taking occasional jobs between secret missions is essential to preserving Ryan's cover, Jack isn't exactly happy about leaving his team behind to play analyst for a week in Singapore. But what begins as a routine audit soon turns into something much more dangerous. Paul Brown has been given a top-secret mission of his own that even Ryan isn't aware of; his secrets reach as high as the CIA and the illegal downloading of a cyberwarfare program. When Brown and Ryan end up on the same path, they find themselves running from a dangerous storm as well as a team of trained assassins ready to wipe both of them out.

Mike Maden is now at the 'helm' of the tales of Jack Ryan, and he definitely proves that he knows the ins-and-outs of an action story and can certainly take readers to the edge of their seats when it comes to thrills. It's nice to know that Tom Clancy's creation will have more adventures ahead. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



RATHER BE THE DEVIL

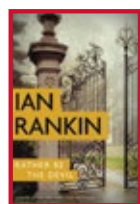
By Ian Rankin

In lovely continental fashion, this book spins a complicated plot and contains a host of characters, set in Scotland. If I counted correctly, this is the 24th *Rebus* novel. No, it's not *A* rebus, it features a character, John Rebus, who after all those books, is now retired. Or he's supposed to be. You can't keep a good detective down, though.

He's trying to keep busy, puttering around with old unsolved cases. However, when he starts digging into one involving a famous rock star and the murder of a beautiful woman, something strange happens. Detective Inspector Siobhan Clarke catches a murder that rings a bell connected with this old case for Rebus. Another old friend, DI Malcolm Fox has been transferred to Gartcosh, causing ill feelings when he's sent to Edinburgh to help out. None of the three want to work with each other. An elaborate money-laundering trail leads through a betting parlor connected with people familiar to Rebus. Meanwhile, Rebus is hiding his physical condition from everyone, spitting up blood from his COPD on the sly. The awkward team works beatings and dead bodies to arrive at a conclusion of sorts.

This is a darkish read with a high body count. Readers familiar with the characters will welcome them back and love this book.

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



DEATH BY VANILLA LATTE

By Alex Erickson

Krissy Hancock is the leading lady of this tale; she is an amateur detective who is placed in the awkward position of attempting to clear her own father of murder. Normally Krissy spends her days being the owner of "Death by Coffee," a bookstore/café located in her little hometown of Pine Hills, but she has also developed a reputation over time as a crime solver.

This time out, Krissy is extremely surprised to have her father, mystery writer James Hancock, show up for a visit with his agent, Rick, and Rick's own assistant. Her father has been asked to give a talk to the local book club, but James is amazed when he discovers that almost everyone in town is a member of the club and almost every single one of them wants him to read their books. James attempts to get Rick to read the books, but Rick disappears like the boorish man he is before the crowd or James can grab him. The next morning, however, Krissy heads to the hotel and finds that Rick has been stabbed in his hotel room.

Officer Paul Dalton, Krissy's ex, is more than a bit unhappy to find Krissy involved in yet another crime. His unhappiness really grows, however, when Krissy's father confesses to Paul that he went to Rick's hotel room the night before, and not only fired him but punched him in the face. He swears he certainly didn't kill his own agent, but James becomes suspect number one anyway.

Turns out, much like it always was with Agatha Christie's long list of suspects, almost all of the authors from the book club had visited the hotel and left their manuscripts in the hopes that Rick would read them, which opens the door to a long list of people who could have wiped the agent out. With the number of suspects and Krissy's awesome handling of the investigation, readers will have a whole lot of fun finding out 'whodunit.'

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





KONG: SKULL ISLAND 2017

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

There seems to be a trend to reboot the classic monster flicks, and the upcoming *The Mummy*, with Tom Cruise, only emphasizes that point. A *Godzilla* sequel and a just announced film pitting Kong against that same giant lizard means that this “new” emphasis is not going away anytime soon.

To say this is the best film featuring the giant ape since the 1933 original might not mean much, but there are worse ways to spend time than watching great actors run around in the midst of exotic locales and stellar special effects. The sheer enormity of Kong’s size has not been showcased very well, until now. The other creatures also add some loud bone-crunching escapism. The end credits show more to come beyond once again revealing that it seems to be more cost effective to just bring back the classics rather than something original. If a reboot is this much fun, I’m on board. ■

THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS 2017

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

Honestly, while this series is a lot of fun and has some amazing stunt work, the last movie was a perfect way to end the series. It was a huge risk to make one without Paul Walker while also making Vin Diesel the villain, since the entire franchise emphasizes family as much as they highlight car hijinks. Forcing the team to join forces with the previous antagonist to stop the hero from causing havoc? Doubts were quickly quashed as the fun began. How can the team stop the man who brought them together in the first place? This works, and everyone’s motivations make total sense. The climax aboard a plane mid-flight makes the entire movie worthwhile.

With two more films in the pipeline, it will be interesting to see how they can continue to up the stakes, character arcs, and mayhem. Rumors of Dwayne Johnson and Jason Statham making a spinoff movie with their characters would be more than welcome. ■



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2 2017

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

How do you take a quirky and somewhat strange sci-fi entry in the Marvel Comic Universe and make a sequel? Take a page from the *Fast and Furious* franchise and emphasize family. Add in an amazing soundtrack that highlights the storyline, and the end result is another hilarious and engaging entry. A mission to stop a creature becomes a chase across the galaxy when Rocket steals some batteries from a race of people who don’t take kindly to betrayal. Star-Lord learns the real identity of his

MOVIES

father, and Gamora is forced to confront her sister who wants to see her dead. Groot is a baby tree, and his antics make the movie go from mere fun to priceless. You will never listen to Electric Light Orchestra's song *Mr. Blue Sky* the same way again. Bringing back these characters for the next *Avengers* movie and Vol. 3 cannot come fast enough. ■

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: The Return 2017

TV Series – Comedy/Sci-Fi (Netflix)

The original featuring Joel, and later Mike, and the two robot friends who sit in silhouette and mock bad movies was fun, and made even the most painful experiences funny. It is hard to imagine wanting to watch such movies as *Manos: The Hands of Fate* without the hilarious commentary. Following a massive Kickstarter campaign, and Netflix jumping on board, newbie Jonah is now forced to watch bad movies with new mad scientists and new voices for both of the bots. Joel Hodgson, the star of the original series, is the man behind the scenes, juggling that fine line between nostalgia for the old version and insuring this new version appeals to both the diehard fans and those unfamiliar with the entire concept of making fun of atrocious movies. It should not work, but it does. The new cast is exceptional, and the movies they are tackling are quite bad, but perfect for the concept. A movie cannot just be awful, it also has to be good enough to shine under hilarious and snarky comments. Definitely check this out, and hopefully an announcement for a new season of horrible films is forthcoming. ■

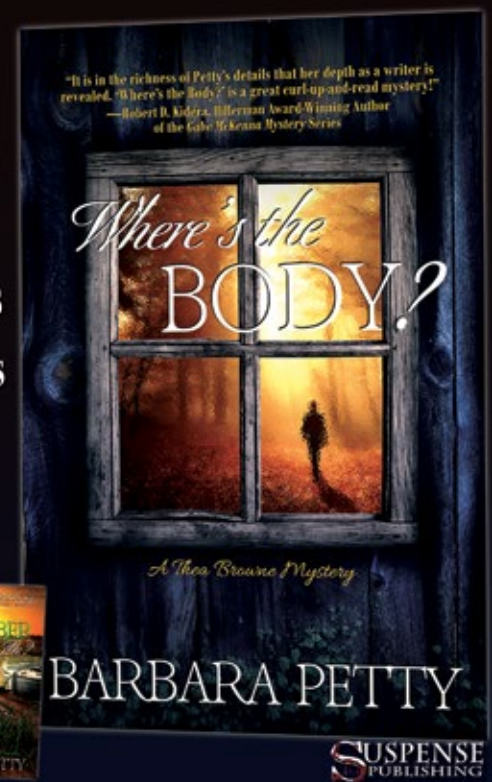


Jeff Ayers co-hosts *Beyond the Cover* with John Raab, and is a freelance reviewer for the *Associated Press*, *Library Journal*, and *Booklist*. He is the author of several books in the worlds of both fiction and non-fiction, including "Voyages of Imagination: The *Star Trek* Fiction Companion" and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

**"Everyone needs a friend like Thea Browne!
Petty's style is sensitive and engaging, her story
is engrossing, spanning three generations of
richly-drawn characters. It is in the richness of Petty's
details that her depth as a writer is revealed. 'Where's
the Body?' is a great curl-up-and-read mystery!"**

—Robert D. Kidera, Hillerman award-winning author of
the *Gabe McKenna* Mystery series

BARBARA PETTY
A Thea Browne Mystery



Featured Artist

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*



Elena Nizaeva
Lives Life Through Different Lenses

MAGIC ELECTRICITY



Born in a small Siberian town in Russia, Elena Nizaeva's passion for photography began at a young age. Watching her father work in his home photo lab, Elena was intrigued. And at the age of eleven, when she received her very first camera, she realized immediately that the creative world of photography

was her one true love.

With the advent of digital photography, Elena became fascinated by Photoshop, and she proceeded to study the science of image processing independently. Working now in the realm of photomanipulation, with elements of artistic drawing, her works of fantastical landscapes and characters create just the right atmosphere and mood, allowing the stunning images to become locked in the viewer's memory. Constantly in a state of creativity and evolution, Elena has also become actively engaged in illustrating books, and recently was able to take a moment with *Suspense Magazine* to talk about the beauty of Siberia, the processes of bringing her art to the world, and her greatest desire to continue to work with other photographers, artists and creative people in the future.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Can you tell readers a little about the Siberian landscapes and what effects they may have had on your artistry growing up?

Elena Nizaeva (E.N.): *The nature of Russian Siberia is very picturesque. I was born in the center of the oil industry of my country, but despite this, our 'nature' is both amazing and beautiful. In our landscapes, the greatness of the taiga, the power of rivers and lakes, and the harsh climate combine. Much of the territory of Siberia is wild and deserted, which makes them even more attractive.*

My parents instilled in me a love for nature; in my childhood I spent a lot of time outside the city. I think that the visual images of beautiful places, in general, helped pave the way for my eventual introduction to the art world. I think that the natural world helps a creative person to relax and immerse themselves in a world of beauty.

S. MAG.: When you received your first camera, you stated photography became your first real love. Can you tell our readers what you loved about taking photographs and what you most liked capturing on film?



“I think that the natural world helps a creative person to relax and immerse themselves in a world of beauty.”



LOST AND FORGOTTEN

E.N.: I was born and grew up in a city surrounded by stunning natural wonders, so my passion is macro photography. My first photo, which I took at eleven years old, was the landscape of Budapest, Hungary. It was from this day that I realized there was nothing more beautiful than the great outdoors and things that the 'human eye' cannot see. I like to photograph plants, insects—even a small grain of sand. Some of the finest things are those that we do not see or notice every day. The lens of the camera helps to show the invisible side of nature and life in general.

S. MAG.: Entering into Photoshop. Can you give us a little background on what “pulled” you in and made you want to be a part of the digital art world?

E.N.: I engaged in the first trial version of the Photoshop program more than ten years ago. At that time, I did not utilize all the power and capabilities of this program. At the beginning of my work, I fully dedicated all my time to photo re-touching, then I got acquainted with the art of photomanipulation. I like to express myself with the help of my art. Photoshop opened my creative 'doors' to the incredible world of art, accessible through digital photography.

S. MAG.: Do you have any idols of your own that inspire you and your work?

E.N.: For many years, I have been inspired by the works of Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso. In order to get to know their creativity better, I visited Spain several years ago. I'm fascinated by their work, expressionism and surrealism. Their creativity allows you to think about the meaning of life and its meaning in this universe.

Something like this, I try to put into my own work. I want my works to be meaningful and multifaceted so that the viewer sees in them something personal.

S. MAG.: If you had to pick one “scene” and/or “image” that you would love to create that you haven't yet, what would it be and why?

E.N.: I think it could be a surreal landscape with elements of fantasy. I believe that blending styles is the future of art. I like to create fantastic landscapes; in them, I honor the power and development of these worlds. Non-existent things in our everyday world allow us to expand the worldview and human consciousness.

S. MAG.: Is there a personal favorite you have when it comes to a color combination, character, or emotion that you wish to always have appear in your works?

E.N.: My works are a little melancholy; it's part of my mood. In my works I show this through a deep blue color, with the addition of light flares. I think that this style reminds me of the snow that shimmers in the sun





during winter in Siberia.

S. MAG.: You stated that you're in a constant state of evolution and in the process of finding that personal style all your own. Can you give us a little background on how ideas come into your mind? How they first begin to form, and then the process of how you carry that "image" to the screen?

E.N.: *I never "plan" a new work. All my ideas come spontaneously. They can be from a dream or even from an interesting event throughout the day. The main feature of my work is that I never make sketches. After I have an idea in my head, I start looking for the right photos to implement the idea. In the process of creating a work, I can even change the original idea and go in the opposite direction, if I wish. To create one job, I can spend several hours of continuous work, or a few days or even weeks—it all depends on my emotional state. In any case, just like an author, I am always very critical of my own works.*



S. MAG.: Do you have an emotional connection to your pieces? Of all your pieces already made, which is/are your favorites?

E.N.: *Yes, every work is a reflection of my emotions. I think that it is impossible to create visual images in isolation from your own personal emotions. My favorite at the moment is my last work "Cradle of Life: Immortals," which reflects the infinity of life and the mystery of its origin.*

S. MAG.: What drew you to illustrating books? Is writing in the future something you think about, or do you wish to stick with the illustrative side?

