

Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER 2017

THE "BEST OF"
2017

Anxiety at the Highest Level

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DEAN KOONTZ

WRITER'S TOOLKIT

ALAN JACOBSON

DEADLINE DREAD

DENNIS PALUMBO

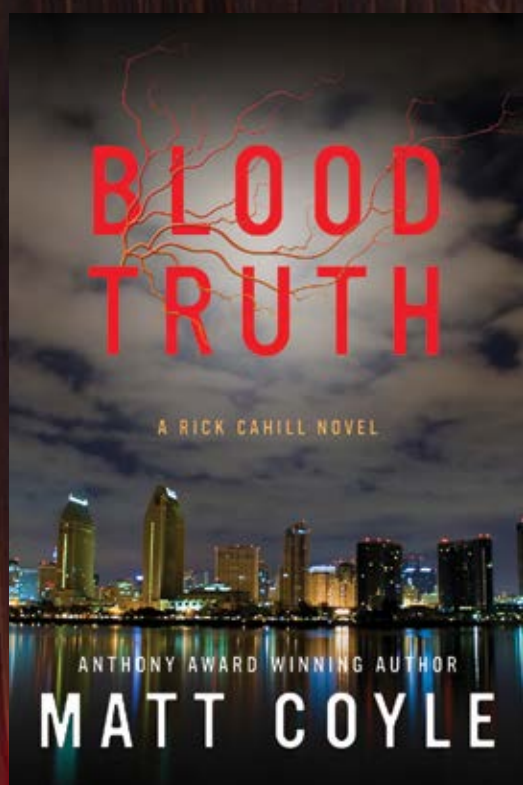
FORENSIC FILES

D.P. LYLE

Excerpt: "Two Girls Down"

LOUISA LUNA

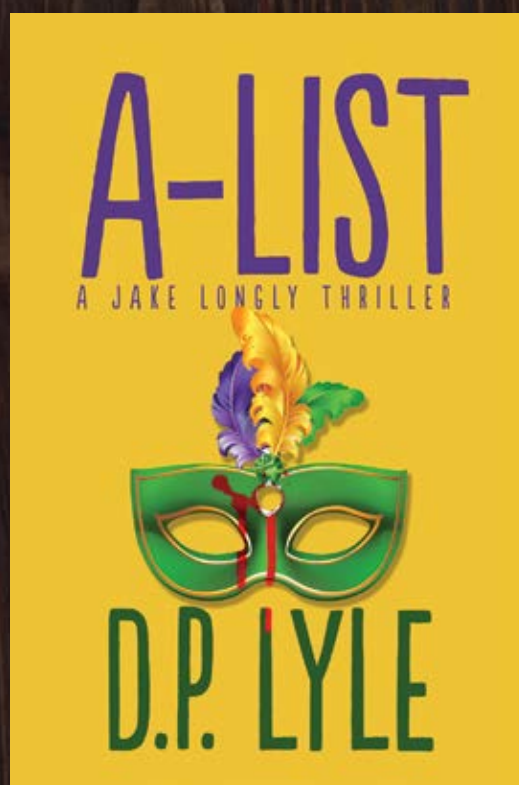
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I know I say this every year, but this time I really mean it! Where the heck did the year go? Talk about watching time fly, it seems like only yesterday (yes, I sound like the old guy at the bar talking to the 22-year-old about life) that we were giving Greg Hurwitz the *Crimson Scribe* award for his book, "Orphan X." But now we must flip the page and write a new chapter (like the way I

did that?) as Greg departs and the 2017 winner is placed into history.

We have sifted through thousands of books published this year to come up with the very best in eight different categories: Cozy Mystery, Debut, Romantic Suspense, Horror, Dark Urban Fantasy/Paranormal, Historical, Young Adult, and Thriller/Suspense. As it was in the past, we then contacted each author and asked him or her a few questions. Not every author was able to contribute, but we got some great responses from the ones who did. When you get that Amazon gift card for Xmas, we have definitely given you a solid place to start when searching for the greatest titles of the year.

The "Best of" list may be the star of this issue, but we also have some fantastic interviews, highlighted by a true "master of the written word," Dean Koontz. In addition, the issue is packed with reviews, short stories, articles, and so much more.

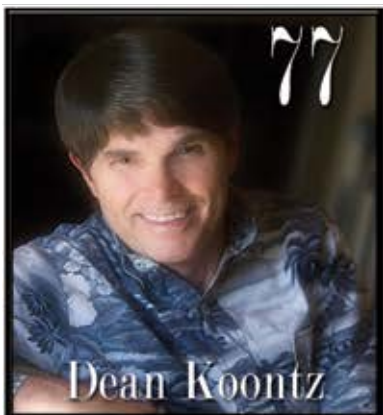
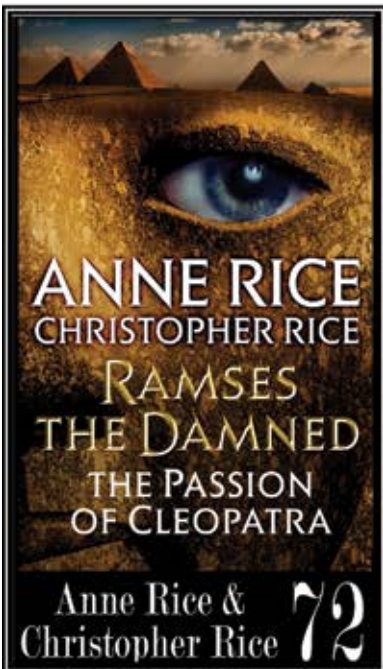
We would like to personally thank each and every one of you for all the support you've given us over the past nine years. We keep doing this for you, and hopefully we're able to bring you exactly what you're looking for when it comes to thrills, chills and suspense. Next year we have some great new things in store, as we constantly transform to make sure that every author has a voice where they can showcase their talent to all the fans of the genre.

From the entire *Suspense Magazine* team, we raise our glasses high and toast all of you! Enjoy your holidays, and we'll see you again real soon in 2018.

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine ■



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DEADLINE DREAD



By Dennis Palumbo

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Someone once said, “The problem with being a writer is that it’s like always having homework due.” Which is as good a starting point as any for a discussion of deadlines, a fact of life for pretty much every writer. Whether a novelist on contract, a screenwriter on assignment, or a struggling author who’s promised his or her agent a terrific new book proposal, everyone’s faced a deadline at some point.

But not every writer views a deadline in the same way. Like most “facts of life,” this aspect of writing holds a different meaning for different people. And most of these meanings were formed years ago, embedded in a writer’s childhood experiences concerning ideas of expectation and performance.

For many of my writer patients, a deadline is viewed with dread—the same pressure to “deliver the goods” that they experienced in school when homework was due. Or a big final exam was to be given. Or some try-out in team sports. The same fears of failure, and concern that they would fall short of their own and others’ expectations.

For some, then and now, a deadline represents the date at which their long-held belief in their own inadequacy and unworthiness is finally confirmed. For these writers, the approaching deadline is like the ticking clock in *High Noon*, or the moment right before Poirot names you as the culprit, or any time you see Hannibal Lecter reach for a knife and fork. In short, not a good thing.

We’re all familiar with this “deadline dread,” and the stereotypical way that most writers cope: namely, procrastination—which can take the form of household chores, distracting social activities, or just anxious fretting. Experienced procrastinators can spend hours “researching” on the Internet, or re-writing again and again the stuff they’ve managed to produce so far.

The point is, the dread is the same: the potential danger of shaming self-exposure. The fear that once written and handed in, the finished product *exposes* us as inadequate, untalented or unentitled.

On the other hand, there’s a smaller group among my patients for whom a deadline, despite its attendant anxiety, is an absolute *must*. These writers feel they need the prod of a deadline, or else they’d never finish the work (or even start it!).

While this may seem an acceptable state of affairs, I think it’s a good idea to investigate a bit further. Often, there’s a kind of “negative reinforcement” in this line of thinking, the meaning being that the writer feels him- or herself to be a lazy, unmotivated slacker who needs to be whipped into compliant productivity by the authority of an imposed deadline.

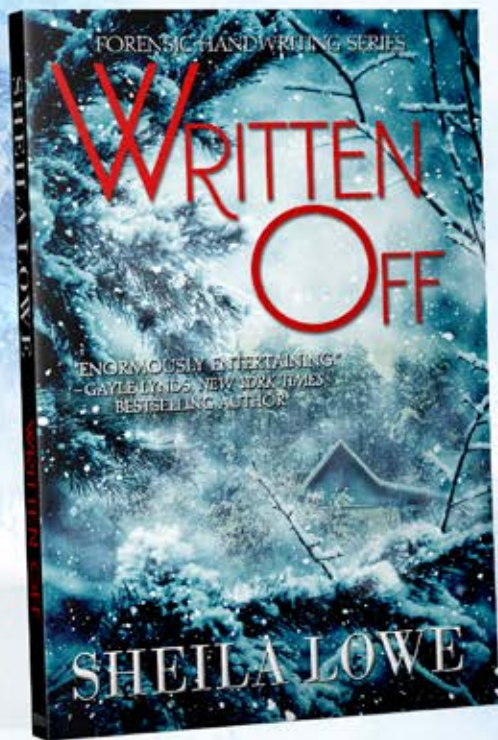
As one patient of mine, a veteran novelist, confessed, “Without a deadline to meet, I’d go all to hell...I mean, I’d just screw

**Experienced procrastinators can spend hours “researching”
on the Internet, or re-writing again and again the stuff
they’ve managed to produce so far.**

A FORENSIC HANDWRITING MYSTERY

"Utterly compelling! Joins the ranks of those rare thrillers that expertly blend nonstop plotting with keen perceptions of the characters—good and bad—who populate this wonderful tale."
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SHEILA LOWE



"Lowe wins readers over with her well-developed heroine and the wealth of fascinating detail on handwriting analysis."
—Booklist

around, not accomplishing anything..."

A noted screenwriter in my practice put it this way: "Deadlines just put a big gun to my head...if I don't get the damned thing in on time, BANG!..."

Now *there's* a pleasant way to spend the next twenty or thirty years of one's life!

Regardless of how you view deadlines, they offer an opportunity to explore and maybe temper the self-critical, self-shaming ways you might be viewing yourself. When the next deadline for a writing project looms, take some time to investigate your feelings about it. Look beyond the almost automatic response of anxiety and dread to see what kind of message you're sending yourself.