E.N.: *I began to illustrate books spontaneously. One of my friends asked for help in illustrating his book. It was from this moment on that I realized illustrating books is an interesting path that helps me to get acquainted with other creative people and their ideas. I think that good stories need visual support in the form of a cover that will tell readers about the book before reading it. I am a self-taught author; therefore, in the future, I would like to write my own book about the techniques of photomanipulation and how to begin working in this area of digital art. I am always ready to share my knowledge and skills with younger and novice artists.*

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

E.N.: *Probably I would be an elf from the tales of middle-earth J.R.R. Tolkien. I could travel a lot, observe different civilizations, study their worlds, get acquainted with interesting people, live many lives and learn many new things.*



We will certainly keep an eye out for the book from Elena in the future and continue to revel in her stunning art. To check out more of Elena's work, head to her gallery at, <http://eowynrus.deviantart.com/gallery>. ■

Fictive Foundations:

Wendy Webb on “The End of Temperance Dare” & Other Haunted House Stories

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Steve Burmeister



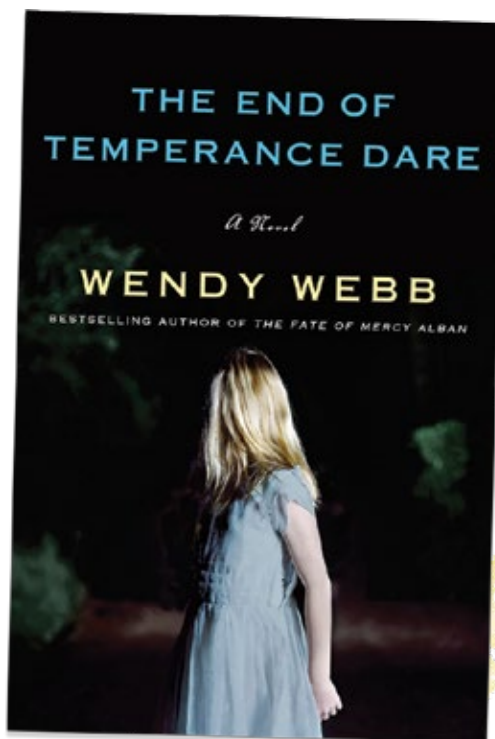
Minneapolis-based Wendy Webb has been called “the Queen of Northern Gothic.” It’s an apt distinction, given that her suspense novels tend to be set in old mansions that play host to both human and supernatural guests, raise questions of how the past influences the present, and feature strong female protagonists who must resolve those issues. Though Webb spent two decades working as a journalist, contributing to publications such as *USA Today*, the *Huffington Post*, the *Star Tribune*, and *Midwest Living*, she knew that she was destined to write fiction from the time that her librarian handed her a copy of “A Wrinkle in Time” at age eleven. She achieved that dream with the publication of “The Tale of Halcyon Crane” (2010), which won the 2011 Minnesota Book Award for genre fiction.

Webb began writing novels full-time following that illustrious debut. Her second, “The Fate of Mercy Alban” (2013) made the Indie Bestseller List and, like her first, was both an Indie Next and Midwest Connections Pick. “The Vanishing,” was published in 2014. This June, Webb returns with “The End of Temperance Dare” (Lake Union Publishing)—a story inspired by the sanatoriums used to treat tuberculosis patients in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Publishers Weekly* called the novel a “solid supernatural thriller,” noting that: “Webb succeeds in escalating suspense while keeping her story grounded, but goes full-on *Exorcist* for the finale.”

Now, Wendy Webb reveals the groundwork for her otherworldly fiction...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): What first sparked the desire to write “The End of Temperance Dare”—and how did the idea of the author/artist’s muse develop into an element of the story?

Wendy Webb (W.W.): *I got the idea for “The End of Temperance Dare” from my own family history. No, there aren’t any bad seeds or demons in my lineage (that I know of, haha), but there were tuberculosis patients. There really was a tuberculosis sanatorium in Bayfield, Wisconsin. My grandfather was a patient there for a time, as was my grandma’s younger sister. My grandfather got better. My grandma’s sister died there. The building was torn down years ago, but many former sanatoriums were converted into things like golf clubs (they were often isolated on big tracts of land) so I started daydreaming about what this building might have become, had it not been torn down.*



J.B.V.: Cliffside Manor and its grounds provide the backdrop for this tale. In what ways does setting enhance narrative—and how did your research of tuberculosis sanatoriums provide a model?

W.W.: *Setting is always what inspires my stories, and I'd even go so far as to say it is a character in my novels. I imagine or come upon a house, and start thinking about the stories that go on inside of it. When I was writing "Temperance," I gave a talk at the high school in Bayfield, where I set the story, and I got a question about what I was working on. I told the group that I was imagining that the san was still there, now a retreat for artists and writers. After my talk, one of the teachers came up to me and told me that, growing up, all the kids in town were afraid of the abandoned san. Parents would threaten to drop them off there to get them to behave! She even told me she used to babysit in what had been the doctor's house on the grounds, and was always terrified to be there. I thought... "yes!" That actually gave me the idea for having a doctor in the story. But research was important, too. I stumbled upon a journal written by a young wife in England who had TB. It wasn't so much her journal that inspired me, it was the characterization of TB sanatoriums as "waiting rooms for death." That phrase caught me and didn't let go.*

J.B.V. The book is reminiscent of Agatha Christie's "And Then There Were None." How do you balance paying homage to classic crime fiction with ingenuity—and what other authors/books do you count as influences?

W.W.: *I don't really think about that when I'm writing. I just tell the story that comes to me, although reading books in all genres inspires me and informs my writing. For me, my greatest influences are Louisa May Alcott, Daphne du Maurier and Madeline L'Engle, but I love the work of my peers, too—M.J. Rose, Carol Goodman, Erin Hart, Louise Penny. There are so many, too many to name.*

J.B.V.: You have a background in journalism. In what ways do seemingly disparate writing disciplines inform one another—and how does Eleanor Harper's character benefit from your experiences?

W.W.: *I've been a journalist for my entire career, and so I was very good at telling a story. This happened, then that happened, then he said this and she said that. But novelists know an expression all too well—show, don't tell. Agents and editors say it to us all the time. We don't tell stories to our readers, we must write in a captivating enough way to bring them along for the ride. That was difficult for me at first. I didn't get the difference. I couldn't understand the concept of "show, don't tell" because I'd been telling stories for so long as a journalist. Then, an author friend of mine told me what worked for her. "Imagine you're the director of a movie. There's a scene in which someone is angry. In the movie, you wouldn't hear: 'John is angry!' You'd see John throw his coffee cup on the floor and stomp out of the room, and you'd know he was angry." The light went on.*

J.B.V.: Your works incorporate the paranormal. What intrigues you about ghost stories—and how do you consider the readers' suspension of disbelief in your storytelling?

W.W.: *I've always been intrigued by ghost stories because, to me, they're spine-tingling but not terrifying. They're hopeful. Even if it's a vengeful ghost, it's a ghost. Which means there's life after death. In terms of suspension of disbelief—not everyone is as into the paranormal as I am. So I try to write realistically. I have the belief that something otherworldly can be waiting for you around any random, ordinary corner—in the grocery store, around the block, in your bedroom.*

J.B.V.: You have been called "the Queen of Northern Gothic." In what ways can such classifications both help and hinder an author—and how do you conceptualize your fiction?

W.W.: *Actually, I love that term. It's really flattering to me. I didn't set out to invent a genre. I just wrote the books I wanted to write, set in a place I knew. Southern gothic is big, but there aren't too many gothic suspense novels set on the Great Lakes. It was wonderful for me to hear that people recognized that.*

We'd like to thank Wendy for spending the time. To keep up-to-date on her upcoming projects, visit her website at wendykwebb.com. ■

Karen Dionne



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUSPENSE GENRE HAS A NEW NAME



By Elise Cooper for *Suspense Magazine*
Photo Credit: Robert Bruce



“The Marsh King’s Daughter” by Karen Dionne delves into what life is like for a child of a long-term kidnap victim. Anyone that has wondered about Amanda Berry or Jaycee Dugard should read this story. These women were kidnapped, raped, and bore a child while being interned in a prison of hell. But what happens to the child conceived under these conditions? This is the ultimate love/hate story between a child, Helena, and her parents. By beginning each chapter with a section of the fairy tale, “The Marsh King’s Daughter” by Hans Christian Anderson, the author formulates a connection between Helena’s life and this tale. She had little use for her mother while growing up; yet, after

reaching adolescence she realized that the violence and cruelty of her father was not normal, and that her mother attempted to insulate and protect her.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): Where did you get the idea for the story?

Karen Dionne (K.D.): *I was actually looking for the backstory on a character in another novel where she was going all over the world in search of this quest. But my agent told me it would not work. I was thinking of my other options, when in the middle of the night the first couple of paragraphs came to me. I had the character and now needed the full story.*

E.C.: How did the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale come into play?

K.D.: *As Helena grew up she had little regard for her mother. Later on, she reflects on her mother’s kidnapping and has memories of being helped by her, including telling the fairy tale story. I was looking at my bookshelf and found “The Marsh King’s Daughter” fairy tale. The focus in this is the daughter of an evil father so I now had the formulation of a plot as well as the characters.*



“PEOPLE WHO OVERCAME A TERRIBLE CHILDHOOD HAVE ALWAYS FASCINATED ME.”

E.C.: How did you do the research?

K.D.: *I thought what it might be like for these children who grew up in a captive environment. I thought it weird, but since this is the only life they knew, they probably would not. Not having any normal to judge by, she accepts her experiences. After reading Jaycee Dugard's book I decided this story should not be about the woman kidnapped, but solely about the child, Helena. People who overcame a terrible childhood have always fascinated me.*

E.C.: It is interesting how Helena loved her childhood and her father.

K.D.: *It did not seem to her that her childhood years were stolen. In the book she refers to it as the only time she was truly happy despite her circumstances. This shaped her worldview as well as how her parents acted. After being rescued her mom withdrew from the world, partly because her parents seemed to only care about making money from the ordeal.*

E.C.: How did you get the idea for the rustic setting?

K.D.: *I lived on the peninsula in Michigan a long time ago, although I never hunted and fished. I researched on You-Tube and Googled it. My husband and I homesteaded in the wilderness when my oldest daughter was six weeks old during the 1970s. We lived in a tent and carried water from the stream. The scene of Helena trudging across the frozen Marsh in winter is something I did many times. When I write about what it is like to wash diapers by hand in a bucket, I have been there/done that. I knew exactly what it is like and it is not fun. Eventually we left the wilderness for practical considerations, our daughter going to school and my husband's job.*

E.C.: Interesting how even Helena was a bit rebellious.

K.D.: *As she grew up her life started to feel small and narrow. She thought about what else is out there. She knew from reading fifty-year-old National Geographic pages and seeing airplanes fly overhead that something else was out there.*



E.C.: How would you describe Helena's relationship with her father?

K.D.: *Her first twelve years, she loves her father unconditionally. After she leaves the Marsh, she hates him and blames him for her lacking in social norms and technology. She put herself in her own witness protection program to lose her identity and get away from her dad. Yet, when searching for him she realizes she still loves him. Helena does have a good heart but is a bit of a narcissist like her father. Her tough as nails attitude was influenced by him.*

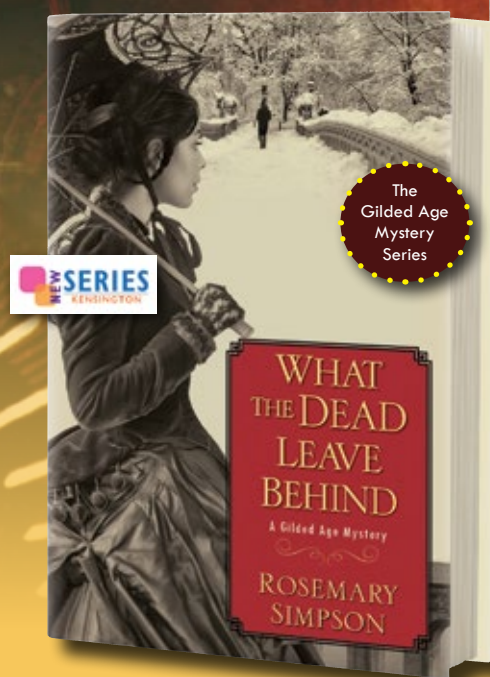
E.C.: What do you want the readers to get out of the book?

K.D.: *I want to convey that no one is all evil and all good. They should experience a range of emotions from sympathy to hate. I hope people will understand that once a decision is made in your life you need to take responsibility. Helena never told her husband of her past life and almost lost him. Her mother would have never been captured if she refused to go up to the kidnapper and ran home instead.*

We'd like to thank Karen for sitting down with us to discuss her latest project. To learn more about Karen's other work and upcoming news, go to <http://www.karen-dionne.com>. ■

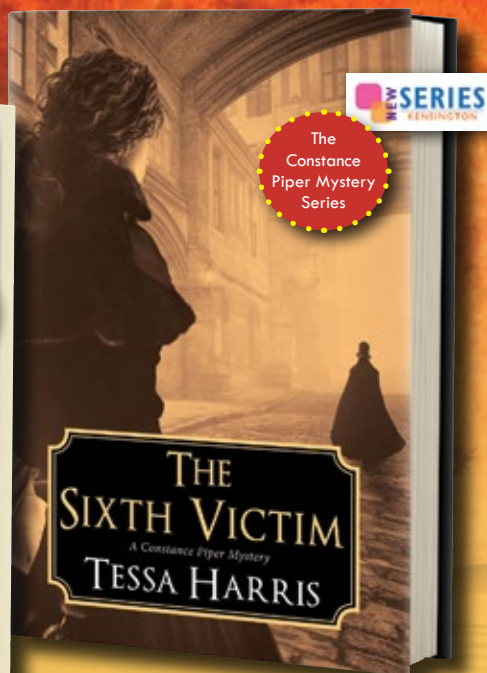


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RAISING THE BAR

Adam Mitzner on “Dead Certain”

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Steve Burmeister



Adam Mitzner's debut came with a flourish: “A Conflict of Interest” (2011) topped “The Hunger Games,” Stephen King’s “11/22/63,” and Walter Isaacson’s Steve Jobs biography to reach the #1 spot on Audible. (The title was also named one of this magazine’s best books of the year.) A practicing attorney in Manhattan, Mitzner—the head of the litigation department at Pavia & Harcourt LLP—quickly found a second career as a novelist, drawing on his expertise to inform his fiction. “A Case of Redemption” (nominated by the National Bar Association for the Silver Gavel Award), “Losing Faith,” and “The Girl From Home” followed, garnering critical acclaim but eluding a mainstream audience.

“Dead Certain” (June) marks a new chapter for Mitzner. It’s the first in a two-book deal with Amazon’s mystery/thriller imprint, Thomas & Mercer—and its plot cleverly unfolds through a story-within-a-story construct that chronicles the lives of sisters Charlotte and Ella Broden, one of whom goes missing but leaves behind unwitting clues in a partial manuscript. *Kirkus* has already rendered their verdict, noting: “[The book’s] leading coincidence, which is quite a whopper, is offset by an equally

dazzling surprise ... it packs enough of a punch to make it worth reading.”

Join the author as he reflects on balancing professional pursuits with passion projects...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): What inspired the idea for “Dead Certain”—and how do you see this book as both standing alone and paying homage to your roots as a writer?

Adam Mitzner (A.M.): *There were two competing thoughts that gave the spark to the book, both of which were very personal to me. First, was the idea of how much of fiction is auto-biographical, which is a question I get all the time. And second, the tension between pursuing your creative passions and having a regular job, something I’m also acutely familiar with as a practicing lawyer and writer. I also wanted to continue to fill in the universe of my books. In my previous book, “The Girl From Home,” Alex Miller, the protagonist from my first book, “A Conflict of Interest,” makes an appearance, and “Dead Certain” marks the return of another one of my favorite supporting characters, the famed criminal defense attorney F. Clinton Broden, who appeared in “Losing Faith” and “A Case of Redemption.”*

I have to confess, “Dead Certain” is my favorite of my books so far. That’s usually the case with regard to the last book I’ve written, but I have a feeling that “Dead Certain” might keep the top spot for a while.

J.B.V.: There are some very “meta” elements to this particular book (such as the story-within-a-story construct). How did you endeavor to achieve a sense of playfulness without being gimmicky—and in what ways is the narrative enhanced by its own self-awareness?

A.M.: *Writing the book within the book in “Dead Certain” was the most challenging part. I wanted the internal story to be good enough that it could stand on its own. Something the reader would be interested in as its own story, not just as a plot device for the larger mystery. I also wanted the writing style to differ from my own, so you actually felt like you were reading two different authors. At the same time, it allowed me to think about some of the things I do when writing, such as using people in my own life as jumping off points for certain characters.*

J.B.V.: At the book’s heart is the sibling relationship between sisters Charlotte and Ella. What makes this dynamic so compelling to explore—and how did you come to know, and capture, their distinct voices and personalities?

A.M.: *This also had a very personal aspect to me. I have two daughters, who are the very loose basis for the personalities of Ella and Charlotte. My daughters are much younger (19 and 13), but both are creative-types, so I was considering the issue of one of them pursuing their creative passions and the other (gasp!) becoming a lawyer! I did mix and match the personality traits of my children to the characters so that in the finished product I can’t tell you which of my daughters more resembles Ella and which more resembles Charlotte.*

J.B.V.: You were not formally trained as a writer but credit your editors with providing an invaluable education. What are the greatest lessons they’ve taught you—and how does this collaborative process typically work?

A.M.: *One of the great things you’re taught as a young lawyer is the importance of editing. I was always a strong writer in school, and then when I joined a law firm and had my product literally re-written by more senior lawyers, I saw how much better they could make it, and that was a more valuable writing lesson than all my years in school. Legal writing is very sparse, and so it taught me how to make points quickly and clearly. Fiction editing is more about big picture themes. When I’m writing, I’m sometimes so immersed in the story that I don’t have the necessary perspective to know if I’ve created the proper tension, if the twists are twisty enough, if the characters are identifiable. My early readers—which include a professional editor, but just as importantly, my wife and close friends—fill in those blanks.*

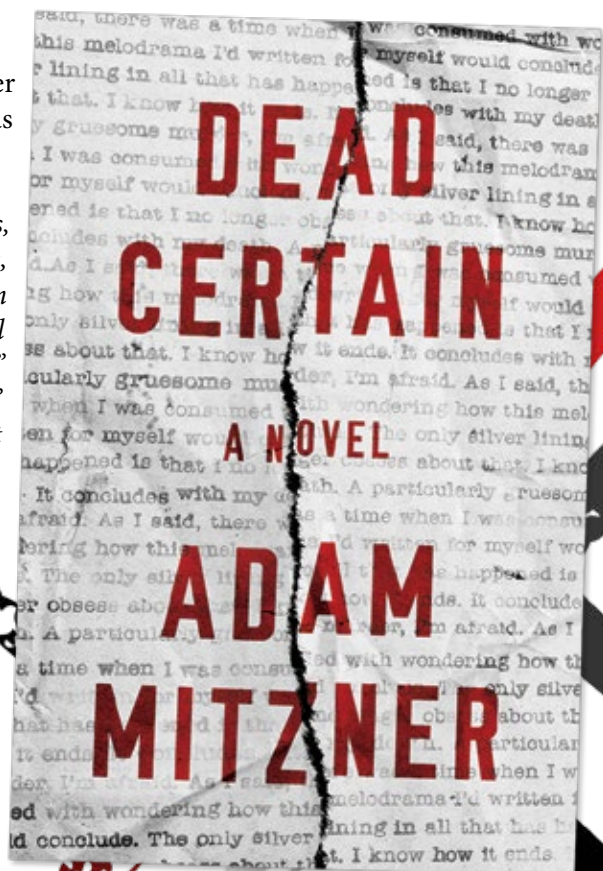
J.B.V.: You are now published through Amazon’s Thomas & Mercer imprint. What drew you in this direction—and how do you see them as being innovative within the industry?

A.M.: *My first four books were through Simon & Schuster’s Gallery Press, and while I enjoyed my time with them and am very proud of those books, I was somewhat frustrated by my inability to get a wider readership. I’m hopeful that Thomas & Mercer can bring my work to more readers. All early indications are that they will because they selected “Dead Certain” as a Kindle First Selection. As much as I’m going to miss “Dead Certain” not appearing in hardback (it does come in paperback), it is clear that Amazon’s business model is the future of publishing because they can connect readers with the books that they’ll enjoy in a way that traditional publishers simply cannot.*

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

A.M.: *I have never written a sequel, but my next book—“Never Goodbye”—picks up six months after “Dead Certain.” I loved these characters so I wanted to spend a little more time with them.*

To learn more about this talented author and follow his new publishing journey, visit his website at adammitzner.com. ■



JAMES HAYMAN

TAKES READERS TO THE BRINK

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist



Author James Hayman and his team of Mike McCabe and Maggie Savage have thrilled readers for a good, long time. And now with the newest title, “The Girl on the Bridge,” McCabe and Savage return to get readers’ pulses racing into overdrive. With a background that includes working on some of the biggest advertising campaigns known to Americans, James Hayman has had a hand in many creative industries. Sitting down with *Suspense Magazine*, he speaks about his past career, his favorite locales, his continuing characters, as well as what other genres the future may hold when it comes to his amazing writing.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Portland, Maine must be a great bit different than NYC. As a native New Yorker who moved to Maine, can you tell readers the effect that each had on you as a writer? In addition, Portland has such an amazing “city” feel (with the art scene, restaurants, things to see, etc.), but do you ever miss the “Big City?”

James Hayman (J.H.): *I’m very much an urban guy. I was born in Brooklyn, raised in Manhattan and spent more than thirty years working on Madison Avenue as a copywriter and creative director on major television accounts, like the U.S. Army (“Be All You Can Be”), Merrill Lynch (“A Breed Apart”) and Lincoln/Mercury (“What a Luxury Car Should Be”). I loved New York and I loved working there in the heart of the ad business. As Bob Keyes, a writer for the Portland Press Herald, once put it, “Hayman was Don Draper before there was a Don Draper.” But you can’t be Don Draper forever. With apologies to Cormac McCarthy, Madison Avenue is no country for old men. So despite my enjoyment of the ad business, my wife Jeanne and I began planning our escape from the big city.*

Part of the plan was to find a place where I could scratch an old itch and try my hand at writing crime fiction. The other part was to find a city with a vibrant arts community where Jeanne could feel comfortable and continue her career as a painter, sculptor and printmaker. We checked out a number of smaller cities we thought might work for us but we kept coming back to Portland. As you point out, it has an amazing city feel. Great architecture. Winding cobblestoned streets. A busy working waterfront. And, importantly, when I decided to set my novels in Portland, a police department that’s big enough to offer all the bells and whistles of a big city department but small enough so all the cops pretty much know each other. You ask if I ever miss the “Big City.” Absolutely. I visit often, and a major part of the McCabe/Savage thriller I’m working on now takes place on Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

S. MAG.: Where did Mike McCabe first come into being in your own mind? Did he just appear out of nowhere, or is he a recipe perhaps of you and others you know?

J.H.: When I started writing the series I wanted to make my main protagonist come off as a real and caring human being rather than as some kind of super-hero. I think McCabe accomplishes that. He's good at his job of catching murderers. But he's also got a life that's a lot more complex than that. He's a single father who worries about his daughter. He's got money problems. Relationship issues. He drinks more than he should, tells dumb jokes, and likes old movies. But most importantly he's guided by a firm moral compass.

I think this is best described in my second book, "The Chill of Night," when McCabe first sees a woman's body in the trunk of her own car: "He took a deep breath and walked toward the trunk, preparing himself for the first few seconds he'd spend alone with the victim. The cop and the corpse. A unique and strangely intimate relationship. Just the two of them. It didn't matter to McCabe who the victim was. A gangbanger or an innocent child. Either way, for him, it was this moment of shared intimacy that turned what, for some cops was merely a job, into an obligation. A sacred trust. To find and punish the killer, to right the wrong, to balance the scales. The Lord may someday get His turn. But for now, McCabe believed, vengeance is mine. I go first."

S. MAG.: Can you give your thoughts on the advertising/marketing that's being done in the publishing world today? Are you an avid marketer online and, if so, is there one tip you could share that has worked well for you personally?

J.H.: The advertising/marketing scene today is very different than it used to be. When I left New York, television and, to some extent, print magazines were the primary tools of the advertising business. Social media barely existed. Today those roles have been reversed. Social media rules the roost. As for marketing my own books, I leave much of that to my publishers at Harper Collins who generally do an excellent job. My own efforts are pretty much restricted to my Facebook page ([facebook.com/jameshaymanthrillers](https://www.facebook.com/jameshaymanthrillers)), my website (www.jameshaymanthrillers.com), and writing the occasional guest blog. Running ads on Facebook seems to work quite well for me.

S. MAG.: You mention that you are a fan of old movie trivia. Do you have a favorite movie hero and/or villain from the past? Is there a specific movie from back then that you think Mike McCabe would be comfortable in, or one he would most definitely want to explore?

J.H.: I have so many favorites, it's hard to narrow down. Humphrey Bogart is a particular favorite. Both as the owner of Rick's Café in Casablanca and as private eye Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* and Phillip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*. McCabe would have been great in any of those classic roles. As for an actor from an earlier day who I think would have made a perfect Mike McCabe, I'd pick the young Harrison Ford, particularly in his roles in the 1990 production of Scott Turow's book *Presumed Innocent* and later as Jack Ryan in 1992's *Patriot Games* and 1994's *Clear and Present Danger*, both based on books by Tom Clancy. While Ford is still working he is sadly, at age seventy-four, way too old to play McCabe today.

S. MAG.: Do you have any particular feelings about the self-publishing realm and the growth that has happened with that over time?

J.H.: I think self-publishing is a mixed blessing. On the plus side, it gives a lot of talented writers an opportunity to get their work out there and to build up a fan base, and that's great. It also allows self-published writers who do have a fan base to keep a greater percentage of the profits from their book sales. The negative side is that it clutters the marketplace with a lot of pretty second and third-rate work. When I search for books to buy I think (sometimes wrongly) that the imprimatur of a commercial publisher suggests at least a minimal level of quality.

S. MAG.: Is there a particular "fan" moment that stands out to you—one that you can share with the readers?

J.H.: Yes, there's one that stands out very clearly in my memory. My first book, "The Cutting," was about a villainous surgeon who removes the hearts of innocent victims in order to sell them for illegal transplant operations to billionaire octogenarians who were too old to qualify for legitimate transplants,



“HE TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND WALKED TOWARD THE TRUNK, PREPARING HIMSELF FOR THE FIRST FEW SECONDS HE’D SPEND ALONE WITH THE VICTIM. THE COP AND THE CORPSE.”

largely because of the extreme shortage of hearts available for transplant.

One reader emailed me saying he was very upset with the premise of the book because he himself had received a transplanted heart and he was afraid my story would discourage possible donors from letting their hearts be used in transplant operations that could save their lives. After thinking about it, I replied that I believed and hoped the book would have the opposite effect. That it would serve to focus readers’ attention on the severe shortage of hearts available for transplant and encourage more people to sign up as potential organ donors. We had a lively back and forth on the subject, but in the end I was pleased that he finally agreed with me and said he would recommend the book to his friends.

S. MAG.: Tell us about the new book, “The Girl on the Bridge.” Can you give us “never-before-told” info about that particular title?

J.H.: *Initially I was hesitant to use the title because of the plethora of “Girl” books that have come out over the past few years. But in the end I decided to go with it because it was so perfect for the story I was telling. The book opens with a seventeen-year-old girl named Hannah Reindel being drugged and sexually assaulted by half a dozen football players at a college fraternity party. The trauma she suffers from the incident (PTSD) is so severe that it never goes away, and twelve years later, in a moment of despair, she takes her own life by jumping off a rusty old railroad bridge into the rushing waters of the river below. The scene in which the reader sees Hannah standing there, the girl on the bridge, suffering a flashback of what happened to her twelve years earlier, as her husband races toward her trying desperately to save her life, is an early but very climactic scene in the book from which the rest of the story flows.*

S. MAG.: What is next up for Mike McCabe? Do you have a particular number of books/thrillers in mind, or will McCabe keep going until he just can’t go anymore?

J.H.: *Right now I’m working on the next McCabe/Savage book. It starts with McCabe getting a call from his brother in New York telling him that their mother is dying and he will want to get down to the hospital before she passes. McCabe and his partner, Maggie Savage, drive through the night from Portland to New York only to learn that in the interim McCabe’s beloved niece, his brother Bobby’s daughter Zoe, has disappeared and may have been kidnapped by a serial killer who has been stalking young women. For McCabe, solving this crime is about more than catching a murderer. This time it’s about family.*

The answer to your second question is, I have no definite number in mind. I like my key characters, Michael McCabe and Maggie Savage, and will probably keep them going as long as I can think up good story ideas for them. Michael Connelly’s Harry Bosch is still going twenty-five years after he first appeared in 1992’s “The Black Echo,” so...who knows?