For example, do you feel the same way with every deadline? Or does it change depending on the type of project, the person you're delivering it to, your perceived (or their explicit) level of expectation? How are these ways of experiencing deadlines similar to the ways you felt as a child in your family or a student at school? Whose authority and judgment evoked these feelings the most? Do you experience your project's potential reader—the editor, your agent, etc.—in some similar way?

By exploring and illuminating these issues, writers can sometimes get the perspective needed to ease the grip that "deadline dread" has on them. Moreover, they can develop coping strategies based on these understandings.

For instance, if you use deadlines as a motivator, but suffer significant anxiety, you can gain some measure of control by setting a series of private, personal deadlines for yourself. Points at which you not only see where you are on the project but also take some time to assess your feelings about it, identify various creative and emotional concerns, and re-group. In other words, *become your own authority regarding your writing process*, instead of merely being vulnerable to that imposed from outside.

Let's face it. As long as there are writers—and, hopefully, readers—there'll be deadlines. How we deal with them, how we weave them into the fabric of our working lives, is up to us.

In fact, as I once suggested to a writer patient, "You could keep a journal about it...maybe jot down the issues you think deadlines evoke for you..."

"Can I bring it in to show you?" he asked.

"Sure. Our next session, if you'd like."

"Great." He grinned. "A deadline." ■

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 "Phantom Limb") feature psychologist Daniel Rinaldi, a trauma expert who consults with the Pittsburgh Police. All are from Poisoned Pen Press. The next book in the series, "Head Wounds," comes out from Poisoned Pen Press in February, 2018.

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

Darling House

By Philip Vernon

THE HOUSE IS A MONSTER. At least to me. Too big. Too old. Too...everything.

"Happy, my love?" James asks, hoisting a box marked 'FRAGILE' up the porch steps of the Victorian century home—narrow and tall and fitting the town's historic district. I can't find words, so I offer him a smile instead. He seems to accept it, and makes his way through the front door. Shadow swallows him, and he vanishes.

Our single car is parked curbside in front of the moving truck, passenger door ajar. I collect a seafood pot packed with picture frames from the front seat and trace James' steps inside.

#

"I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU, AMELIA," James announces suddenly as I sit across from him in the living room, knitting material on my lap. "We've lived here for months now, and you haven't made a single friend."

"Ellen from knitting group..."

"A *real* friend. How many times have you seen Ellen outside the first Tuesday of every month?"

I remain silent, let his concern sink in, hope he moves past it. But the truth is, I don't desire friends. Not anymore. Not since we've moved here. I've taken to calling the home "Darling House." I call it this because it sounds whimsical and plays off the dollhouse dreams I hold secret.

It blunts the edge of the coldness, too. The coldness that takes hold more and more with the passage of time. Time spent inside Darling House.

#

"I'VE GOT AN IDEA FOR BUNKO TOMORROW," James tells me.

I hate bunko night, but James insists I participate. The women—the frantic hens that populate bunko night—are insufferable. Dyed hair and couture blouses too tight for their post-menopausal frames. Bunko is society's way for society women to carry on day-drinking into the night.

"What idea?" I ask.

"A medium. Richard at the office; his wife Fran is a medium."

"Doesn't sound very Christian. I'm not sure the other ladies..."

"I've already invited her. Through Richard, of course." James smiles. "She's coming over."

Of course.

#

"I DON'T LIKE YOUR CELLAR," Fran says pointedly. She's the last guest. We make our way from the wine glasses and brie and stale crackers abandoned in the dining room, into the foyer.

"What's not to like?"

"There's death down there, Amelia." Interesting Fran doesn't like the cellar on account of death. Death was the talk *du jour* all evening long.

Fran relayed messages from Melissa's late father. Said he no longer blames her for his wife's accident. When Melissa was twelve, she begged her mother to look at a hastily scrawled drawing from the backseat. Mother returned her eyes to the road in time to catch a glimpse of the stop sign she ran. Last thing she saw before the impact snapped her neck.

Fran told Regina she has nothing to worry about. The knotty dollop of blood she flushed down the toilet nine years ago wasn't her unborn child. She'd not miscarried. Empty silence from the Other Side indicated Regina had never been pregnant. At least, not in that instance.

Suddenly, Melissa and Regina's fermented afternoons make more sense.

"Well, it's an old home." I smile at Fran and open the front door. "I'm sure it's seen quite a bit of death."

"Not like this," Fran says. Her eyes...she almost glowers.

I recall the previous owners. The husband, he died of heat stroke. The upkeep of such an old structure had grown too burdensome for his widow.

"That isn't it, either," Fran tells me. "The echo, the lingering imprint, is one of violence. And much older. Much, *much* older."

I politely thank her for her company, and shut the door behind her.

As I do, I think she's said something else. I think she might've muttered, "He was killing people down there."

But I'm nearly certain I'm mistaken.

#

"COPIES OF THE PROPERTY RECORDS," says James. He's walked in through the front door as the grandfather clock chimes six. Same as every other weeknight without fail. He sets a manila folder on my lap next to my knitting and gently kisses my forehead. "Like you asked for. I'm happy you're occupying your mind with something smart. How's Ellen?"

"She's fine," I tell him. Knitting is all I have now. No more bunko nights at Darling House. No more bunko nights for me at all. Melissa and Regina have grown cold. But that's okay. I'm cold, too. All the time, I'm cold. All the time, the tips of my fingers tingle with bloodlessness.

I thumb through the copies James made for me. An eclectic mix of owners, renters—Darling House rented for thirteen dollars and twenty-five cents per month in 1914. I stifle a chuckle.

As I flip past one record, something calls. I go back to it; I read it more carefully.

Frederick Cecire. Candlemaker. Apparently, he built the home. Only person to live here till it began collecting renters a decade later.

Candle making. I eye my knitting suspiciously. I might try making candles.

#

"IF YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE UP A NEW HOBBY, PLEASE DO SO WHERE IT WON'T MAKE SUCH A MESS," James chastises, though his smile's still warm. "What happened to knitting? Is all not well with Ellen?"

"Ellen's fine," I whisper, peering out the kitchen windows. "It's too cold outside. It's snowing, and I need flame. The wax is made from fat, and it needs to melt down for the mold."

"Take it into the cellar, then." James says.

I recall Fran's words. Fran doesn't like our cellar. *He's killing people down there.*

I collect my things, bringing the spools of wick, my blocks of fatty wax, and my scissors, into my arms and make for the cellar.

"Good girl, Amelia," James calls lovingly from behind.

Taking the groaning stairs one slow step at a time, I enter the moist space—the one Fran doesn't like. Down here, standing on uneven concrete below pine rafters so ancient they've petrified, I understand why Fran doesn't like the cellar. Down here, I grow even colder.

#

IT'S MY FIRST TRIP OUTSIDE DARLING HOUSE IN ALMOST TWO MONTHS. Ellen says I've become a shut-

in, and I'm much too young for that sort of behavior. James now seems to secretly enjoy that I stay in the home. *No sense becoming overwhelmed outside*, he tells me in pleasant tones.

The glass door trips a bell wire, alerting the antique shop's clerk to my presence. As he greets me, I hoist the object I've been carrying onto his desk: the object I'd spotted beneath a cobwebbed pile of junk in a dark corner of Darling House's cellar.

"I was wondering if you might have candles from a mold like this one?" I ask. The clerk eyes the candle mold, the elegant C.C. stamped into one side.

"Cecire Candles," he tells me, sucking air through the gap in his front teeth. "Famous up and down the coast in his day. Frederick lived in our town, you know."

"I know."

He rests his chin in the groove between his thumb and forefinger. "Come with me."

I follow him to a dining table for sale in a back nook. Flanked by an ornate hutch—cherry wood or something like it. The table settings are silver and exquisite. A swirling candelabra rests in the very center and holds ten candles, long and thin and pointy. Their color, red with a warmth that's almost too deep.

"Those are Cecire candles, ma'am."

"I'll take them," I say. "And the candelabra."

#

"WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PIECE," James exclaims, setting his crocodile briefcase on the dining room table. Six o'clock, sharp. "Really, it's quite lovely."

"The candles, they're Cecire candles. Their maker, Frederick, built this house."

James takes my hand, kisses the back of it, "You're a precocious little historian, aren't you, my love?"

"I'd like to have dinner in here this evening," I tell James.

He grins in agreement.

#

I STRIKE A KITCHEN MATCH AGAINST ITS BOX AND SULFUR TICKLES MY NOSE. As I light the final candle, arms wrap around my waist. My shoulders jump.

"The meat looks fabulous," James whispers in my ear. Both his hands wander down to my hips, then beneath the hem of my skirt. I step sideways so his fingers can't reach any farther.

"Have a seat." I refill his wine from the glass decanter and take my own chair across the table from him. As he cuts into the roast with a sharpened knife—a precise medium-rare—droplets of red gather and grow from the center, roll down cooked flesh like bloody teardrops, and strike the bone china plate below.

My eyes dart to the candles. At the wicks, just below their dancing flames, the wax does the same. Looks almost *exactly* the same.

#

IN THE CELLAR, I RUN MY PALM AGAINST THE EXPOSED RIVER STONE FOUNDATION. Cold. The same temperature as my hand atop it. My fingers stop every so often at tiny flecks stuck to the walls. Black flecks long since hardened, the way sap turns to amber. Black, but whispers of red remain. Red like the Cecire candles upstairs.

And at last, I know. I know what Fran doesn't like. I know what Frederick Cecire has done.

#

THE GRANDFATHER CLOCK STRIKES SIX. One lyrical chime for each hour since noon. I set my knitting on my lap, and clench my aching hands. My eyes find the front door, visible from my living room chair. I wait for James' return from the office. I wait for James to ask me how Ellen's doing. To congratulate me on a day well-spent at home. Alone.

But the door stays shut.

Then my eyes meander to the entryway table. To the new silver candlestick resting there, and the new red candle it holds. The flame paints the wall in dancing shadow. Wax, crimson and clotted, drips down its sleek shape.

For a moment, I consider inviting Fran back to Darling House.

I wonder what she might have to say now. ■

Forensic Files

Q&A: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR SOMEONE TO DIE FROM CAROTID ARTERY COMPRESSION?

By D.P. Lyle, MD

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Q: How long does it take for someone to die if their carotid artery is compressed?

A: The two carotid arteries lie in the front of the neck on either side of the trachea (windpipe) and carry blood from the heart to the brain. They supply approximately 90% of the brain's blood, with the rest coming from two small vertebral arteries that travel along the spine and over the back-most portion of the brain. The carotids are interconnected in the brain so that, in a normal individual, compressing a single carotid artery will have little effect. Compressing both can cause a loss of consciousness in 15 to 20 seconds and death in 2 to 4 minutes.

One general rule in medicine is that if the heart stops, the victim will lose consciousness in about 4 seconds if standing, 8 if sitting, and 12 if lying down. This simply reflects the effects of gravity on blood flow. These numbers would also mostly hold true if both carotids were suddenly pressed shut—which is not easy to do—see below. But, to the brain, the complete interruption of blood flow through carotids would look the same as it would if the heart had stopped. Either way, the brain would receive no blood supply. And the brain needs a continuous supply of blood to function and survive.

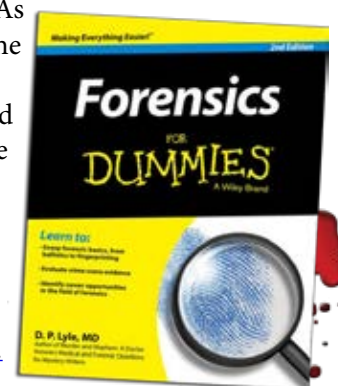
Another medical truism is that dizziness, loss of consciousness, and sudden death are simply gradations along the same scale. That is, what makes you dizzy can make you lose consciousness, and what makes you lose consciousness can cause death. One of the things that can do this is compression of the carotid arteries. Brief compression can cause dizziness, longer compression can cause loss of consciousness, and even a longer period of compression can cause death.

Another variable is how severely the arteries are compressed. If only partially collapsed, the victim may experience no problems. Severe and almost complete compression can cause loss of consciousness and death in short order. And anywhere in between. Significant and potentially deadly compression can result from strangulation—either manual or ligature, hanging, or an aggressively applied chokehold.

So, depending upon the nature, force, and duration of the compression, your victim could have no symptoms, become dizzy, lose consciousness, or die. Or could progressively move from one of these to the next. The time required for death could be a couple of minutes or many minutes if the compression is less severe or intermittent. As the victim struggled, he could intermittently release the chokehold and this would prolong the ordeal.

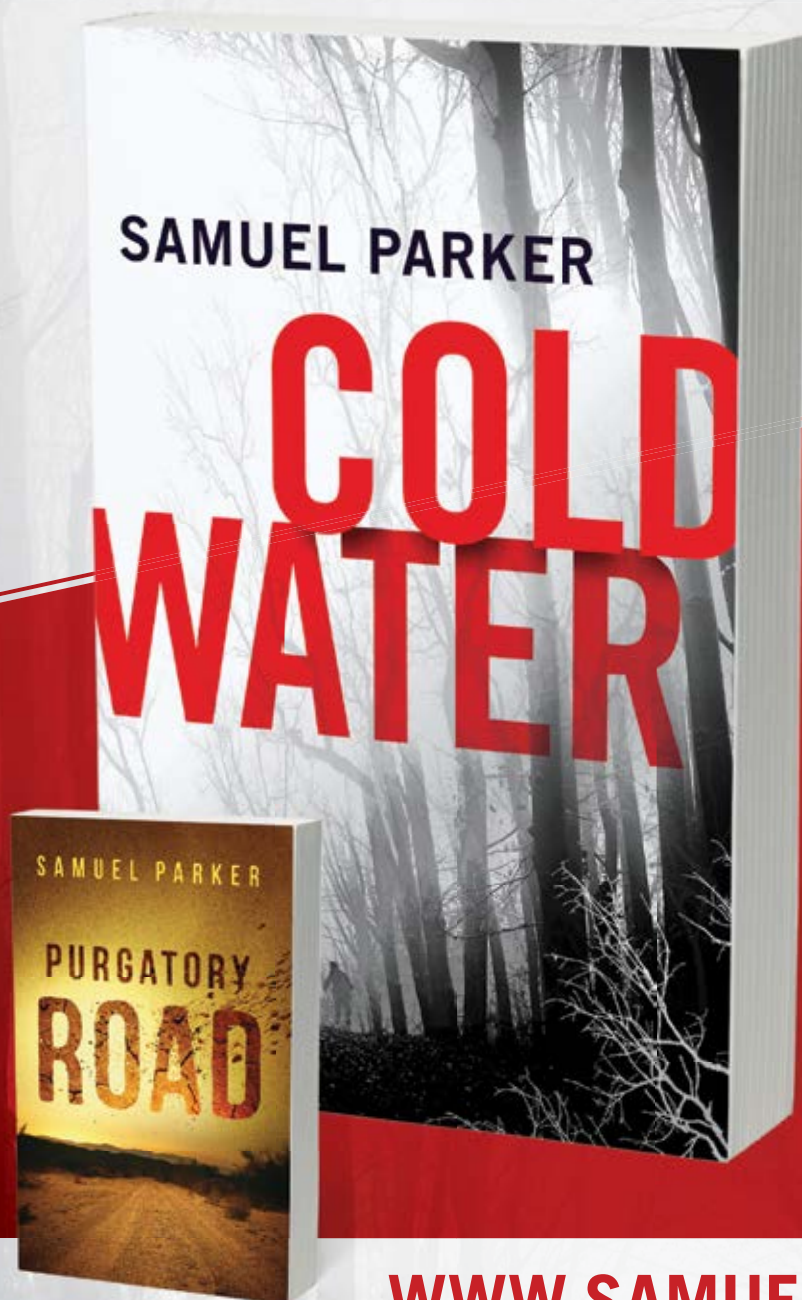
All these variables mean that you can have it almost any way you want. The killer could overpower the victim, render him unconscious in 20 seconds, and kill him in 2 minutes. Or the struggle could go on for many, many minutes. It's up to you. ■

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



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Now he's on the run from men who've tried to kill him once, but Michael is more than an ex-con. A powerful, sinister force skulks within him, threatening and destructive. What—and who—it will destroy next is the only real question.

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THE WRITER'S TOOLKIT:

What's in Your Agency Agreement?

You May Not Want to Know:

*USA Today Bestselling Author Alan Jacobson
Gives us a Primer on What to Avoid*

By Alan Jacobson

Press Photo Credit: Corey Jacobson

As writers, the last thing we want to think about are the legal repercussions of our agency and publishing contracts—or whether the words we put down on paper could invite a lawsuit. But writing is ultimately a business, and if we don't treat it like one, we could find ourselves spending tens of thousands of dollars mounting a defense against a thirsty plaintiff and his or her legal counsel.

I've been writing full-time for 24 years, published a dozen novels and written 15. I've overcome a number of obstacles, navigated a lot of issues, heard stories from friends about their unfortunate experiences, and learned about others second-hand. There are many hidden landmines that can derail or delay your career; some are avoidable, while others are out of your control. This article will address those you can protect yourself against.

We understand that when we first receive a publishing contract there will be industry-speak language and terminology with which we're not familiar. Some of us realize we had better educate ourselves before putting pen to paper, while others figure that none of it is negotiable anyway, and since our agent knows what needs to be modified and what doesn't, if he's signing off on it, we are inclined to accept the terms and scrawl our signature on the dotted line. Whether or not any of those assertions is smart is the subject of a future article. However, before we land that deal to have our manuscript transformed into a book, important pitfalls that many authors fail to recognize may lie—surprisingly—in our agency agreements.

Although we and our agents are on the same team, a contract is almost always signed setting forth the financial parameters of that relationship. Authors, particularly those just starting their careers, are ecstatic to have representation and might overlook the fine print in the agency agreement. Initially, this seemingly has no ill effects. But as in any business, contracts *seemingly* first become important when a problem arises; however, the time to realize that you have agreed to some egregious terms is not when it *becomes* an issue. Instead, look ahead and anticipate what could happen—and to do that, you must understand what you are agreeing to. Things that may seem innocuous may have important implications. An entertainment law attorney can help ensure that you understand the ramifications of all the terms and clauses that are contained in the

Authors, particularly those just starting their careers, are ecstatic to have representation and might overlook the fine print in the agency agreement.

contract.

What are some things you should look out for in an agency agreement? First, understand what you're paying. The 15% commission is obvious, but there are agents who charge for expenses to copy your manuscript as well as for mailing or messenger services to deliver it to the publishers—as well as the cost of postage to send you your royalty statements and checks. A lot of this can be handled electronically nowadays, but still be aware of whether or not your agent charges you for certain items. During my career, I've had agents who do and those who don't. Whether or not an agent reimburses himself for these overhead costs does not make him good or bad. However, if he does deduct these costs, it should be clearly spelled out in your agreement—and the fees should be reasonable...actual expenses incurred, with no profit built in. (And do you really need to spend \$40 for overnight service when two- or three-day mail, with tracking, will suffice, at a fraction of the cost? Don't be afraid to request the less expensive option.) Review any provision about expense reimbursement and consider whether written approval should be required for costs other than certain listed categories—or for any that exceed a certain dollar amount.

Another area of concern—which comes to light only after you've received a publishing offer—is an agent who is more concerned about her agency clause than she is about negotiating the nuances of your publishing contract. Some agents prefer their own agency clauses to be inserted into your publishing agreement rather than using the standard one supplied by the publisher. That's fine if she's trying to protect her interests—but if her substitute clause goes far beyond the normal agency agreement, in parameters and/or length, that's a potential warning sign. Read it. Make sure it's kosher—and make sure she's devoted the same attention to the items in the contract that affect *you*.

Most importantly, watch out for clauses in your agency agreement that tie the agent to your work forever. These clauses are tricky because—as noted earlier—if you're unfamiliar with the legalese being deployed, you don't realize what you're agreeing to. Following are some examples:

1- A clause that extends the royalty period beyond the termination of your agreement. This means that you still owe commission to the dismissed agent for a period of time after you show him the door. This window can be from a few months to a year and usually applies to any contacts the agent made while trying to sell the manuscript—so if he submitted it to half a dozen editors and four rejected it, and two never replied...if suddenly five months later your new agent follows up and convinces one of them to make an offer, and the now-defunct agency agreement had an “after termination” clause of six months, you would be on the hook for paying double commission. If you already have such a clause in your existing agreement and plan to find new representation, get a list of all editors to whom the agent sent your manuscript—before you terminate him.