S. MAG.: You utilize so many places in your books: Is there a particular figment of your imagination you would love to see become a reality?

J.H.: *Most of the places described in my books are real. Sometimes I change their names but most often not. But there’s one place that appears in every one of the McCabe/Savage books that isn’t real but I wish it was. It is McCabe’s favorite hangout, Tallulah’s, at the foot of Portland’s Munjoy Hill where the owner (Tallulah) keeps the rear booth permanently reserved for him, and where the bartenders know to give him an extra-generous pour of his favorite Macallan twelve-year-old single malt whisky.*

S. MAG.: Have you ever craved or thought of delving into another genre at some point in time when it comes to your writing?

J.H.: *Yes. At some point I’d like to try my hand at writing a historical mystery. Most likely set in the U.S. or the U.K. in the 1920’s or 30’s. I was an American History major in college and still read a fair amount of history, both real and fictional.*

Whether a McCabe/Savage thriller or a mysterious journey through history, James Hayman fans will always be gifted with the best. For more information about events, projects and more, head to www.jameshaymanthrillers.com. ■



THE WRITER'S TOOLKIT:

How do I get an agent?

How much research should I do?

By Alan Jacobson

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The publishing landscape has changed dramatically during the twenty-four years I've been writing professionally. Some things, however, have remained constant, because regardless of who's publishing you or the format in which the reader is consuming your work—hard, soft, eBook, audio—you still have to craft a compelling story and populate it with characters the reader cares about. That was as true two decades ago as it is today.

In the early years of my writing career, when my debut novel was published, I was one of the first authors to (if not the first) include his email address on the back flap of the hardcover. People thought I was crazy—who'd email an author? This was a decade before Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Goodreads. The Internet, on a consumer level, was relatively new; these were the days when AOL would mail you diskettes enticing you to use their service. On *dial-up*. For those of you who never had that pleasure, let's just say you're lucky. You'd click on a link, go get a cup of coffee, and return to your computer to find the webpage was *just* about finished loading. In that context, the question of who would contact an author via email was a fair one.

Nevertheless, I wanted a way to reach my readers and give them a way to reach me. What did I have to lose by listing my email address on the book jacket? Well, "False Accusations" was a national bestseller and I *did* get emails...lots of them. Most were about my book, but some were from aspiring authors who wanted to know how to navigate a new industry they wanted to break into. I have always answered all my own email, but after a while the questions—and answers—got repetitive and started consuming more of my time, hours I needed to be spending writing my next novel.

The following year, I thought of a solution. When I launched my website, www.AlanJacobson.com I included a section with the questions I got most often from aspiring writers—along with my answers. Whenever I received a new email from someone with these questions, I would refer them to my website. They got what they needed and I was able to return to writing for a living. That section of my website is now called The Writer's Toolkit, and *Suspense Magazine* has asked me to include excerpts from it for their readers.

The first two topics we'll cover in this installment is agents and research. I'd like to extend a heartfelt thanks to agent Lukas Ortiz of the Philip Spitzer Agency for reviewing the information on agents for accuracy.

Q. HOW DO I GET AN AGENT?

A. There used to be one primary method: buy a resource book that lists agents and their specialties. Many agents only handle certain types of fiction—and some handle only non-fiction. By doing your homework, you save your time and money in not making erroneous submissions. These reference books also list recent sales by the agent as well as guidelines the individual agent requires for a submission. One such publication, which is updated annually and has been around for as long as I can remember, is “Guide to Literary Agents” from Writer’s Digest Books.

Alternatively, a previously unconventional way of finding an agent has become more mainstream. In short, there is no substitute for doing business in person. Meeting someone face-to-face is the most effective way to make a connection...and business (publishing is a business) is all about making connections. How do you meet an agent (or editor) in person? Many writers’ conferences have taken the lead from the defunct Maui Writers Conference in providing a forum for writers and agents to get together. Usually there is a fee for each face-to-face consultation you have with an agent. However, if you are someone who can schmooze and sell yourself, then it’s well worth this minimal cost. Again, you want to do your homework to make sure you’re meeting with the right type of agent. Talking to an agent who specializes in historical fiction when you write self-help books will likely get you nowhere. ThrillerFest, held in New York City every year and run by International Thriller Writers, features a dedicated track built around such pitch sessions.

Q. IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET PUBLISHED WITHOUT HAVING AN AGENT?

A. Back in the day when I was practicing chiropractic medicine, a physician friend of mine once coached me before I gave my first deposition. His advice: if the opposing attorney asks you, “Doctor, is it possible these injuries were caused by a UFO abduction instead of the car accident your patient was involved in?” my response should be, “Anything’s possible.” So I’ll answer this the same way. Of course it’s possible to get published without having an agent. It does happen. But like UFO abductions, the likelihood of it occurring is...somewhat remote. I think it’s best to focus your energies on finding a good agent.

That said, the e-Book revolution has given the goal of “getting published” a different meaning. It has made self-publishing feasible because it utilizes print on demand to publish bound books and e-Book platforms to distribute the digital editions. This allows you to easily make your work available on all digital platforms (Kindle, Nook, iBooks, Google Play, Kobo, etc.). Thus, if your timeframe for realizing your dream of getting published is short, it is now possible to move forward without securing an agent. While it’s not a substitute for being traditionally published—and has some significant disadvantages, which I’ll cover in a later article—it is a viable alternative for some writers.

Q. WHAT MAKES A GOOD AGENT?

A. This is an involved question. But...you want an agent who is enthusiastic about your work, who can and will fight for you when necessary, and who has solid contacts in the industry, primarily with editors. He or she should be attentive and make sure all potential avenues of distribution for your work are explored.

You also want your agent to be industry-savvy: that is, when negotiating contracts, you want him/her to be well-versed in industry norms; to be able to tell you that something is reasonable or unreasonable, or that something is or isn’t customary for the publishing houses; to be well-informed on new issues and industry technologies; and to be able to tell you about the ramifications of a particular clause in your contract. It’s a bad feeling to later find something in your contract that doesn’t mean what you thought it meant...or that you could have negotiated something substantially better just by asking for it. The agent needs to know to ask in the first place.

Finally, your agent has to be responsive. If you ask a question, they should respond in a timely manner.

Q. I’VE HEARD THAT SOME AGENTS CHARGE READING FEES. IS THIS REASONABLE?

A. No. Never pay a fee for an agent. Reading fees are unnecessary and are indicative of a sub-par agent who looks to the reading fees for his or her source of income rather than the sales of author material.

Q. I'VE FINISHED MY NOVEL AND I'M READY TO SUBMIT IT. CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME GUIDELINES ON HOW TO FIND AN AGENT AND HOW TO SUBMIT MY WORK?

A. Spend some time poking through [The Writer's Toolkit](#) on my website to gain insight into the publishing industry and its nuances and practices. Then buy a book like "Guide to Literary Agents." When deciding on which agents you should submit your work to, make sure they handle the type of book you write. Next, comply with whatever requirements are outlined in the summary profile provided for each agent. If they say to send the first 15 pages, don't send 50. (I wouldn't send the entire manuscript at the outset, as it's expensive and unnecessary. I know someone who just hit his 100th agent rejection, so the costs add up.)

Some agents accept electronic submissions. If so, this will be stated—and will obviously reduce your costs to next to nothing.

If they require a hard copy, make sure the text is printed on clean paper, single-sided, in a standard (Courier or Times Roman) font, 12 point, with one inch margins. Your name, the manuscript's title, and page number should go at the top of each page. Include a query letter that contains the best writing you've ever done. Their feeling is if you can't write a good query, you can't write a good novel. I'm not sure I agree with that, but the point is it doesn't matter what I think—just make it an intriguing letter of no more than one page. There are books dedicated to the particulars of writing a query letter. "Guide to Literary Agents" covers the topic as well.

Finally, I wouldn't make exclusive submissions, even though this is what agents prefer. (This means you send out a query and wait to get a rejection from that agent before sending it out to another.) You have to be fair to yourself. Look at it this way: if it took 100 submissions to get signed by an agent, and you sent out one query at a time and waited about two months (if you're lucky) to get a reply, you'd literally spend about 15 years mailing out queries. More than ridiculous, it's not good business. And like it or not, writing is a business.

If you want to get scared and depressed at the same time, read Noah Lukeman's book, "The First Five Pages." A former editor and current literary agent, Lukeman outlines some of the things agents and editors look for in a manuscript. Some of the advice is excellent, while the behind-the-scenes look at how agents and editors make a decision on your manuscript is, as I said, scary and depressing. Assuming the information is accurate—a reasonable assumption since he's an industry insider, so he should know—it's information *you* need to know. It's also a sad commentary on how our publishing industry operates (though that's clearly not what he intended).

ON RESEARCH...

Q. WHEN WRITING A NOVEL, HOW IMPORTANT IS RESEARCH?

A. If you care what your readers think (and you should), you'll want your facts to be ballpark accurate. Think of it this way: your readers are intelligent people, with knowledge bases spanning many careers and professions. It's likely some of them are going to know about the topic you're writing about. The last thing you want to do is take the reader out of the fiction you've worked so hard to create—and one sure way is to state a fact that's blatantly incorrect. You don't want your reader saying, "This guy doesn't know what he's talking about. A Glock doesn't have a safety!" *Boom...* what just happened? The reader is no longer thinking about your story, or your characters, or the suspense you've worked hard to create: they're thinking about the facts you've gotten wrong.

Q. ARE ALL YOUR FACTS ALWAYS CORRECT?

A. I guess this was the next obvious question. The answer is no. Over the course of 400 pages, there are many different topics and concepts you'll encounter. Even the most diligent writer can't get it all right all the time. You can only do your best.

That said, sometimes you'll want to, or need to, take literary license—change or stretch the truth to move a story along, maintain pacing, avoid confusing the reader, or enabling a plot point to work. It's still important to know what's correct so you can judge how much you want to stray from the truth. About twenty years ago, Ridley Pearson told me he works hard to

“Think of it this way: your readers are intelligent people, with knowledge bases spanning many careers and professions.”

ensure the accuracy of his facts so that when he introduces a “fictional fact” to further his story, the reader won’t know which facts are real and which aren’t.

One final note on research: the old writing adage of “write what you know” is flawed—because there aren’t any Renaissance men or women around these days—and life was much simpler when they did exist. No computers, no Internet of Things—hell, no Internet. No cars, no planes, no forensics, no microbiology, no genetics. Medical knowledge was a fraction of what we understand today. The sheer volume of information that exists nowadays virtually guarantees that you won’t know a lot about most things—so if you only wrote what you knew, you’d be forced to write in a very narrow band. When you’ve been writing as long as I have, keeping to that limited knowledge base would’ve become a problem sometime after my first novel! Researching your story means breaking through those chains.

When I wrote “Inmate 1577,” the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, “Alan Jacobson researches his books like a good newspaper reporter, and then pushes the envelope into reality more thoroughly than the typical crime novel could ever allow.” That was a tremendous compliment—and illustrates my point. What did I know about crime and police work back in 1994 when I started writing professionally? Not a whole lot. But I changed that.

Q. AS A WRITER, HOW IMPORTANT ARE CONTACTS IN CONDUCTING YOUR RESEARCH?

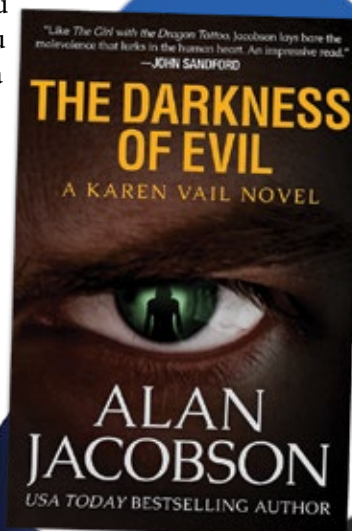
A. Contacts are invaluable. Other than the obvious—providing you with information you wouldn’t otherwise be able to access—they sometimes think of something or say something that takes your story in an entirely different direction. For example, while researching “False Accusations,” my FBI contact took me to the Department of Justice’s Division of Law Enforcement indoor shooting range and showed me a variety of handguns. It was his opinion that in order to write about guns, I’d first have to experience what it felt like to fire them. He was absolutely right. And though I don’t think the word “gun” is even mentioned in “False Accusations,” guns have played a role of some kind in every novel I’ve written since. His instruction and the experience he gave me was invaluable in understanding the power a character holds in his or her hand when he or she points the weapon at someone.

After I wrote “The Hunted” (*OPSIG Team Black #1*), I received an email from a lieutenant commander in charge of the US chemical weapons depot in the Pacific Northwest. He told me he loved “The Hunted” but that I’d gotten something wrong relative to the MP5 semiautomatic submachine gun. I was mortified! I’d learned how to shoot the MP5 at the FBI Academy—as well as how to disassemble and clean it. How could I have gotten *anything* wrong? I consulted my notes and video, then replied, telling the Lt. Commander that I thought I was correct—and explained why. Three days later he wrote back. He checked with his SWAT commander, and it turned out I was right. He became an important resource for me when I wrote “Hard Target” (*OPSIG Team Black #2*), and for years beyond.

I believe anytime a writer can experience something in life, it’s enormously beneficial. You may not be writing a book that involves guns, or skydiving, or even meat packing. But once you experience it, you’ll carry that memory around with you forever. And it’ll inevitably end up in a book—at which point you may even know who to ask for more info about it. ■

As author of the FBI profiler Karen Vail series and OPSIG Team Black novels, USA Today bestselling author Alan Jacobson has spent 20 years working with the FBI profiling unit, US Marshals Service, DEA, ATF, SWAT, Scotland Yard, and the US military. Jacobson’s books have been optioned by Hollywood and named to ‘best of the year’ lists. James Patterson, Nelson DeMille, and Michael Connelly have called Vail one of the most compelling heroes in suspense fiction. Follow Jacobson on Facebook (AlanJacobsonFans), Twitter (@JacobsonAlan), Instagram (alan.jacobson), and Goodreads (alan_jacobson).

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Every Wife Has A Story

A Carol and Jim Andrews Baby Boomer Mystery

"An outstanding series."
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Dieting Can Be Murder

Every Wife Has A Story

Seventh in the Series



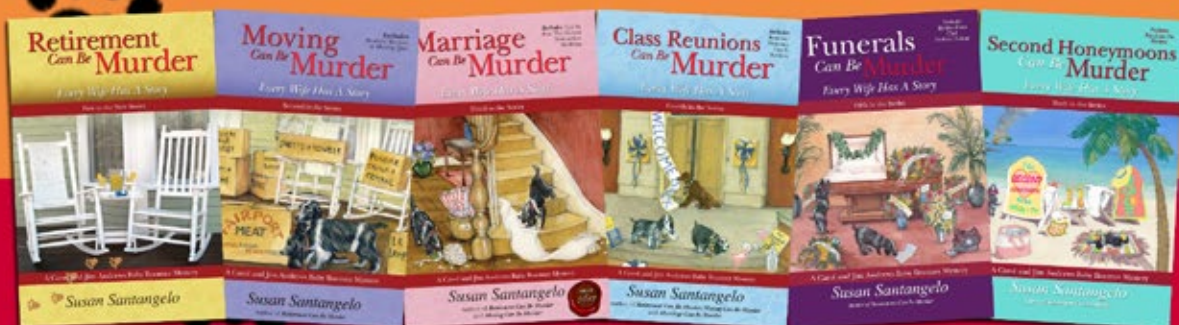
A Carol and Jim Andrews Baby Boomer Mystery

Susan Santangelo

Author of *Retirement Can Be Murder*

There's a little too much to love about Carol Andrews these days, thanks to the extra calories she consumed during her second honeymoon in Florida with her husband, Jim. Determined to shed the extra pounds before the birth of her first grandchild, Carol joins Tummy Trimmers, a new, holistic approach to fighting—and winning—the battle of the bulge. But her weight loss regimen is interrupted by another group member, who collapses on Carol right after completing a meditation exercise to help lose weight, and dies. When the evidence points to murder, the always curious Carol can't resist adding sleuthing to her personal weight loss routine.

<http://babyboommysteries.com>



HULK SMASH

"The Man of Legends" with Kenneth Johnson

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Susan Appling Johnson



It is easy for fans to see, whether their passions lie in books, television, or movies that Kenneth Johnson has most definitely earned the title of "Writer/Producer/Director." As the creator of *V*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Alien Nation*, *The Bionic Woman* and a plethora of many other Emmy-award winning shows, he has also garnered and received everything from Saturn Awards to nominations for Writers Guild and Mystery Writers of America Awards, among others. When it comes to the big screen, his Director's hand can be seen behind movies, such as *Steel* and *Short Circuit 2*.

With a brand new book releasing, "The Man of Legends," (July 11, 2017) Kenneth Johnson has once again created a timeless tale that offers up adventure, suspense and romance all wrapped tightly in a supernatural mystery. *Suspense Magazine* was lucky enough to steal a bit of time with Kenneth so he could speak about past projects, as well as introduce this new, upcoming epic that is sure to see the big screen one day soon.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Writer/producer/director...the resume is certainly a long one. Is there one out of the three that you favor? If not, can you tell readers what particular aspects/traits of each bring out that creative passion in you that has brought about over forty years of ground-breaking shows, books, etc.?

Kenneth Johnson (K.J.): *I was a director first. Graduated from the legendary Drama Department at Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie-Mellon U). Producing was quickly added, but for writing—which was by far harder for me—it took my college classmate Steven Bochco's badgering to force me to try. He and my dear, late pal Steve Cannell were tremendous helpmates and helped me get a foot in the door at Universal Studios where we called ourselves the "Class of '80." There's a fun Writer's Guild article about us at my website: www.kennethjohnson.us.*

S. MAG.: Do aspects of your growing up period in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, appear in any of your books/screenplays? Is there a specific area you have loved living over the years?

K.J.: *Although I was born in Arkansas, we moved to Washington D.C. when I was four, where I grew up in Maryland with my mother and stepfather. But I visited my father and many Southern relatives every summer. When I was in Pine Bluff at age five or six I saw a water fountain with a sign: colored. In my naivety, I eagerly turned it on to see what color the water was. I also*

remember how in public places there were always three restrooms: men, women, and colored. Once, I got on a bus in Arkansas and ran to the back because I always liked the 'big' window—but was chastised by my grandmother: she said I wasn't allowed to sit "back there." In Maryland I was also raised in a virulently bigoted and anti-Semitic middle-class household where I heard every manner of hate word every night at dinner. Somehow I instinctively sensed that it was not right and never bought into it. Throughout my career I've seized every opportunity to chip away at such intolerance, bigotry, scapegoating and prejudice. My Emmy-winning TV series, *Alien Nation*, was a particular delight to create because it allowed us to tackle such issues head-on.

S. MAG.: The industry has changed such a great deal; can you speak a little about some of the highlights that you have experienced in the world of entertainment?

K.J.: Some of my personal highlights: a college film buddy of mine got me hired at age twenty-two to produce and direct a rock-and-roll show at WPIX TV that became NY's highest rated. A year into it, the station's general manager told me he didn't want so many black people on it. (He used the N-word). I quit that day. I was then hired by Roger Ailes to be a producer-director on *The Mike Douglas Show*—America's first 90-minute daytime talk-variety. A year later, when I was twenty-four, Roger left to produce Richard Nixon's campaign and I took over as Executive Producer. Nixon later invited me to join up and go into the White House, but I declined and headed west to get into film...my first love.

S. MAG.: Do you have any personal favorites: actors, writers, shows, etc.?

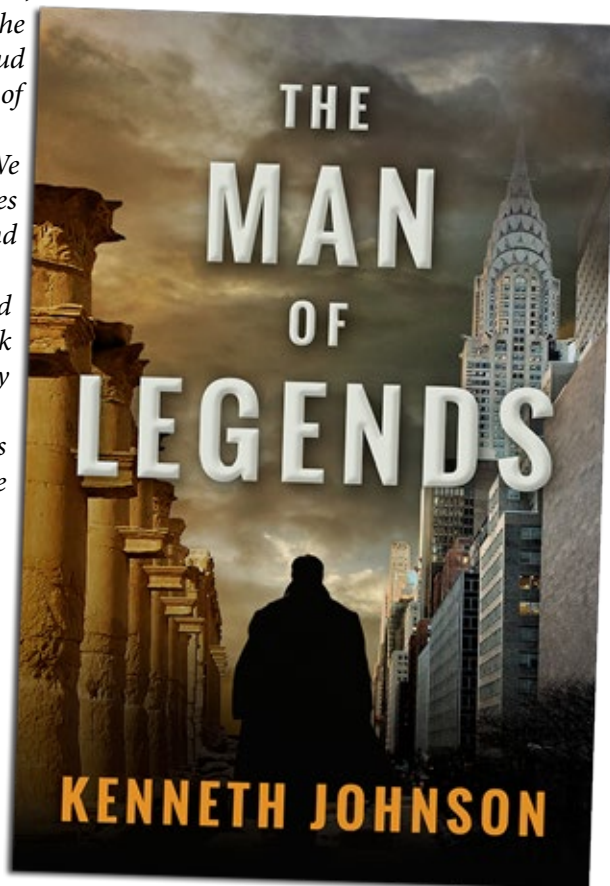
K.J.: Steve Bochco introduced me to Harve Bennett at Universal who was EP of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and needed scripts badly. I suggested *The Bionic Woman*—and Harve asked me to become a producer on SMDM, then we spun off BW as a separate series, and for a while I was writing and producing both shows simultaneously—they were the Number 1 and 3 shows in ratings. For me it was like graduate school—with pay! Lee Majors and Richard Anderson were delights to work with and Lindsay Wagner was (and is) an astonishing actress with a gift for spontaneity that made her unique. Certainly the five years I spent working with the great Bill Bixby are fondly remembered. Bix and I had many arguments, but it was never about BS or Hollywood nonsense—it was always how to make the show the best and most humanistic it could be. We were dearest friends throughout his life. And I still see Lou Ferrigno frequently. Lou is a gem. I've been very lucky to have worked with so many great folks—the entire massive cast of my original miniseries *V* were remarkable, headed by Marc Singer, Faye Grant and Jane Badler. *V* also gave me the opportunity to illustrate the dangers of fascism and scapegoating. I'm proud that it was not only critically acclaimed but is the highest-rated work of science fiction in television history.

But the show where we all had the most fun was *Alien Nation*. We laughed so much together while creating a series and five later movies that allowed us to address really substantive issues of intolerance and discrimination.

I was blessed to be working with some of the finest writers and producers working in television as well, including James Parriott, Nick Corea, Harry & Renee Longstreet, Craig Buck, Diane Frolov and Andy Schneider—who all went on to terrific careers.

I also had great fun directing *Short Circuit 2* with Fisher Stevens and Michael McKean. It had a wonderfully subversive underlying theme

"THE GREAT GEORGE BURNS
ONCE TOLD ME: 'KENNY,
WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO TELL
A LIE PUT AS MUCH TRUTH
IN IT AS YOU CAN.'"



about stereotyping. There are even echoes of that in my Disney Channel movie, Zenon.

S. MAG.: Have you seen a downside to the industry transformation over the years? Is there anything that you wish was still a part of the writing/television scene?

K.J.: *I don't miss executive producing a series...because that's like living in a garbage disposal, and one doesn't have enough time to direct. And I still delight in directing episodes for shows that friends are doing. My old pals Andy and Diane are the EP's of Chicago Med where I recently directed. I also own the motion picture rights to V and we're in the process of setting it up as the first of a major science fiction trilogy, utilizing my novel "V: The Second Generation" as the two sequel movies.*

S. MAG.: Can you tell readers about your newest book, "The Man of Legends," that reviewers are already calling one of the must-reads of summer 2017?

K.J.: *What I've endeavored to do in "The Man of Legends" is blend epic adventure, suspense and a love story for the ages into a supernatural mystery that's rooted in a great, untold legend. It takes place in New York City over New Year's weekend in 2001—but with flashbacks across the last 2000 years to the ancient Holy Land, and beyond into the primal imagery of "Paradise Lost." The hero is an engaging, flesh-and-blood man we call Will, who made a grave mistake—that you or I might have made—which brought a curse down upon him. And for twenty centuries he's been known the world over by a more enigmatic name. He's had a profound impact on a great many famous historical people and shaped our world in numerous stunning ways. He's also the subject of an intense manhunt by an ambitious Vatican authority determined to contain him, a young tabloid journalist, and an eighty-five-year-old UN envoy who was the love of his life sixty years ago. In addition, he is tempted by a sleek young man who seems to be an immortal emissary of darker, incredibly dangerous forces.*

S. MAG.: This book is told in first-person by a variety of eyewitnesses; from the reporter to the obsessed priest. Is first-person a difficult avenue of writing to master? Where exactly did this idea stem from?

K.J.: *I greatly enjoyed getting inside each character's head and letting their words come out in a uniquely personal manner. I wanted the book to feel as real as possible—like it was a documentary that had been pieced together by the young female journalist from interviews she did with a dozen people who, like herself, were eyewitnesses to the startling events that transpired—including the first-person account from the hero himself.*

S. MAG.: Is there any mentor(s) who gave you advice that you'll never forget?

K.J.: *As I've mentioned, Steve Bochco, Steve Cannell and Harve Bennett were invaluable helpmates through my early days at Universal. I also learned a huge amount about people from an old carny I knew and loved named Lefty Edgerton (one of the characters in the book bears his name). Also, the great George Burns once told me: "Kenny, when you're going to tell a lie put as much truth in it as you can." Tremendous advice. I've also learned by listening to the responses from audiences and readers. But the cornerstone influence of all my work for over forty years is my incredibly literate, wise, funny and loving wife, Susie.*

S. MAG.: If you had to give a piece of advice to those out there who wish to achieve such a stellar career as you have, what would you want them to know?

K.J.: *Andrew Carnegie's motto was: "My heart is in the work." He's right—you must have your heart in it for it to be any good. And also of key importance: you've got to LOVE what you do.*

S. MAG.: What's next for Kenneth Johnson? Are there book or TV projects in the works?

K.J.: *Amazon's 47North has bought a new novel on an entirely different subject, but told in the same multiple-first-person style. I delivered the manuscript on May 1 of this year and it's due out in spring of 2018.*

There you have it. Not only will there be a new, alternate "Spring Surprise" from Kenneth Johnson, but we will also be able to sink our teeth into "The Man of Legends" very, very soon and once again get a bird's-eye view of what epic intelligence and creativity is all about. For more information, check out Kenneth's website at www.kennethjohnson.us. ■

It Takes Two

MEET THE WRITING DUO BEHIND BESTSELLER NICCI FRENCH

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist



NICCI FRENCH IS A TRUE TEAM IN THE LITERARY WORLD. “Partners in Crime” to the nth degree. Although each are outstanding writers when it comes to their standalone bodies of work, authors Sean French and Nicci Gerrard have also proven 100% that they are magnificent together. Being one of the fan favorite husband/wife writing teams, it was back in 2011 that they brought the character of Dr. Frieda Klein to suspense fans everywhere. Beginning with “Blue Monday,” the release of “Dark Saturday” (the 6th in the series) will occur July 11, 2017. After all this time, the ‘week’ will soon be wrapped up for Dr. Klein. Fans are not only chomping at the bit to see what happens but they are also clamoring to find a way to add more days to a week so that “Sunday” will not be Dr. Klein’s departure.

Well, more projects are certainly coming from this duo. And the authors who brought readers to the edges of seats, each in their own way, took some time out to speak with *Suspense Magazine* about where their new path will lead.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): There are well-known and beloved teams out there in the suspense world: Nicci French, of course, being one of them. Can you tell readers from both points of view the biggest upside and the biggest downside to writing as a team?