From the agent's perspective, such an after-termination clause is not unreasonable. It *can* be reasonable if it's limited to the prospective buyers (editors) with whom the agent is in active negotiation at the end of the agreement (after the expiration of any notice period). In that case, your agreement should stipulate that the agent must submit a list of those parties shortly after the agreement ended, and it should be limited to any deals made within a few months thereafter. In addition, it would be best to restrict these parties to a particular editor or imprint, not the entire publishing house. The way the industry is currently constructed, one house may own dozens of imprints. Put it this way: you would not want all of Penguin Random House, with its 250 imprints, to be out of bounds for long.

Most importantly, watch out for clauses in your agency agreement that tie the agent to your work forever.

2- A clause that gives the agent exclusive rights to represent your works for the term of copyright instead of the term of your agency agreement. This is similar to publishing contracts, which grant the publisher the rights to the novel for the “life of copyright”; in essence, absent a strong out of print clause (difficult to get in the eBook and print-on-demand era), that agent is forever and irrevocably tied to your works, enabling him or his agency (after he passes away) to collect royalties for decades after *your* death.

Counterpoint: a number of reputable agents take the position that if they make the initial sale to a book publisher, they should be entitled to handle all rights to that work in perpetuity. Other agents don’t care or would even prefer to be relieved of handling sub rights for an author who is not an ongoing client. In addition, in some cases it isn’t necessarily a bad thing for the author if an agent continues handling all rights, since it can be less confusing if one can turn to a single agent for foreign rights in all the different territories, at least if the original agent has a good foreign rights department. In other cases, this can be undesirable because the agent will likely give his current, active clients priority. And if you fired him in the first place, the relationship might be damaged and having to continue doing business is not always desirable...or smart.

In any case, know what you’re getting into. Consider whether it’s good, bad or somewhere in between for your type of books and the particular agent involved. Also, look at the big picture: if you don’t want to agree to this clause, but he’s a great agent—the kind you’ve spent a long time trying to secure—you may decide to live with it, understanding the potential long-term implications should the relationship sour.

3- As a corollary to the above, a contract that includes a phrase like “agency coupled with an interest” may be an easy one to miss—but you’ll want to strike it from your agreement. Such a clause theoretically gives that agent exclusive right to represent your works for, again, life of copyright. However, a literary agency relationship cannot be an “agency coupled with an interest”; the agent must have some ownership interest in the book in question, not just a commission arrangement, and including such a clause in the contract cannot make it so. The purpose behind such “agency coupled with an interest” clauses is to permit the agent to act for the author to sign agreements, etc. If you see such language, best to strike it.

In sum, be aware of what is contained in the agreement you sign with your agent. For the reasons stated above, it’s helpful to have an entertainment law attorney review it. They’re often short documents, so it should not be prohibitively expensive. Alternatively, if you’re a member of the Author’s Guild, they have counsel who will advise you on your agency and publishing contracts free of charge (Emerging Writer and Student membership levels excluded).

As in any article addressing legal matters written by a non-attorney (as indicated in my bio below), please be sure to confirm the above information and assertions with the legal counsel of your choice before making important decisions relative to your contract documents. ■

Alan Jacobson is most definitely not an attorney. As the USA Today bestselling author of the FBI profiler Karen Vail series and OPSIG Team Black novels, Jacobson has spent 20 years working with the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis unit, the US Marshals Service, DEA, ATF, SWAT, Scotland Yard, and the US military. Several of Jacobson’s award-winning books have been optioned by Hollywood. Oh, and James Patterson, Nelson DeMille, and Michael Connelly have called Vail one of the most compelling heroes in suspense fiction. Not too shabby. Follow Jacobson on Facebook (AlanJacobsonFans), Twitter (@JacobsonAlan), Instagram (alan.jacobson), and Goodreads (alan_jacobson).

TWO GIRLS DOWN

By Louisa Luna

Press Photo Credit: Bertrand Roberts



1 JAMIE BRANDT WAS NOT A BAD MOTHER. Later she would tell that to anyone who would listen: police, reporters, lawyers, her parents, her boyfriend, her dealer, the new bartender with the knuckle tattoos at Schultz's, the investigator from California and her partner, and her own reflection in the bathroom mirror, right before cracking her forehead on the sink's edge and passing out from the cocktail of pain, grief, and fear.

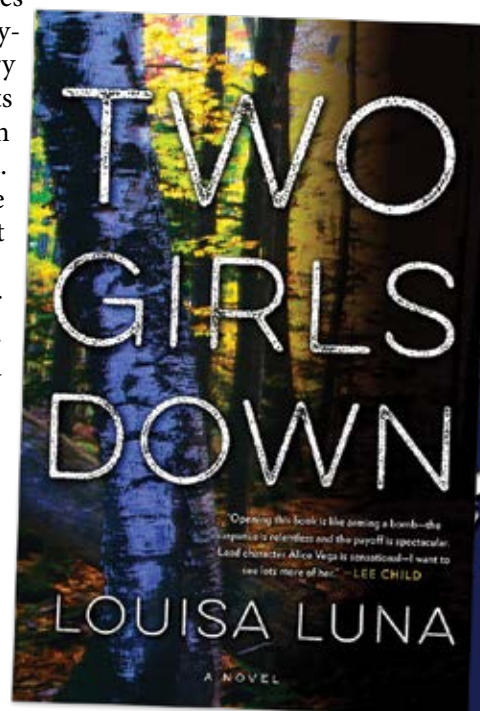
She was not a bad mother, even though she'd yelled at them that morning. It was Saturday, finally, and Jamie was embarrassed to say sometimes she liked the weekdays more, the predictable rhythm of her aunt Maggie's real estate office where she was the receptionist, the chance to drink coffee and read *Us* magazine online, thinking of the girls in school, which they

actually liked for the most part. Kylie, the ten-year-old, might piss and moan over homework, but she loved the day-to-day operations of school—the hurricane of note passing and gossip. She was already popular, had already stolen makeup from Jamie's top dresser drawer and sent texts to boys from Jamie's phone. Bailey, eight, was just as sassy but loved school for the school part, reading and writing—especially vocabulary, the way words sounded and the rules that went with them.

The weekends were hectic, a blur of soccer games and ballet practice, playdates and every last minute crammed with errands: groceries, cooking, pharmacy (Kylie's allergies, Bailey's asthma), cleaning the apartment, dusting and Swiffering every surface to avoid allergies and asthma. And then meltdowns and screaming protests about the rules: one hour on the computer for non-school-related activities, half an hour of video games, one hour of TV, all of which would be broken by Sunday night. Jamie would have to beg them to go to the housing complex playground, which the girls claimed was old, dirty, with two out of five swings broken and a sandbox that smelled like pee.

All Jamie wanted was to get to Saturday night. Then Darrell would come over and maybe the girls would go somewhere for a sleepover, or to Nana and Papa's. Maybe Jamie would let them play video games for a bonus hour in their room and take pictures with her phone just so she and Darrell could drink some beers and watch a movie that didn't feature a chipmunk or a princess. And if the girls weren't there, maybe they'd smoke a joint; maybe his hand would slide up her shirt and they'd end up naked on the couch, Jamie looking at him on top, thinking he is not perfect, he has funny teeth and always wears that leather jacket with the hole in the pit, but there are a few good qualities here. One large good quality: she would think and then she'd laugh, and Darrell would say, "What?" but then he'd laugh too.

But first, errands and then a birthday party for all of them. It was for a girl in Kylie's class, but it was one of those parties to which everyone was invited—siblings



and parents for pizza, games, and cake in the family's big ranch-style house in a new development called The Knolls. Jamie didn't like the trend, these big free-for-all events, was worried because Kylie's birthday was in June and maybe she'd want the same thing. Jamie saw the problems coming at her like headlights: their apartment was too small for a party, her mother would never let her hear the end of it if she asked to have it at her parents' place, and the money, all that money, for that many pizzas plus gifts plus a new dress for Kylie and the new dress Bailey would have to have too.

"Why do you guys even have to come in?" said Kylie from the passenger side, eyebrows wrinkled up over her big hot-cocoa eyes, a sneer in her angel lips.

"Fine, we'll wait outside in the car," said Jamie.

"Everyone will see us," said Bailey from the backseat, anxious.

Jamie looked in the rearview, taking in Bailey's face, a palette of worry. How can she care so much about what other people think already? thought Jamie. She didn't want the girls to care; she missed the days when they were too little to worry about appearances or be embarrassed, back when they would streak like hippies before jumping into the tub.

"We're not waiting in the car, Kylie," said Jamie. "Hey—won't Stella Piper be there with her family? Bailey can play with Owen."

From the corner of her eye Jamie saw her shrug, and felt the weight of it.

"They're not friends anymore," said Bailey.

"They're not?" Jamie said to Bailey. "You're not?" she said to Kylie.

"Why can't you shut up?" Kylie said, craning her head around the seat to glare at her sister.

"Mom!" shouted Bailey, pointing.

"I heard it, Bailey." To Kylie: "Don't talk like that to your sister. Why aren't you friends with Stella Piper anymore?"

Another shrug.

"She thinks Stella's dumb. And her glasses are funny," Bailey reported. "She says they make her look like a creature."

"She's been your friend forever, since you were in kindergarten," said Jamie.

"I know," said Kylie, hushed and hissing.

Jamie stopped third in a trail of cars at a light and said, "You shouldn't be mean to someone just because they look funny."

Kylie stared out the window.

"Someday someone might think you look funny, and then how'll you like it?"

Kylie kept staring.

"Well?" Jamie took Kylie's chin in her hand and turned her head. "Well?"

"I won't like it."

Jamie let go and looked up to see a policeman directing all the cars in her lane to the left.

"What's this now?" said Jamie.

Bailey looked up over the seat.

"What is it? What's happening?"

"I don't know, for God's sake," said Jamie.

She pulled up even with the cop and rolled down the window.

"I need to go straight ahead to the Gulf on Branford."

"Branford? That side of the highway's closed for the parade, Miss," said the cop.

"Fuck me," Jamie said, remembering.

Spring Fest. The town's annual parade of toilet-paper-covered floats and high school bands slogging their way through "My Girl."