Sean French (S.F.): *There are plenty of upsides. First with plotting, it really helps that if one of us has an idea, they have to really justify it to the other person. I think there’s a temptation when writing alone to have a half-formed idea and then start writing, with a general sense that you’ll sort it all out later. Well, maybe you will and maybe you won’t. It’s generally better to sort it out first. With the writing itself, I think, when it’s really working, we push each other into areas we might not go into on our own. We write for our readers, but in a sense we also write for each other. When I’m writing a chapter, although I’ve always planned it with Nicci, I try to give her something extra, something she might not be expecting. (Although, of course, that something extra might not be any good and she might cut it or rewrite it.) I think we’ve avoided some of the downsides of writing together: rivalry, trying to impose our ideas on the other, etc. If we hadn’t avoided them, we would never have survived as a writing couple; or maybe even a married couple. The downside we haven’t avoided is that when the writing isn’t going well, then we have to go through that together.*

Nicci Gerrard (N.G.): *It still feels strange and mysterious that we can write together. If it didn’t, perhaps it would be time to stop. I think that the hardest part of it is that there is nowhere to hide: most couples have separate worlds and we don’t. If I’ve had a bad day, a day when nothing worked for me, I can’t pretend it was OK. But being Nicci French has been our way of exploring the world together, and that’s been extraordinary—an act of self-exposure and vulnerability; an intimate project to work out what we think and feel about things; an adventure. And fun!*

S. MAG.: How did you first get the idea to form the team? Was it difficult to find the balance?

S.F.: *When we were both journalists. From early on, we talked about the idea of collaborating one day. But it was a vague aspiration until we both read about the controversy over the idea of 'recovered' (or 'false') memory—a big controversy in the 1990s. It seemed like a compelling idea for a thriller, and since we'd had the idea together, we thought we should write it together.*

The only possible 'balance' was absolute equality. We've always done the planning and the research together. We write basically equal amounts of the books, without obsessing too much about it. All of it was difficult, I suppose, but then all writing is difficult.

N.G.: *The odd thing is that when we write separately, we have entirely different voices. And part of the challenge in finding this balance, this equality, is not to make writing together an act of compromise. And the other thing I'd add is that it requires a huge amount of trust: it mustn't be a power struggle. We have to be able to be messy, foolish, undignified, take risks. We have to not mind that we are changing each other's precious words, or erasing them.*

S. MAG.: Your new novel, "Dark Saturday," arrives on July 11. Can you give a nugget of information to readers about the book—something that hasn't been placed already into a press release?

S.F.: *Some years ago, when Nicci was a journalist, she wrote a long article where she visited Broadmoor, which is famous in Britain as a place that treats the criminally insane (including notorious killers, such as Ian Brady or the Yorkshire Ripper). People think of it as a prison, but really it is a hospital—part of the National Health Service, not the prison system. Nicci portrayed it as a place of great dread and great sadness. We always planned to set a novel in a place like that and in "Dark Saturday" we have finally done it.*

N.G.: *I think we both feel great tenderness for Hannah, who is locked away as a teenager. Characters like that come to feel painfully real—because, of course, there are plenty of Hannahs in the UK. When I was visiting Broadmoor, I spent some time with one of the psychiatrists who told me a story about one of his patients, who had murdered his wife and both his children because the voices in his head had told him that otherwise they would be horribly tortured. The psychiatrist's job was to cure him, so that he would no longer hear those voices. But to be cured would be to understand what he had done, which would also be unendurable. We've never forgotten that story and it's in the novel.*

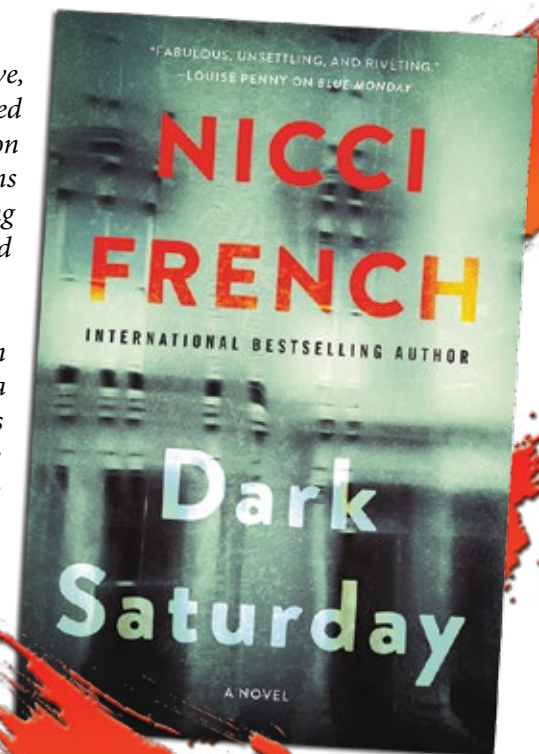
S. MAG.: Frieda Klein is such an enigmatic character that readers have certainly been drawn to. Can you share a bit of background as to where she first "appeared?" Are there qualities Frieda has that you or someone close to the both of you share, or was she simply created?

S.F.: *We were fascinated by the idea of a psychotherapist as a kind of detective, uncovering secrets, finding the patterns in the chaos of life. As we talked and talked about that, Frieda emerged, as if from a mist. We aren't aware of basing her on anywhere. But, in her nightwalks, we might have been inspired by Charles Dickens who was so fired up by his obsessive writing that he would spend the night walking through London's streets and alleys, and these strange nocturnal experiences would then feed back into his work.*

N.G.: *Bit by bit, over the years, we feel we've come to know Frieda quite well (though Frieda fiercely resists being known—which is one reason why we had to give her a series, not a single book). She's part of our relationship now: we often find ourselves saying, 'what would Frieda,' think, or say, or do. And we love Frieda, who is prickly and reclusive and honourable. But sometimes we worry about what she would make of us—because she sees through everyone's defenses, into the heart of them, and that's rather scary!*

S. MAG.: Out of all the books written, both as a team and separately, can you tell readers who your favorite character is and why?

S.F.: *Well, of course, our characters are like our children! But I have a special*



fondness for characters that some readers have found difficult, and none is more difficult than Holly, the central character of a novel of ours called "Catch Me When I Fall," a bipolar woman who doesn't realize she's bipolar, who tries to do good and causes terrible damage.

N.G.: *I'm very fond of Josef, the Ukrainian builder in the Frieda Klein series, who enters her life by crashing through the ceiling (this is something that actually happened to us once, when a builder fell onto our kitchen floor in the middle of a dinner party). He can speak to Frieda in a way no-one else dares to.*

S. MAG.: Is there a genre you have not tackled as of yet that you would like to in the future?

S.F.: *We've both written in different genres in books published under our own names. We've occasionally had slightly different ideas. If we put them into practice, we'd probably do them under another name. 'Sean Gerrard' perhaps.*

N.G.: *Maybe this Sean Gerrard can write a horror story about a couple writing books together....*

S. MAG.: Can you give readers a little look at literary life in England? And do you see differences in readership/fans between England and the U.S.?

S.F.: *My own (probably unreliable) impression is the obvious one. The literary world in Britain is very much smaller than in the U.S., so that you keep bumping into Val McDermid and Ian Rankin and Sophie Hannah and so on. And they are a very nice, comradely bunch.*

N.G.: *There are probably differences between readers and fans in the two countries—but the main thing I'd say is that with readers in every country we are published you have a miraculous kind of relationship. With books you love, a voice is speaking directly to you.*

S. MAG.: Will "Nicci French" be attending any events in the latter part of 2017 in the U.S.?

S.F.: *We're eager to visit the U.S. as soon as possible, whether doing events or not doing events. But in the latter part of 2017, Nicci French will be writing the first post-Frieda Klein book, which will feel like a whole new career.*

N.G.: *Yes—in the autumn we are going to go away on a long-ish walking holiday in which we are going to work out what we are going to do with our life once we no longer have Frieda living with us. We are going to miss her very much.*

S. MAG.: Could both of you please answer this question: "If I had not been a writer, I would have been _____."

S.F.: *a teacher, if I could have managed it (I sometimes think it's harder to be a good teacher than a good writer).*

N.G.: *a tree surgeon.*

S. MAG.: Would you share a favorite fan moment with our readers?

S.F.: *We met a reader who had named her daughter after us. That was very touching. And on the set of a film that was made of one of our books, Nicci met the star, Heather Graham, who said she was eager to talk to her about the intense sexual theme of the story. That was rather puzzling. Why didn't she want to talk to me about the intense sexual theme of the story?*

N.G.: *Quite often at book-signings, mothers and daughters come together because they've always read our books together, and passed them between each other. I love that because it's what reading is all about—an intense immersion in another world, and also a way of sharing the pleasure of that world. And several times, people have talked about how they have recently been through bereavements and great grief, and reading our book has helped them through—and that's a great privilege.*

It was a great privilege learning more about the duo behind Nicci French and, as with all fans, we'll be looking forward to what comes next! For more information about Sean French and Nicci Gerrard, head to www.facebook.com/NicciFrenchOfficialPage. ■

Laurie R. King is on “Lockdown” & We’ve Got the Key

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist



Laurie R. King has the intrinsic ability to continuously take an idea, add in the perfect character—in a specific time and place—and bring it to life, creating a story that resonates in readers’ minds. As a *New York Times* bestselling author of both standalone and series novels, and other works, she is responsible for the beloved *Mary Russell-Sherlock Holmes* stories as well as tales surrounding Kate Martinelli, a San Francisco homicide inspector who continues to solve unforgettable mysteries each time out.

With an extensive background that includes a variety of things, from traveling the world to holding a doctorate in Theology, Laurie R. King has a great many avenues to explore when it comes to crafting a plot. With her new release, “Lockdown,” this author walks down a slightly different path that will engage readers once again. She joins us to talk about this new release, characters on the verge of returning soon, as well as giving us a peek at what constitutes a ‘perfect writing day’ in the life of Laurie R. King.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Being that you excel at both standalone novels and series fiction, can you give readers insight on both the upsides and downsides to writing both? Is it more fun to sink your teeth into a series?

Laurie R. King (L.R.K.): *Starting a new book in a series is like walking into a family reunion: it’s always great to see everyone again—just super to catch up on all their lives and interests, meet their new kids and partners. Then, after a good long visit, it’s a relief to move on.*

A standalone, on the other hand, is a visit to a foreign country. You’re learning the language, building maps, making new friends—everything is strange and exciting and scary and demanding. And after a tumultuous period, you go home to your family and give them all a big hug, since you can appreciate them anew.

S. MAG.: Does your extensive educational background provide insight when you are writing a book? There are certainly theological issues found in some of your titles—does theology provide characters with more substance, considering the width and breadth of the topic?

L.R.K.: *There are two questions here, of theology and of religion. Theological ideas give me the kinds of ideas that reach beyond the everyday lives of the people and their actions. Holy fools, alchemical symbols, Christian mystics—they bring in the wider universe. Religion, on the other hand, opens a door into a character. What I believe in adds a dimension to who I am and how I relate to the people around me.*

And, yes, both carry with them a considerable weight in building character, plot, and a story’s wider meaning.

S. MAG.: The *Russell & Holmes* series is among some of your reader favorites. Mary Russell’s apprenticeship with Sherlock Holmes is incredible and brought about some amazing stories. Are you a particular fan of history? Is there a particular

character you would love to write about from history that you have not yet delved into?

L.R.K.: *In fact, I'm terrible at history, was never any good at keeping dates and names straight in my head. By now I've absorbed the essence of the Twenties, having lived there for more than fifteen books, but I still have to look up the details of what happened when. And then I had to plunge into the Victorian era (for "The Murder of Mary Russell") and try to get that time straight!*

What does appeal is a sense of continuity. I did my MA thesis on a particular set of stories that can be traced over some thousands of years in the Middle East, from Canaanite religion to the New Testament. In the same way, it fascinates me that a movement or personality that rises up in one society can influence people decades, even centuries later.

As for historical individuals, those are always tricky. If they're too interesting, and too well known to the general public, it's hard to shape them to the needs of the story. What I like better is to find someone who isn't really well known, then create a variation on that person—a 'what-if' that places them in my own alternate universe. Like General Allenby and Man Ray and Dashiell Hammett and Marshal Lyautey and....

S. MAG.: Is Arthur Conan Doyle the favorite of yours when it comes to writers? Are there any others you can mention that you feel an affinity to, or perhaps just simply love and look forward to reading their next titles?

L.R.K.: *Conan Doyle has a brilliant writing style for the kinds of stories he was telling—brisk, unadorned, and distinctly of his time and place. Not my style, in the least, but with a vigor that is enviable. And the following generation, the Golden Age writers, clearly build on the Victorian generation—I adore Tey and Sayers, Marsh and Allingham.*

As for more modern writers, I'm not sure it's fair to talk favorites among the living, since if they're a friend, my praise is suspect; whereas, if I don't mention the person because they're a friend, that's an insult!

S. MAG.: Your new book, "Lockdown," is a standalone that certainly hits upon a specific area of the news that has unfortunately become a part of our daily reality. Can you tell readers a bit about this new title and what brought the idea into your mind?

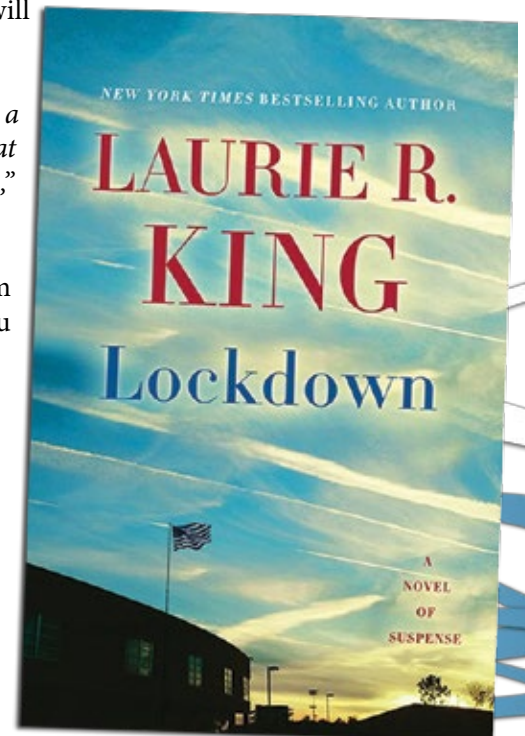
L.R.K.: *The book is a mosaic of closely fitted lives and acts. It began with a story I wrote many years ago: "Paleta Man" (nominated for an Edgar award!) Some time later, I wrote another story, this one for a Michael Chabon collection, then one for Dana Stabenow—eventually, there were half a dozen short stories, none of which had any apparent link. The thing that brings together the characters of those stories is one of those events typical of a middle school: Career Day, when a bunch of relative strangers, each carrying their burdens of history and problems and secrets, are brought face to face in the midst of children. In the story, the "lockdown" is an event, one with alarms and police reaction. But "locked down" also describes what's going on in several of the lives at school that day.*

S. MAG.: For those who love San Francisco homicide inspector Kate Martinelli, will Kate be reappearing anytime soon?

L.R.K.: *I do hope so. I've been trying to carve some time in my life to do at least a short story or novella that we can put up as an e-story—because I want to know what Kate and her crew are doing, too! (In fact, she appears very briefly in "Lockdown," although just in a phone conversation.)*

S. MAG.: You have branched out in so many ways with your writing—from historical to war to post-apocalyptic (near future)—is there a particular genre you have not tackled that you think about?