"Mom!" the kids shouted, embarrassed.

"Well, Officer, I'm about to run outta gas, so what do you recommend?"

The cop leaned into her window.

"Tell you what, I'll wave you through to St. Cloud; then you can take a right to Route 1080 and you can get to the Hess over that way."

Jamie pictured the route in her head and nodded. "That'd be just great, thanks."

"No problem, ma'am," said the cop, tapping the roof of the car.

Jamie drove the path laid out for her by the cop.

"I can't believe you said the f-curse to the police," said Kylie, a look of quiet shame on her face.

"I'm full of surprises," said Jamie.

"Can we go past the parade? Miss Ferno's on a float from her church," said Bailey.

"What? No, we're already late for this thing," said Jamie.

She glanced at both of them. They stared out the window. Someday you'll think I'm funny, she thought. Someday you'll tell your friends, No, my mom's cool. Once she said "Fuck me" right in front of a cop.

Finally, when they got to the Hess, Kylie asked, "Can we split a Reese's?"

She had yet to outgrow an unwavering devotion to sugar—she would pour maple syrup over Frosted Flakes if you turned your head the other way.

"No, you're going to have all kinds of crap at this party; you don't need a Reese's."

Then the wailing began—you'd think someone was pricking their cuticles with sewing needles. Jamie held her head and leaned over the wheel, thinking she should have smoked the very last bit of resin in the pipe this morning. She didn't like to drive stoned, but there wasn't enough in there to mess her up proper, just enough to help her push through, get to the party where it might be acceptable to have a light beer at noon.

"Enough, stop it!" yelled Jamie, feeling her voice crack, the muscles in her neck tense up. "Fine, go get a goddamn Reese's. Get me a coffee with a Splenda, please."

She threw a five in Kylie's lap.

"Go before I change my mind," she said.

The girls unbuckled their seat belts and scrambled out of the car. Jamie watched them run into the mini-mart, heard the clicks of their dress-up shoes. She checked her makeup in the mirror and shook her head at herself, then went out

to the pumps.

She continued to shake her head, thought, Jesus Christ, do I ever sound like her—her own mother, Gail—“Before I change my mind” and all those threats. First you swear you’ll never be like your mother; then you find yourself sending them to their room and grounding them, and occasionally, once in a while, you hit them once or twice too hard on the back after they say something rude.

Jamie got back in the car and blew air into her hands. Spring Fest my ass, she thought. It was the end of March and still freezing in the mornings and at night, although they’d had more than a few hazy warm days the past two months that fooled everyone into thinking spring was really here; even the black cherry trees were confused—fruit had prematurely formed on the branches, then iced over and broke off the next week in a storm.

The girls had been in the store a long time.

Jamie looked at the time on her phone. 11:32 a.m. They still had to go to Kmart for a gift for Kylie’s friend, which meant they would argue about the under-ten-dollar rule, then engage in negotiations until they got to an under-ten-dollar-without-tax agreement. If there was time, maybe Jamie could browse for something for her aunt Maggie, whose birthday was coming up. Maggie was fond of her, and Jamie didn’t really know why—maybe because she admired Jamie’s pluck, maybe because she’d been a single mother herself after Uncle Stu had left her for a girl in a massage parlor twenty years ago, and she knew how rough it was. Maybe because it was a way to piss off her sister, Jamie’s mother, which she enjoyed doing for a list of reasons either one would tell you all about if you asked them. Jamie ultimately didn’t care about the details since Aunt Maggie had cleaned up in the divorce and got her real estate agent’s license in short order, owned half a dozen homes in the Poconos that she rented out to vacationers, and brokered deals between buyers and the new developments surrounding Denville.

“Goddammit,” said Jamie.

She got out of the car and jogged into the mini-mart, scanned the inside quickly and saw only one other person—a man, looking at a porn magazine.

“Hey,” she said to the fat boy behind the counter. He seemed too old for the braces on his teeth.

He jumped.

“You see two girls in here?”

“Yeah. They went to the bathroom in back.”

Jamie did not say thank you, walked past the guy with the porn and out the back door. She saw Kylie leaning against the cinder block wall, holding a Reese’s cup between her thumb and forefinger like a teacup.

“What the hell, Kylie?” said Jamie.

“She had to pee. She said it was an emergency.”

Jamie stormed past, rapped on the bathroom door and said, “Bailey, come on, let’s move it.”

“I’m washing my hands,” said Bailey from inside.

“You’re done. Let’s go.”

“I’m trying not to touch anything.”

Jamie almost smiled. She had been trying to teach them to line the toilet seat with paper towels, hover above the bowl, and turn the faucets on and off with their elbows in public bathrooms.

“I have Purell in the car. Come on.”

The door opened and Bailey came out. She looked at her mother and covered her mouth with her hands.

“We forgot the coffee!”

“It’s okay,” said Jamie. “Let’s go.”

They went back to the car and drove to the Ridgewood Mall without speaking, Kylie staring out the window, Bailey reading her school workbook. Jamie glanced at both of them and thought they looked nice. Bailey in a pink princess dress, Kylie in a black dress with a purple flower print and the sweetheart neckline that was a little too old for her, Jamie thought, but since it was a hand-me-down from her cousin, she could not complain. They are both so big, she thought, which makes me so old.

The parking lot was surprisingly not crowded, the first three or four rows of the grid full but that was it. God bless Spring Fest, Jamie thought.

“So what does Arianna want?”

“Aren’t we coming in?” said Kylie, shocked.

“No way. I’m going in and out.”

“Come on. That’s so unfair!” they both said.

“Deal with it,” said Jamie. “What does she like?” Kylie sighed. “She wants a sleeping bag.”

“I’m not buying her a sleeping bag. Does she like jewelry?”

Kylie nodded.

“Great. I’ll get her some bracelets.”

Jamie looked through her purse for her phone and her wallet, left the key in the ignition so the heat would stay on.

“Can we at least listen to music?” said Kylie.

“Yes, you can. I’ll be back in five minutes.”

Jamie got out and was about to slam the door when Bailey said, “Mom?”

“What?”

She looked up from her book and said, “Do you know you call a group of lions a pride, not a pack?”

Jamie stared at her, then at Kylie, who rolled her eyes.

“No, baby, I didn’t know that.”

She shut the door and left them.

Into the calm, controlled air of Kmart, pop music from ten years ago in her ears, she forced herself to stay focused. If she didn’t have a list, she had trouble concentrating in big box stores, got distracted by displays and sales. That was the point, wasn’t it, she thought, to turn you into a kid again who sees something shiny and wants it. When the girls were with her, a ten-minute trip turned into thirty minutes easily, everyone leaving with candy and gum and a tank top.

Jamie went to the toy aisles, skimmed over the bright boxes and tubes and balls to the girls section, Make-Your-Own-Headband, Home Manicure Kit, Bead-a-Necklace—she picked that one up; it was \$9.99. You got lucky today, Arianna.

She made her way to the cards and wrapping paper, grabbed a pink gift bag with tissue paper already lined inside and a white card dangling from the handle.

Then on her way to the checkout she stopped when she saw a sheer cowl-necked sweater on a sale rack. The tag read \$21.99. Nope.

At the register, she checked her phone (11:55). Oh who cares, she thought. It doesn't matter if you're late to this kind of thing; it's an open house. Suddenly she felt relaxed, realized her hands were in fists, holding the strings of the gift bag hostage in her fingers. The day opened up in front of her. The party would eat up a couple of hours, then maybe they'd stop by her parents' place, then she could pick up McDonald's for dinner, and then they could waste time until Darrell came over and she could send them to her room and let them watch TV in her bed.

It didn't seem that bad when she thought of it that way. Just some hours to fill.

She paid, picked up her bag, and left. Into the parking lot, back to her car, she sped up. Confused at first, she thought, This is my car. Checked the dent in the fender, the plate. No girls.

I'm going to kill them, she thought, took a breath too quickly and coughed, started talking to them in her head. Don't even tell me you can't tie it in a knot till we get to the fucking party, Bailey. Or you, was this your idea? she thought, picturing Kylie's face. You and your sweet tooth, looking for free samples.

Jamie looked around at the stores: Reno's Coffee, Morgan Housewares, StoneField Ice Cream. She ran to the latter, coughing like she was a smoker, entered through the doors. It was quiet and cold inside. A woman and two little boys and a baby in a car seat sat in a booth. The girl behind the counter had a ring in her lip.

"You see two girls come in here?" said Jamie.

"Yeah, they were just in here."

For a second they stared at each other.

"So where are they?" said Jamie.

Lip Ring shrugged.

"How should I know? They left a few minutes ago."

Jamie could feel the blood rush in her chest. She started to leave, then turned back and said, "Lemme ask you something: How the fuck do you eat with that thing in your face?"

She left and slammed the door before she could hear the answer.

Then Reno's Coffee—a couple, a man post-workout, everyone on his phone.

"Did you see two girls in party dresses?" she asked the people behind the counter. "Eight and ten years old. Did they come in to use the bathroom?" Then to the couple and the man: "Did you see two girls?"

They all said no.

She left, looked back at her car, still empty.

Then Morgan Housewares, Global Market, Eastern Sports. By the time she got back to Kmart it was 12:11, and the fear had become a rock in her throat.

"I can't find my girls," she said to the security guard. She put her hand to her lips after she said it, like she was trying to get the words back.

"Did you lose them in the store, ma'am?" he said. His double chin was strangled by his uniform shirt.

"No, they were in the car. I was in here. Now they're gone."

"We can page them in the store," he said.

"They're not in the store. I was in the store."

"Maybe they came in to look for you," he said. "Yeah, okay. Yes, please, page them."

She was standing in Customer Service with Geri the Customer Service Liaison and two other security guards when she heard the guard with the double chin's voice say her daughters' names: "Kylie Brandt, Bailey Brandt, please come to the Customer Service Center."

Jamie watched people emerge from the aisles, calm, bored. It was not their daughters' names in the air.

"You have bathrooms? Where are the bathrooms?" she said.

Geri pointed to the left.

"You can hear the loudspeaker in there too," she said. Jamie couldn't even see this woman; her face was a smudge with dull gray spots in the middle.

Jamie ran now through the white aisles, hearing the sound of her own wheezing and rationalizations as she talked to herself, "She had to pee, Bailey had to pee. Maybe one of them got sick from that Reese's."

She threw herself onto the door and into the bathroom, knocked on and pushed open every stall. A woman with a walker and a younger woman stood at the sinks.

"Did you see two girls? I can't find my girls."

The woman with the walker appeared not to understand. The younger woman said, "No, what did they look like?"

"They're wearing dresses," Jamie said, and ran out again, to the front of the store.

She passed the security guards and Geri, and now a small crowd of people looking and talking, to the front doors where she exited, ran into the parking lot, back to her car, which was still empty. She hit the hood with her hand and ran back to the store, where more people stood, watching her.

The face of a man with a mustache blurred in front of her, next to the guard with the double chin.

"Ma'am, I put out a Code Adam alert for the entire mall and called the police. Do you want to sit down?"

Jamie didn't understand the words he said. He held out his hand, to guide her inside to a cushioned folding chair, where someone would bring her a glass of water.

Jamie didn't take it. She dug her fingernails into her scalp and whispered, "My girls . . . my girls." ■

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the Fall

By Derrick R. Lafayette

It summoned him.

He saw it just outside the window of his corner office. Standing between two tall unopened bottles of bourbon, scarlet red bows upon the necks, placed on a small brown table. A blanket of snowflakes landscaped the sky. He saw it hovering over the metropolis, various skyscrapers serving as its background. A multitude of lights fighting against the white atmosphere. He placed his wrinkled hand on the freshly cleaned glass, smooth to the touch, as he peered down on the city streets. The wind stroked the age spots on his hand, and blew back his ugly Christmas tie when he pushed open the window.

An expensive pair of transitional glasses drifted and fell straight off his face, as vertigo tapped his shoulder. A book of Post-Its and a ball point pen joined the frames, escaping his shirt pocket and descending into a sea of falling snow. He leaned back, stuck his feet out first, pushing his body with his arms. He took a step forward, closer to what lured him forward. Then another step, as the brisk breeze slammed his window shut. He was trapped...standing in the sky. He thought that gravity wouldn't get in his way, until he fell nearly three hundred feet. Splattered atop a yellow cab filled with a family of four running late to a holiday clearance on Park Ave and 54th Street.

Two detectives, rugged 'thirty-somethings' by the names of Harry Wilson and Jake Cleaver, whipped out small notebooks, standing adjacent to the wreckage of the cab. Police, paramedics, and a coroner all on the scene, snapping pictures. A white sheet covering the old man's body. The dried blood mixed with melted snow resembled a Rorschach of burgundy painted on his back.

"It's always hard around the holidays, but I can do this," Jake said, jotting down notes that resembled gibberish.

"I know...but you haven't," Harry responded, exhaling smoke into the misty gray of the dying blizzard.

"I got it; I'm a 'go' the whole day without mentioning Marie. Not one time."

"Whatever helps you sleep at night. This is your game, I'm just here for support. Anyways, I heard that the guy's shoes hit the hood first, and the family inside was arguing about who should pay the fare right before..."

"Everything falls at the same speed. You drop my ex and a bowling ball off a cliff, they crash together. You're a detective, how do you not know that?"

"I cheated in high school."

"In Physics, or in life?"

"You mentioned her again."

"I said ex."

"What other exes you got? Ten dollars."

Jake sighed, unearthing his worn and torn overstuffed wallet from his back pocket, smoothing out a wrinkled Hamilton. He snapped it closed before Harry saw his ex's picture, fitted inside the plastic picture holder.

"So a note left behind reads: 'I'm looking for the Velveteen Rabbit,' then a sixty-year-old CFO plays Batman and dents the roof of a taxi?" Harry questioned, snatching the ten dollar bill from Jake's hand.

"Vague, I know, that's the story where the doll comes to life. Meets a fairy or something, lives with real rabbits."

"Never read it. Secretary said she was bringing in his fifth cup of coffee at noon, saw the window open. Note taped on the glass. Doesn't read like suicide, plus no forced entry."

"Guy was a known insomniac," Jake said, reaching out his two fingers for a cigarette, the ring finger imprinted by a wedding band no longer worn.

"Got so tired he decided to swan dive into a bigger bed? Get some *real* sleep?" Harry responded, shaking his pack to pop up a smoke. "Let's retire, meet with his widow tomorrow."

"What do you think he saw out there?" Jake inquired, as he moved the bloodied white sheet with the edge of his pencil. It uncovered the old man's mangled face, and briefly Jake thought he saw the man's pupils dilate.

"NO TAMPERING!" the coroner screamed, as his ID lanyard swayed.

"Either a stuffed rabbit doll or the book, I suppose. You want a smoke or not?"

A centipede of taxis blared their horns at an ungodly hour, deep into the night. Above them, in an apartment a shy larger than a storage closet, Jake sleepwalked to his bedroom window. He drew the lightweight sheer curtains aside. A glow of canary washed over the thin white fabric, caught in the shine of a broken traffic light. Outside, in the park across the street, Harry was floating near the trees. He opened his mouth and large, bright white letters came out, materializing into a message: *Walk with me.*

SSCCCHHHRRROOOOMMMM!

The jarring sound of a rickety train shocked Jake awake. He stumbled back from the window, knocking over a picture of Marie's wedding picture. It fell face down, shattering the glass. When his eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw two tall unopened bottles of bourbon placed on his nightstand, the same red scarlet bows attached.

Harry rang the doorbell for the fourth time on a two-story rundown house the following morning. Jake chain-smoked, and fought making eye contact with him.

"This can't be right. His wife lives like this? Separated but not divorced, I imagine."

"No prenu either. She's probably a hoarder. Opposites attract. I mean, it looks like a cat lady house, windows painted black," Jake murmured, looking down, frost and smoke enveloping his face.

Harry rang the doorbell again, jamming his index finger into the small black button encircled in gold.

"Harry."

"What?"

"Remember I told you how hard it is to sleep, since..."

"Careful, ten dollars."

"I had a waking nightmare. You won't believe it, but..."

"Oh shit, she's on the roof!"

Jake looked up to see an old woman adorned in a loose bathrobe, walking to the edge. Her skeletal hand reaching out, yelling something inaudible. She sprinted off the roof, arms extended and, for a moment, Jake saw a pearly white, ghostly image of Harry standing right in front of her. As if she was running to him, like he summoned her. The words 'Walk with me' traversed his ears as the old lady crashed onto the pavement of her driveway. Red blossomed from her back and seeped into the robe. Harry ran towards her.

A cigarette fell loose from Jake's lips; he was motionless.

"We need to call an ambulance! Wake the hell up!"

Jake shook his head and woke up, swiping at the empty spot where Marie's picture used to be, covered in sweat, not sure what day it was. Shadows enshrouding his room. *Did I dream that too?* he thought. Jake stood and walked to the bathroom. The 'on' switch was a chipped piece of wood, dangling from beads; he yanked it down. Draped over his shower curtain was a bathrobe soaked in blood.

Six hours later, sleepless, he met with Harry at a deli. The waiter dropped off a large black coffee that he cupped in his hands quickly. Harry scoffed, as his teeth sank into a Taylor ham sandwich, ketchup escaping the sides, splashing on his shirt.

"You skipping breakfast now?"

"I guess. My stomach, it's..." Jake responded, watching the black rings appear in his cup as he blew away the steam.

"Anyway, guess what? Turns out him and his old lady were both insomniacs. Suffering from terrible nightmares, hearing shit. The old lady wrote it all down in a diary. We found it when we searched the house. She even got a story in there about watching a man jump off a bridge. Actually, she was living under a bridge, guy landed in front of her. It was a big house, could've used you."

"I wasn't there?"

"You freaking bolted man. Your face went all white, unresponsive. When the paramedics did come, you just left in your car."

"No. I mean yea, the old man, for a second I thought...I thought, yea, he probably just went crazy, hallucinated, death by misadventure. There's no crime."

"Right, case is already over. No sign of forced entry, struggle, blood. I hope I don't go batty when I get older. Personally, I think they're schizos. You ever catch me reading 'The Velveteen Rabbit' shoot me in the face."

"Schizos, huh?" Jake said, holding back painful moans, as he drank the burning hot coffee.

"...you know what? Rest up, hit me later, round eight. Meet at Plush downtown, few beers, try that Alligator burger."



"Yea, right. So, I wanted to tell you—"

"Hold that thought, man. I gotta pee something vicious," Harry stated, standing up awkwardly, rushing to the bathroom.

I am tired, Jake thought to himself, as his eyelids grew heavy. He nodded off, leaning forward, when a waiter tapped his shoulder.

"You said a large black coffee, no sugar or cream?" the waiter asked.

Jake beheld a youthful freckled face and realized his table was clear; no one was sitting across from him. In his peripheral, out the window, he saw Harry looking both ways before crossing the street, coming towards the deli. *Did I dream that?* he thought, watching Harry walk through the front door.

"Sir? Large black coffee?"

"No...no thanks. Wait, yes, please. I'm sorry," Jake answered, rubbing his ring finger with his thumb.

Harry plunked into the chair at his table, catching his breath.

"Guess what?" Harry questioned, his chest puffing in and out.

"The diary right?"

"Nah man, turns out the secretary might've poisoned his coffee. Autopsy turned up with a host of drugs in his system. Hallucinogens, poison. Must've fantasized, jumped. We got a case now, conspiracy to murder."

"How does that explain the wife?"

Harry sat back in the booth, looking completely confused. "What? His wife died five years ago. Jumped off a bridge."

Beneath the crescent moon, Jake didn't sleep. He marched around the apartment, occasionally smacking himself in the head, murmuring. Ashtrays were overfilled with mountains of dust, along with a soft yellow noose gripping his neck, from a broken streetlight adjacent to his window. *What day is this? Why can't I remember the day? The Old Man, his eyes? Did he give me something?*

Jake bumped the nightstand in his bedroom. A bottle of bourbon fell off; he swooped to catch it. Slowly, he opened it; sniffed it. A card was attached to the bottle: 'From Harry' was written inside. 'Merry Christmas.' Hoping to calm down, Jake drank himself into a stupor. The bourbon bubbled in his empty stomach and he ran to the bathroom. On his knees, retching, his mouth aimed towards the toilet. *This is why she left me*, he thought. Another dry heave, and a crumpled up ball of yellow appeared at the edge of his throat. He forced it up painfully and straightened out the Post-It. Meeting his eyes were the words: 'I'm looking for the Velveteen Rabbit.'