*"A novel is not an idea:
it is the chemical reaction
that occurs when an idea
meets a character in a
specific time and place."*



L.R.K.: Yes. As one of my publishers' early sales-meeting handouts put it, "What Laurie R. King will write next...is always a mystery." I guess it's tough to categorize someone who writes San Francisco cops, historical Sherlock Holmes, and Vietnam War novels. However, it would drive me mad to write the same set of characters year in and year out. And I know I'd end up getting increasingly cruel to the protagonist—when I found myself doing four Russells in a row, the fourth one opened with her suffering amnesia from a severe head injury. So I try not to commit myself to too many of one series in a row.

It would be fun to do a hard-core science fiction story, although I'm not sure I could pull it off. I'm thinking of doing one or two follow-ups to my sci-fi/urban PI/noir story "Hellbender." And if someone wrote me a check to take a year off, I'd probably spend it finishing the book of modern Midrashim that I started with "Mila's Tale." (Both of those are published as e-stories through the LRK website.)

So many stories, so little time...

S. MAG.: Some of your books include events from your own background, such as the rebuilding of homes. With the travel you have done and various careers or projects you've been a part of, do you ever have that moment of not knowing what to do next? Your mind is certainly a well-spring when it comes to characters, but do you ever experience writer's block? If so, do you have your own method of breaking through?

L.R.K.: I can't say I ever have trouble coming up with an interesting place to write about, or a theme I'd like to explore. What does occasionally stump me for a while is finding the right combination. A novel is not an idea: it is the chemical reaction that occurs when an idea meets a character in a specific time and place.

As for writer's block, for me it's generally a symptom of a first-draft that's about to go off the rails and I haven't consciously spotted it. If I'm in the process of writing and suddenly want to take a few days off to clean the oven and clear the closets, it's almost always a warning signal from the back of my brain that I'm about to write myself into a corner in some way. If I take a day or two off and then go back to what I've written, it usually jumps out at me. (And, yes, this would not happen as much if I wrote to an outline, but I'm Organic, not Organized, and that's how my stories come into being.)

The kind of writer's block that isn't a safety mechanism—the kind that makes me want to go sit on a beach somewhere for six months—is a natural part of the overworked writer's life. After a week...or four of cleaning up my life and my house, getting my taxes organized and seeing friends and family I haven't talked to in months, I pay the bills and realize that mortgages don't pay themselves. There's nothing like the threat of living in one's car to inspire another stint on the laptop. And once I get going, I remember that I actually love my job.

S. MAG.: Can you give readers the Laurie R. King 'perfect day of writing'? Such as, what your preferred surroundings would be when it's time to write; rituals you have, such as needing music playing in the background, staring out at a certain San Fran landmark, etc.?

L.R.K.: Silence is good, although I've written books surrounded by construction crews with Skil saws and pneumatic hammers. Early on, in the days before laptops, I used to write a lot sitting behind the wheel of my (stationary) car, while the kids were at soccer practice or piano lessons. Now, I write in my study, a book-lined space the size of a two-car garage (which, coincidentally, it used to be) with dark purple carpeting and windows looking out onto the trees.

A perfect day of writing? That's when I get 2500 words done before lunch, having sat down at 8:00 a.m. with no interruptions other than cups of tea and a visit from the UPS lady.

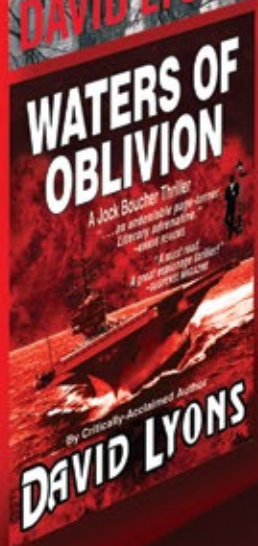
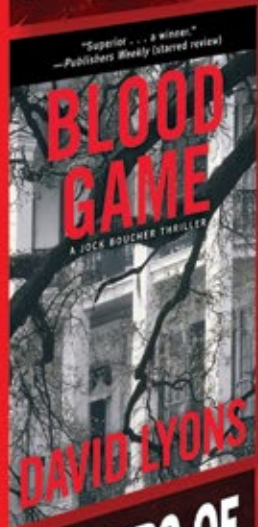
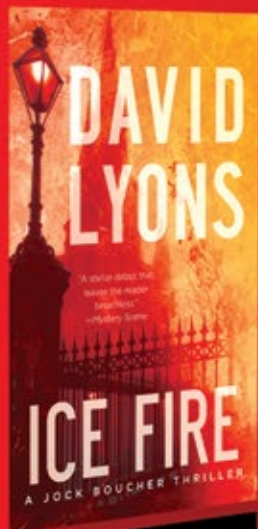
An acceptable day is 2000 words before my brain melts down around 3:00 p.m. I'd even go with 1500, if they're the right words.

S. MAG.: If you could have dinner with one author/writer—or even one character—who would it be and why? Is there a certain question you would ask them?

L.R.K.: Wouldn't you like to have a dinner with Kate Shugak and Kate Martinelli? Or—not with them, but at the next table, listening in? What about Mary Russell and Miss Marple? Harris Stuyvesant and Sam Spade?

And...no, I wouldn't ask them anything, I'd just sit back and grin. And madly scribble notes...

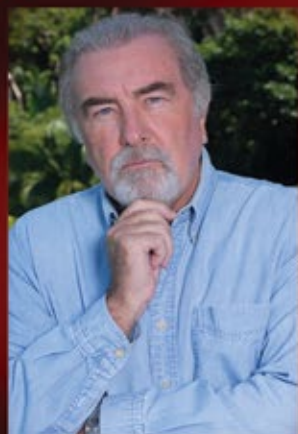
That would definitely be a conversation made for eavesdropping! We want to thank Laurie for taking time out of her busy schedule to speak with us. For more information on "Lockdown," as well as all other events coming up, head to Laurie's website at, www.laurierking.com. ■



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FACE DOWN

By Steve Vance

HENRY "PAWPAW" NEWTON LOOKED TO THE WEST and the tide of dark black clouds that dominated that portion of the sky, and shook his head again. "No, boy, I don't think this is a good idea," he repeated. "Weather's getting bad, and you need to be on the road before it hits here. I hate to think of you trying to drive the interstate in a downpour. This can wait until tomorrow."

His grandson released a slightly exasperated/slightly amused sigh before tempering it with a grin. "Don't worry about that, PawPaw; I'm a big boy. I can drive in the rain." Joe Newton rubbed the aging man's shoulder affectionately. He stooped to flip the latch on the small door that offered entrance to the space below the flooring of his grandparents' large, and long, ell-shaped home. "This won't take five minutes."

"It's going to take all afternoon if you two don't make up your minds," Joe's grandmother observed wryly. Though only about half the size of her husband, "Nonnie" Newton had maintained fairly complete control over the disposition of her house and possessions for most of her married life, but when it came to basically technological issues such as this, she tended to defer (if grudgingly) to the men.

"I'll call up Carl Hoobler in the morning and get him to drop over and hook up the cable," PawPaw stated firmly.

"And pay him fifty dollars, right?" Joe said. "Right?"

"Well, he'd deserve some compensation—"

"For crawling—*what?*—seventy, seventy-five feet on his fat beer gut to push a TV cable up through a hole in the floor?" asked Joe. "I'm here, I'm free. I won't charge you a penny for what may well be the living definition of 'unskilled labor.'"

The older man shook his head. "No, sir. If you go under there, I'm paying you."

"PawPaw, you just forced me to take a hundred bucks for housesitting, during which the most strenuous thing I did was switch on the security lights once a night. You're not going to shove any more money into my back pocket. Okay?"

Nonnie tossed her hands into the air before pulling Joe's arm down so that she could give him a peck on the cheek. "You two stubborn mules go on and work it out. I'm getting my wash off the line before that rain hits. Be careful on your way home, Joey."

"Yes, ma'am, you know it," he assured her.

"And tell that silly girl of yours she's a flat out fool to break up with a catch like you!" the little woman added over her shoulder.

"I will." Joe waited until she had disappeared around the corner of the house before getting back on-topic. He couldn't remember ever having to struggle so much to do a favor for anyone. "Now, I know how much you love your boxing, PawPaw, and I know it's on TV tonight, so let's just get this done before the first round begins, okay? It's not like this is the first time I've been underneath your house, you know."

"First time in about fifteen years," PawPaw replied. "Since you were five and looking for fishing worms."

Joe gave him a wink. "You might be surprised."

And the old man gave in. He really did enjoy his boxing. "All right."

As Joe dropped to all fours and stuck his head into the cool waiting darkness beneath the dwelling, Henry used the tall television antenna posted next to the door to maneuver himself to his knees behind his grandson. There had once been a time when he would have wriggled through the opening and to the far end of the house like a fish swimming downstream, but that had been many years and a number of post-middle-age pounds ago. Long before any thought of cable television.

Joe watched his grandfather's obviously painful stooping and forced himself not to argue the point. Even though PawPaw would have to be inside in a couple of minutes to pull the cable up through the hole in the floor and reattach it to the receiver, Joe wasn't going to take the moment from this formerly athletic man who had given so much of himself in hard physical work to keep his family well-provided-for.

Instead, he looked away from the pain and effort coloring his grandfather's face to the antenna. "You know, you could make a nice little handful of cash yourself if you took down that pole and sold it to the metal recyclers."

"Nope. We still use that to help reception for the over-the-air boxes, local news and all."

Cable TV and government-subsidized broadcast receivers, Joe thought. For a pair so distrusting of "modern" technology, his grandparents sure did love their television.

"Lotta people have nothing but bad to say about Mr. Bush Junior," Henry continued, "but all I hold against him is the taking away of free television airwaves and giving them to the government."

Joe smiled but said nothing. He turned his face toward the opening in the foundation of the huge house. In contrast to the simmering heat of a late summer afternoon out here, the air in there was invigoratingly cool. And dark. "Got a flashlight on you, PawPaw?"

Of course the older man did. After a moment of digging it from a back pocket of his overalls, he handed the long, silver instrument to his grandson.

"You know the definition of a flashlight, don't you?" Joe asked. "It's 'a cylindrical tube designed for storing dead batteries.'"

Henry snorted in amusement. "Is that what you're learning in college?"

"That's pretty much the extent of it. Better head back into the house; it won't take me long to get to the den."

"I'll be there." Still using the antenna for support, he began to work his way to his feet once more. "This wouldn't be necessary at all if I hadn't snagged a boot on the carpet while I was moving the blamed receiver."

"Murphy's Law: whatever bad can happen *will* happen." Joe ducked his head beneath the miniature doorjamb and began to crawl inside. "See you down there, PawPaw."

Henry coughed slightly, uncomfortable with what he was about to say. He'd never been a man to display his emotions, even to his family. "Joey, I just want to tell you again how much me and your grandma appreciate everything that you do for us, looking after the house while we were gone . . . this . . ."

"Aw, are you trying to make me cry?" Joe interrupted. "Because I will. Right here, right now. I'll bawl like a baby."

Henry smiled. "Doofus. But what your grandma said is the truth: that girlfriend of yours . . . Valerie? She's flat crazy to look for somebody better than you. You're a good boy, Joey Newton."

Joe felt himself blushing. "Well, there are plenty of other fish in the sea, right?"

"Always are." With a quick nudge to his grandson's side from his knee, Henry began walking painfully toward the back door of the home.

"Yeah, I'm just twenty-four carat," Joe whispered to himself as he crawled underneath the floor.

It took no more than an instant to remember why he had never enjoyed spending time here, below the house, even when he had been an adventurous kid. First and foremost was the lack of headspace. While the house was large and long, the absence of a basement meant that the foundation had been dug no more than two and a half feet into the hard, reddish Georgia soil (or "chert," as the locals called it), and it was only that deep in the outline trenches that held the block walls that supported the building. Between the ground and the descending floor joists measured no more than eighteen inches of space. Crawling eighty feet or more on his hands and knees would have been bad enough, but eighteen inches left room only to elbow-walk. It really was something like dry swimming just to move around.

"I'll bet the cable guys were cussing like sailors when they hooked up this place," Joe whispered.

He switched on the flashlight and was transported instantly three decades into the past. Everything that had been left by the workmen once the flooring had been dropped into place stared back at him. Half a dozen Coke cans lay scattered carelessly here and there, most probably now home to various varieties of insect life—Joe hated insects; over there was a dingy white carpenter's apron, obviously still holding a handful of rust-eaten nails; and he spotted a couple of those peculiar flat measuring pencils that carpenters employed waiting to be picked up, sharpened by ancient pocket knives, and pressed into service once again. Separated from sunshine and rain, the already farmed-out ground could support not even a dusting of plant life, so that left only shards of feldspar and other forms of splintered rock glinting in the ray of the flashlight. It was kind of sad to see, in a way.

While the ground ahead was basically empty, that didn't mean that the way was clear. Mounds of red earth erupted from the foundation at irregular points before him, most left over from the excavation that had created the trenches for the block footing. Every so often, another one-by-three foot rectangular column rose from the ground to the floor above to bear some of the immense weight that Joe could feel in a psychic sense pressing down upon his neck and spine. And there were the

grave-like swellings of dirt scattered haphazardly all about for no evident reason, almost as if the workmen had buried trash or time capsules while they nailed down the flooring. There was a long one just beside the open door.

All right, "good boy," why did you decide to volunteer rather than let Carl Hoobler earn his fifty dollars doing this wiggle worm routine tomorrow? Joe asked himself with a laugh. *Oh, yeah, there's that.*

From directly above him, his grandfather's muffled voice interrupted the moment: "You down there, Joey? Everything okay?"

"Fine, PawPaw!" he called back. "I'll race you back to the den!"

"Then get a move-on!"