Jake's hand pounded on Harry's front mahogany door, in the twenty-fifth hour, betwixt twilight and sunrise. He

pressed his face against the glass, peering into the darkness of Harry's living room. An old lady in a bathrobe opened the door.

"May I help you?"

"Ms. Abigale, get back to your room, it's too dangerous for you to be opening doors this time of the night," Harry intervened, placing a hand on Ms. Abigale's back, glowering over his shoulder at Jake, fire in his eyes.

"Sorry, dear. I'll go back to bed. I dreamt I fell off a roof, and there were rabbits..."

"Yes, yes, off you go." Harry watched her disappear into the darkness of his home. "My mother-in-law," he said, turning to Jake. "She has Alzheimer's. What the hell you doing here?"

"The note man, it...came up, out of me."

"The suicide note?" Harry questioned, catching a strong smell of bourbon.

"Let me in, please," Jake's voice cracked, and Harry moved to grant him entry.

Near the breath of embers burning in Harry's fireplace, they sat across from each other in upholstered chairs, chessboard between them, crinkled Post-It smoothed out in the center. Both drinking, both smoking, although Harry smoked slower.

"Out your *mouth*?"

"I thought it was gonna be vomit but..."

An old leather-bound book was suddenly revealed from Harry's inside pocket; he dropped it on the chessboard.

"Widow said the same thing in her diary. The man who fell in front of her, the guy who jumped off the bridge, landed on his neck. Instant death. But when people arrived at the scene, she said a glimpse of life left his eyes and went into hers. Years later, she started having nightmares, hallucinations, weird shit, just like the Post-It."

"Can I borrow it?"

"Sure. But Jake, the widow, it was revealed that she *was* in fact a schizo."

"That doesn't explain the husband."

"Maybe she drove him crazy?"

"It's not contagious."

"You're reminding me of her entries, though. She said a scroll came out her ear one night with the message 'Walk with me' written on it."

"Maybe...it made them crazy, a spirit, transferred from the..."

"Nope, nope, gotta stop you there. It's late, my kids are asleep, no ghost stories. I'm the type that needs to watch cartoons after that shit. Let my kids hear that, they gonna wake up, then the wife. Look, Jake. You got drunk, wrote the note, than tried to eat it."

"Where would I get the note from? Why would I eat it?"

"Who knows, you been off since the start. You're a



drunk.”

“I’m going through a divorce.”

“That’s true, but you can’t even tell me what day it is.”

“It’s two days after Christmas. I got drunk off the bourbon you got me.”

“Let me ask a better question, you sleeping ok? Hmm? Been dreaming about *me*?”

“...what?”

“In the diary, old lady says she was dreaming about her husband before she met him. You in love with me, Jake?”

“This isn’t real...”

“You have thought about me; dreamed about me. I can see it in your eyes. No judgment. Relax. Here, let me read you something from the diary I think you’ll like.” Harry cleared his throat. “‘What is REAL?’ asked the Velveteen Rabbit one day when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. ‘Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?’ ‘Real isn’t how you are made,’ responded the Skin horse. ‘It’s a thing that happens to you.’”

“...The old man gave me something. Oh god, Harry, *please*, WAKE ME UP!”

“Jake, calm down man. It’s gonna be alright. Hey, remember the deli? What did I say to do if you ever saw me reading this shit?”

“Shoot you in the face.”

“Bingo.”

Weight from the pistol shook his hand. Jake didn’t remember even having one. He lifted the barrel, aimed it at Harry.

“No, no, *I’m* already awake.”

Jake felt tremors as he slowly turned the gun towards himself, the barrel kissing his temple.

“There you go, Jake. Now go on...wake up.”

A gunshot blast collided with the sunrise. Jake sprang up in this bed, covered in sweat. The picture of Marie still on the floor, broken, as waves of white swayed down from the sky. A cacophony of horns sounded from the centipede of taxis below. And only one unopened bottle of bourbon appeared on his nightstand.

Ring! Ring!

The phone added to the symphony of madness going on in the streets. He watched it momentarily, and finally picked up.

“Crime scene in thirty? 899 Park Ave, 49th floor, right off 54th.”

In the skyscraper, Jake leaned against the elevator wall, watching the numbers go up and up. Harry side-eyed him, noticing the distance between them.

“I rub you the wrong way or something?” Harry asked.

The elevator door opened, Jake bum-rushed his way out first. Stomping heavily with a frantic stroll, he opened the entrance to the corner office. It looked eerily familiar, especially the two unopened bottles of bourbon. He glanced between them and saw a translucent walkway, right outside the window, a bridge through the sky. *This is definitely a dream*. While walking towards it, a ‘ping’ of broken glass sounded beneath his foot: Marie’s wedding picture, shattered. *Of course, same old tricks*. Jake patted his jacket pocket and felt the imprint of the gun.

“This is your reality now,” the old lady whispered, standing at the end of the translucent walkway, bathrobe completely red. “The thing inside you has been sick for many years.”

“The old man...”

“...he was trying to wake up, too,” she responded.

“I’ll just use the gun.”

“Your partner removed the bullets. He worries. Come. Walk with me. Have you ever flown in your dreams?”

“No.”

“Come...” the old lady said, slowly transforming into Marie, bathrobe mutating into a wedding dress.

Jake pushed open the window, placed his foot on the sky bridge; surprisingly, it felt solid. He pressed down, then added the other foot. Three steps later he was defying gravity, looking around at the beautiful flakes of white. Marie warmed his hand.

“Now comes the fall.”

A little after the twenty-fifth hour, a host of police, paramedics, and a coroner arrived, taking pictures in Harry’s living room. A white sheet was cast over Jake’s dead body, the silhouette of a red crown sprouting from his head. Two detectives, early forties, scribbling notes, glancing at Harry being consoled by his wife. He couldn’t stop shaking.

“Partner killed himself. Couldn’t handle the divorce, I’m guessing.”

“Shame, he was almost over it, at least that’s what the grapevine said. Makes no sense, him running in here to shoot himself. Why not do it at home?”

“Some need an audience, I suppose. Apparently the partner tried to stop him, removed the clip.”

“Forgot about that one, though.”

“Yep.”

One of the detectives bent down, his knees popped, and he slowly lifted the white sheet off Jake’s body. For a moment, he thought he saw Jake’s pupils dilate.

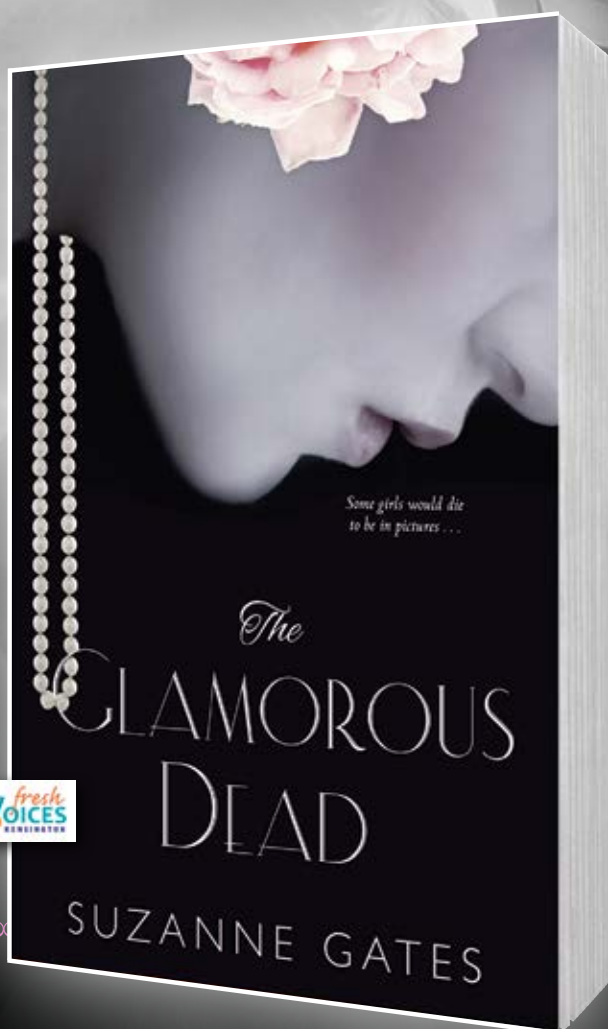
“Hey, partner says the guy had a note on him. Apparently it came out of his mouth.”

“Suicide note?”

“I don’t know. Supposedly says: ‘I’m looking for the Velveteen Rabbit.’” ■


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SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

THE USUAL SANTAS

Foreword by Peter Lovesey

Split into three sections, aptly named; “Joy to the World,” “Silent Night,” and “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus,” 19 great authors came together to give their own personal take on the holidays.

A tale from section one comes from Mike Herron. *The Usual Santas* is a fantastic story that’s all about eight Santas working at a local mall that come together after a long day of distributing “Ho-ho-ho’s” to a bunch of ungrateful families. They put together a plan to teach shoppers what the real meaning of Christmas is all about. Only trouble is, there are nine Santas in the mix when they make and carry out said plan. But... who exactly is the ninth man?

From section two comes a rather macabre story written by *Gangsterland* author, Tod Goldberg, titled, *Blue Memories Start Calling*. In this dark tale a family of four that went missing in a small town months ago is literally dug up by a bird dog named Roxanne. Following a sheriff who has experienced enough of his own personal pain throughout life that he is truly sick to death of death, readers are led on a journey that not only involves the law and murder, but also human moral choices that must be made to either save or destroy.

In the final section we take a tale by the incredible writer who authored the Foreword of this anthology, Peter Lovesey. His story, *Supper with Miss Shivers*, has an odd Christmas invitation coming to a home where there lives a wife who, although not psychic, somehow knows that she and her husband must attend. A train ride offers up background information and the ‘stranger on the train’ is explained by one, Miss Shivers, to wrap up this tale in a cool, supernatural way.

Talk about an anthology that would make the perfect stocking stuffer for all those suspense readers out there, this is definitely it! Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



X MARKS THE SCOT

By Kaitlyn Dunnett

The colorful Scottish lady, main character Liss MacCrimmon, is back and has recently come across some auction items to include in her little shop, The Scottish Emporium, at an old mansion in Moosetookalook, Maine.