Joe took a deep breath, worked his elbows beneath his chest, and immediately whacked his forehead on one of the hanging floor joists. "Crap!" he grunted.

"What?"

"Nothing, PawPaw! I'm coming!" He began to move.

Like an old friend—or at least an old acquaintance—claustrophobia settled over Joe as he took his first elbow-steps around the large mound of earth by the door and headed for the rearmost room of the house. Joe wasn't incapacitatingly claustrophobic; he could wear a seatbelt in his car or a necktie for Sunday morning services. But he wouldn't even entertain the thought of things like lying in a closed tanning bed or zipping himself into a sleeping bag overnight. As he crawl-swam forward, the smothering tons and tons of weight of his grandparents' home began to bear down upon him, reminding him that only a tiny geological event, an earthquake of, say, 2.0, or a brief and angry tornado touchdown, could shift those tons just enough so that they slipped from the thirty year old block foundation to flatten his vulnerable body into something like Joe Newton Fig Bar filling. His breath grew even colder in his chest.

To redirect his thoughts, he tried to focus on less terrifying aspects of the moment. For one, it really wasn't that dark under here. As he moved farther along, farther than he had ever been beneath a building like this before, farther even than his fishing worm expedition days, his eyes began to adjust to the gloom, and the pools of sunlight seeping in at the regularly-spaced foundation vents helped the flashlight illuminate his surroundings. It was sort of a moonscape under here. If the moon were composed of red clay, of course.

No rat holes waited for him, no desiccated corpses of 'possums or raccoons or stray dogs blocked the way, no snakes slithered with poison sensuousness in the shadows away from the vents. Well, he did think that he heard tiny feet skittering here and there, just out of the range of his vision—he hated insects—but nothing touched him or crossed the beam from his light. It wasn't too bad. In fact, it was almost like he was exploring some mysterious, hidden world that had lain untouched for thirty years. Except for the cable guys, naturally.

He thought of how this week of housesitting while his grandparents visited children in Ft. Lauderdale had come at just the right time and had allowed him to be alone when he most needed it. To decompress from the pressures of college. And to deal with the sensations of betrayal that Valerie's leaving had engendered in him. There had been a lot to resolve, but, all in all, it had been a good week.

Still, he could only trick his mind off-topic for so long. When he reached the collection of hard plastic pipes descending from the floor that signaled the location of the first of the two bathrooms within the house, Joe knew that this was the bend in the "ell" of the structure's design and that he would have to take a ninety degree right turn to continue. As he executed this, his eye caught the now distant square of sunlight entering the doorway that had been behind him until then. It looked so small now, tiny. Then he crawled into the long remainder of the ell and the door light vanished altogether.

Oh, God, he thought, it's like being swallowed. I'm down here now. I'm really down here.

"Still breathing, boy?" PawPaw called.

That caused Joe to take another breath. "Fine, PawPaw!" he yelled back. "Still coming towards you!"

He heard his grandfather laugh (and it seemed a little mean-spirited to his ears). "How's the spiders down there?"

Joe waved the flashlight ahead of him into this fresh section. There were a number of old and intricate webs woven among the joists and block walls here, more than he'd noticed over the first third of the course. "I think I can fight my way through them!" In his mind's eye, he envisioned himself, with only a little shading of ridiculousness, wrapped tightly in half a hundred of those webs, struggling, cocooned, screaming in a teeny Al Hedison voice, "Help me! Help me!"

Joe yelled, "But, hey, if you don't hear anything from down here in ten minutes or so, call the rescue squad! And have 'em bring flamethrowers!"

PawPaw chuckled again. "Will do, skipper! But, no kidding, you'd better hurry. That sky's looking awful nasty out there."

Okay, Tough Guy, Joe told himself, show the world how tough you really are. He began scuttling forward once more.

He was still a good thirty feet from the rear wall, not even underneath the den yet, when the rain began outside. Paradoxically, this relaxed the young man somewhat. He liked the rain, always had. The sounds that it made as it cascaded

over the house and property were comforting in a way, and even the loud, very close-sounding booming of thunder was welcome along with the bursts of light through the vents. It was something of a trade-off, however, because the heavy clouds quickly reduced the ambient sunlight to almost nothing.

Finally, he was there. His hand fell on something cold, round and slick, drawing a hiccup of shock until he realized that he'd located the loose cable without meaning to. Finally. "PawPaw! You up there?"

Thunder cracked loudly, apparently very near to the house. "Joey, you better get out from under there!" the older man shouted. "It's getting real bad up here! Come on out!"

"I'm safer under here, PawPaw! Don't worry about me!" He picked up the coaxial cable gingerly. It was insulated, of course, and the receiving dish in the backyard was well-grounded, but Joe still felt as if he were holding something live and deadly in his bare hand. "I've got the cable, PawPaw! Do you want me to hand it up to you or wait until the storm passes?"

Another burst of thunder obliterated whatever his grandfather had tried to say, and once his ears cleared, all he could make out was, "... gloves on!"

"What?"

"I've got my heavy rubber work gloves on!" the man repeated. "Stick it up through the hole!"

"Okay, but don't you try to hook it to the receiver while this mess is going on!"

"I won't!"

"All right, just snag it under a chair leg or something to keep it from slipping back down!" Joe swept the beam of the flashlight about the dark gray joists and planking above him, searching for the small opening into the room. "Give us some help, PawPaw! I can't find the hole!"

Almost instantly, a shaft of radiance from a second flashlight shot down through the hole no more than three feet from where Joe lay on his stomach, and he thrust the end of the cable toward it. The waiting man snatched the cable and drew it upward as fast as a striking snake. "Now get your behind back up here!" he ordered.

Relief engulfed Joe's body like the pouring rain outside. "You don't have to tell me twice!" As he had said earlier, he actually was quite safe from the elements down here, but sometimes there's no place for rational thinking in a specific situation. Still sliding about on his stomach, he rotated his body away from this end of the house and pointed himself in the direction he had come. It was twenty or twenty-five yards back that way, a hard left, and ten more to the foundation door, and then, man-oh-man, home free into that wonderful cascading rain out there. *Out of the tomb and into the deluge*, he thought wryly to himself as he scrambled forward.

Going back often seems faster than getting there, and this was Joe's perception as he swam over the dry, dead earth underneath the house. The storm remained in force overhead, with camera-flash bursts of light brightening the way every few seconds while the young man pictured himself in his already-loaded car, driving through the downpour and back into his life again.

Then irony decided to step in.

His own words regarding the definition of a "flashlight" rang in his ears the instant that the illumination from the one he held began to flicker. The batteries were dying.

"No," Joe whispered. "No no no no no no . . . not now!"

Denying it didn't help. The beam that had been so bright and steady moments earlier seemed to shudder now, as if frightened of the competing light from the storm, and within seconds it was practically gone. Joe knew a trick he had learned accidentally as a child, and he used it swiftly. Holding the flashlight in his left hand, he rammed the heel of his right against the rear of the cylinder with so much force that it nearly shot from his grip. But for some reason, this worked. Perhaps it was the jarring and re-mixing of the chemicals within the batteries themselves, but for whatever cause, the bulb grew brighter abruptly to show him the way out.

"Okay," he gasped, lurching forward again. He was now less worried about the dirt on his clothing or the pain the tiny rocks were generating in his forearms, elbows and knees. All he understood at that instant was that he had to get out.

He slid over only ten more feet before the bulb began to die again, and he didn't try to keep his language muffled from the ears of his grandmother, somewhere up there above him, as he hit the flashlight a second time. It flared once more. He crawled just half that distance before it died altogether.

The rain was still pouring and creating enough of a din beneath the house to nearly deafen the young man, even without the punctuating thunder, but his keyed-up senses still allowed him to hear the tiny cry of broken filaments when he smashed his fist into the side of the flashlight for a third time. The bulb was gone. Now nothing would help. He slammed the cylinder onto the hard ground as if to prove it to himself.

"I gotta get out of here," Joe muttered, without realizing that he was speaking. "I can't stay down here. I can't." Something small and prickly ran across the back of his right hand.

With an inarticulate cry, he threw himself forward. His forehead smacked into another of the endless series of joists, but he hardly felt it through the flood of panic that had overtaken him. He was in the dark, down here, underneath tons and tons of stone and wood and metal and . . . Lightning flashed to light the series of vents on either side of him, like the rows of lamps on a landing strip, and he saw the turn he would have to make to reach the door so far up ahead. Then the lightning was gone and the darkness rushed back in.

I gotta get out of here.

He breathed the blackness and felt its terrible weight, crushing downward from the bottom of the house and outward from the interior of his lungs. It filled him. It enveloped him. It was drowning him.

Joe raced onward as a blind thing now. There was more than just the weight of the darkness trying to kill him now. There were things in it, things just as deadly and hungry. He didn't know if he was screaming or not.

Another flash. He saw the pipes from the bathroom, maybe fifteen feet ahead, and he ran as much as his prone position allowed. Somehow, his blind sense of direction failed him, so that he swerved from a straight crawl into a slice that carried him to his right, toward the side of the foundation. His hand slipped into the trench that held the block wall and the long-dried river of concrete that anchored it to the ground. The flesh was torn from the knuckles of that hand before his temple cracked into the blocks to incite a brilliant explosion of colors inside his brain. But he didn't stop moving.

Please don't let it fall on me! I gotta get out of here! Please, God, don't let it fall on me!

His left shoulder smashed into the drainage pipes of the bath, and he hooked in that direction. There it was, the open door. The storm was so full and powerful that the sunlight admitted by the door was less than that of the moon, but it represented everything to Joe Newton. He saw it and he saw heaven beyond it.

Twenty feet away, fifteen. Spiderwebs blew across his face and released countless tiny legs into his hair and eyebrows, but he kept scrambling and clawing for that doorway. He encountered the rising mound of freshly-turned earth that was located just inside the opening and swam up with it—too terrified to slide to one side and not realizing that this would bring him again into abrupt contact with the floor. His head rang with the collision, but the more awful result was the still sharpened end of a nail that had been errantly driven three decades before as it tore through the shirt he wore to slice the skin of his heaving back. A bloody trench opened from his left shoulder to his right kidney as he rolled from the mound to the packed ground next to it. Screaming.

But the door was right there.

Joe thrust his left arm down to push himself to his side, but rather than finding the packed and firm dirt of the rest of the foundation, his elbow sank into the loose earth of the mound, digging down, finding a film of plastic, puncturing it, touching . . . Touching flesh. Cold and rigid. Touching a hand.

He screamed more loudly than he had during the entire nightmare, not caring if PawPaw or Nonnie heard him above the chaos of the storm now, completely consumed by the slender, icy hand that was reaching up out of the ground to clutch his arm. The long and stiff fingers almost engulfed his left elbow with their polished nails sparkling scarlet with every flash of lightning. It was the same color that . . .

Joe dropped back onto the ground, face-up now, and allowed the terror that had erupted from his heart outward like some biological volcano to dissipate through laughter. It was the same color of polish that Valerie always wore.

"You idiot!" he spat at himself in relief. "You raving cowardly idiot! Who did you think it would be, moron?"

Forgetting the throbbing pain in his head and his hands and his back, he carefully reached across his body with his right hand and tugged Valerie's clenched, dead hand from his other arm. Then, with surprising care, he tucked the hand back inside the plastic, rewrapped the rest of the young woman's body and gently re-covered it with loose dirt, as he first had seven days before.

"Go back to sleep, my dear," he whispered.

This done, he rolled again to his stomach and breathed deeply of the fresh—if rather violent air—rushing out of the rain through the open doorway. He certainly had an amount of explaining to do to his grandparents before cleaning up and leaving for college, but the driving rain would wash away most of any incriminating evidence he had collected over the past several minutes. Ah, he loved the rain.

Reaching his hands and knees, he glanced back at the mound of dirt that he felt certain would remain undisturbed for at least another thirty years and said, "Now we know why fat Carl Hoobler couldn't be allowed down here to poke around, don't we?" And for a moment, the relief and twisted affection that he had displayed during the last few seconds was pushed aside by a sort of harsh satisfaction. "Just like we know that no bitch is ever going to walk out on Joseph Newton. Right, bitch?"

Finally, Joe crawled through the doorway and used the help of the aluminum TV antenna to stand fully and stretch in the embrace of the pouring rain.

He didn't feel a thing when the lightning struck. ■

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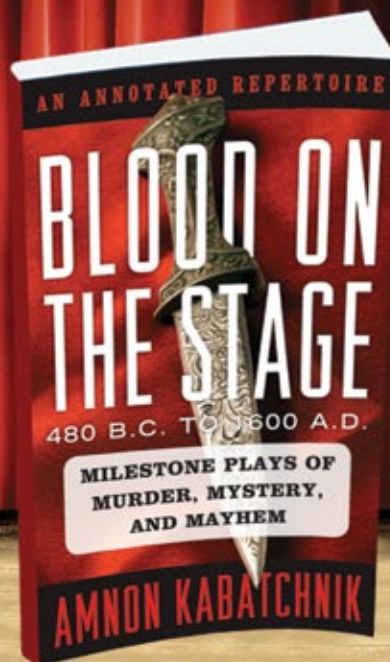
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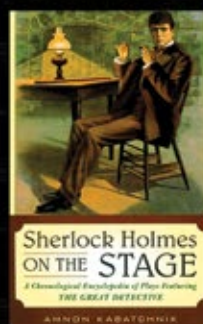
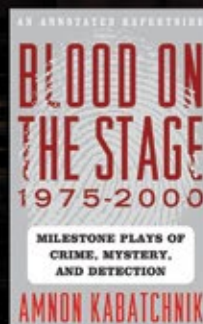
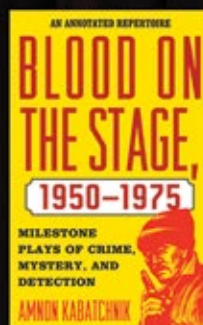
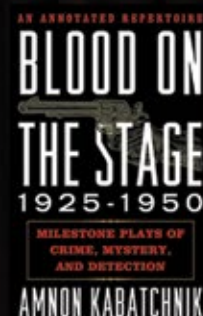
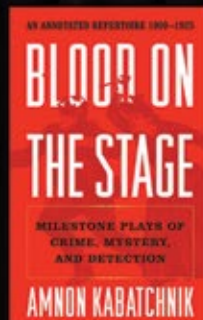
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