While at the Chadwick mansion, an estate that has been talked about in whispers for many generations, Liss buys a painting of a bagpiper. But the painting is not all she receives for her money. A treasure map has also been tucked behind the painting, and when Liss finds this intriguing document she uncovers a link to an older Chadwick family member who had lived his life by smuggling goods across the Canadian border into Maine.

Taking a business trip, Liss pushes further into the Chadwick past by setting up a meeting with an archivist who can hopefully offer her more information regarding both map and family. Trouble is, before things can come together, the person who was helping her ends up murdered at a local genealogical society. What is unveiled by this tragedy is the fact that Liss is not alone on this particular treasure hunt; a killer is out there and may just be following Liss until he or she can make Liss their next victim.

Heading back to Maine, Liss shows her Scottish bravery and decides not to give up on her own investigation. Finding clues as to who might have killed the archivist and how that event may tie into the Chadwick family, Liss gets closer and closer to revealing a person who has already shown they have no problem taking out whatever, or whoever, stands in their way.

Forgotten secrets, a mysterious mansion, a family of thieves, you never know what’s coming next in this new *Liss MacCrimmon Scottish Mystery*. Best advice? Sit back and enjoy the ride.

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

THE WANTED

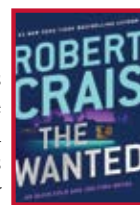
By Robert Crais

When the odds are against you, and there seems to be no hope, and the A-Team is not available, you want to call Elvis Cole and Joe Pike. The latest featuring the PI with the legendary rock-and-roll name and his enigmatic partner, seems innocuous at first when a worried mother asks Elvis to uncover what her son is doing behind her back. She fears drugs, but the truth is much more disturbing. He’s part of a trio robbing homes in wealthy neighborhoods. The money and jewelry are obvious, but what Elvis does not realize is that the crooks stole from the wrong house, and the victim wants the material back at any cost.

Soon two hired killers are investigating as well, and they will leave no witnesses.

Crais is one of the best crime writers in the business, and this thrilling novel will not only be wanted by thriller aficionados, but cherished as well. He has another guaranteed bestseller on his hands.

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* ■



DEATH AT NUREMBERG

By W.E.B. Griffin and William E. Butterworth IV

The intense and riveting *Clandestine Operations* series continues with this amazing, can’t-put-down read.

It is not an overstatement to say that World War II was one war that became larger and more frightening than some people ever imagined it would become. The villains who would be remembered for all time appeared.

It is Special Agent James Cronley, Jr., who now finds himself knee-deep in the biggest legal event that the world has ever seen. About to win the Legion of Merit, his latest job is to be Chief of DCI-Europe; yet, surprise, he finds himself re-assigned to protect the United States Chief Prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials. It seems that a Soviet NKGB kidnapping has been planned, and he must thwart the attempt, yet also hunt down and stop the shameful organization, Odessa, which is dedicated to helping Nazi war criminals escape to South America.

The first attempt happens rather quickly, and it doesn’t take long for the second attempt to be made. But who, exactly, are the culprits? With NKGB and Odessa on his plate, Cronley has a slew of would-be murderers to deal with.

The more he searches, the more secret schemes and schemers are revealed: A plan to swap Nazi gold for paper money; a religious cult that was organized around Himmler; a German who turns out to be far more vicious than he actually appears; as well as a newspaperwoman who is asking a whole lot of questions. Cronley wishes he knew which will turn into the most dangerous threat, but all he can do is use his talent and skill to survive as he finds himself fighting more than one war... all on his own.

This plot is more than intense. Thrills and chills abound, making “Death at Nuremberg” a shoe-in for bestseller status.

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



TWELVE SLAYS OF CHRISTMAS

By Jacqueline Frost

Mistletoe, Maine is most definitely the place you want to be for Christmas... especially if you're into thrills, suspense, and lots of fun characters that start off this brand new series called, *Christmas Farm Mysteries*.

A young woman by the name of Holly White has been ditched by her fiancé. With him canceling their Christmas Eve wedding, Holly heads home to Mistletoe where her parents run the coolest, cutest family tree farm you can ever imagine. There is a café where coffee, baked goods, and hot cocoa is served with peppermint sticks. The one thing that's a problem here, however, happens to be one of those surly women that all small towns seem to have. In this case, Mistletoe is the home of Margaret Fenwick. Fenwick is the president of the Mistletoe Historical Society and she just loves getting on peoples' nerves.

One of the people she upsets is Holly's father, Bud. Walking into the café one night, Fenwick starts crabbing about the height of his fence (a fence used to keep the "reindeer" safe). She threatens to rip the fence down and she and Bud have an argument in front of everyone. Next time Fenwick is seen, Holly discovers her bludgeoned and left for dead in one of the farm's sleigh displays.

The police have to shut down the farm because it's a crime scene. Now losing money, seeing as that this is the busiest time of year, Holly starts her own investigation to find out who committed the crime. And, soon, Holly finds herself on the killer's list.

Everything from fun suspects to a cop who takes a shine to Holly right off the bat, to the scrumptious snickerdoodles that all readers will crave, this book has it all. A perfect Christmas gift; it will be so much fun to see what happens next in Mistletoe, Maine.

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

RIGHTEOUS

By Joe Ide

If you're just now learning about the stunning new series by new-to-the-scene author, Joe Ide, you'll want to thank your lucky stars that you're getting an early introduction. It can be challenging to find originality in the vast sea of options for the thriller fan, but rest-assured, Ide offered a beacon of light with his debut last year and has followed it up by knocking it out of the park in the second IQ novel, "Righteous."

Isaiah Quintabe isn't your normal P.I. Think friendly neighborhood superhero without the cape, cool toys or hero-status, and then stick him in the ghetto or what locals refer to as East Long Beach. You won't find the Hollywood glitz and glam on this side of town, you'll find the struggle that these people deal with on a daily basis to survive their personal war zone, and sometimes they need a little help. Isaiah is smart and highly-motivated by the injustice in the world. He is also the guy who will accept a live chicken in lieu of cash payments for tracking down your stolen goods, and then keep the chicken as a pet.

For a decade, Isaiah has been haunted by the tragic death of his brother. He still rages at the loss and is compelled to hunt down the killer when a clue comes to light. He's got a few other neighborhood projects, but when his brother's ex-girlfriend calls looking for a favor—one that will pit Isaiah and friends against killers without conscience—the now grown man-child within who holds a budding crush for his brother's ex, can't say no. He's going to jump in and save the day and... hopefully not fail, because these Chinese gangsters have nothing to lose and they're happy to take out everyone who gets in their way.

Ide's writing is fast-moving, fresh, humorous, at times, and even when the reality of what he pens takes a distressing turn, the emotions of his characters continue to ring true. It's going to be a long year waiting for book three to arrive.

Reviewed by Shannon Raab ■

DOOM WITH A VIEW

By Kate Kingsbury

This fantastically written series began with "Dead and Breakfast." Now, this second title from the *Merry Ghost Inn Mysteries*, solidifies this cast of characters as being yet another group formed from the imaginative mind of best-selling author Kate Kingsbury that is cool, funny, and should stick around for a while.

Melanie West and her grandmother, Liza, are the owners of the Merry Ghost Inn. Melanie has recently hired an assistant by the name of Cyndi to help her. Unfortunately, she also hired Cyndi's boyfriend to come and do his magician act at the grand opening of the establishment; an act that is more than bad.

Although Melanie and her grandmother bought the 19th-century home a while ago, a fire had destroyed parts of the house that delayed their grand opening until now. The first guests are members of a book club who live in a retirement community in Portland. They are all just absolute sweethearts. The only rotten person at the show who Melanie wishes would just be quiet is a man by the name of Walter Dexter; he just loves heckling the poor kid whose magical act is going down the toilet.

Melanie is more worried about the fact that her biggest test happens the next day. They have to serve their very first breakfast to the guests and it has to go well to make locals and vacationers visit the B&B in order to make money and stay in business. The only thing Melanie and Liza didn't count on was Melanie's dog, Max, discovering a dead body on the property. All of the book club members are suspects, but Melanie will do everything she can to discover the killer before her future goes straight down the tubes.

Kingsbury writes series for a reason: she's darn good at it! Staying at the Merry Ghost Inn is a whole lot of fun for all readers.

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



A TANGLED YARN

By Betty Hechtman

This brand new *Yarn Retreat Mystery*, the series that released one of the best cozies ever with "Gone with the Wool," is a great mystery that not only offers a memorable story but also goes that extra mile of granting knitting patterns and a recipe. So, in other words, enjoy the tale and then have some fun with arts and crafts or head to the kitchen.

Monterey Peninsula is where the latest yarn retreat is about to begin. All those attending will have the fun and somewhat surprise of learning how to arm knit and finger crochet while they're there. For Casey, however, her arms and fingers are otherwise busy as she works to make sure the preparations at the Vista Del Mar hotel are in order before the retreat gets into full swing.

The one thing she finds almost immediately is the fact that the arts and crafts group likes the old, traditional work instead of these new "in" arts and crafts that the youth of today are trying. Therefore, even though Casey has gone to a great deal of trouble to make everyone happy, she must now find arts and crafts that these yarn-lovers will approve of and participate in. What she doesn't realize is that having a new craft will not be what gets excitement flowing through the group. What does, is when a travel writer is found dead in his hotel room under a mess of feathers. And when one of the owners asks Casey for her help with the matter, she immediately gets locked in and works to uncover a murderer.

Who would think that a yarn retreat would be so adventurous? Again, for fans of the *Yarn Retreat Mysteries*, you'll once again love the characters and the plot. For those who have not yet jumped on the "yarn" bandwagon, now is the time to get your 'wool on.' (Once you're done reading, make extra sure to try those Apple Fritters!)

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

CAT GOT YOUR SECRETS

By Julie Chase

Who would possibly think that just by delivering dreidel-shaped dog treats to a Saint Bernard's Bark-Mitzvah you would get involved in murder? Well...that's just what happens to Lacy Marie Crocker, the owner of a pet boutique in New Orleans.

The pet shop and organic treat bakery, where "every pet is royalty and every day is a celebration" is just about the cutest business in the world. Lacy makes sure that every creature is treated like the king or queen that they should be. Valentine's Day is right around the corner and Lacy's own black-and-gray tabby cat, Penelope, has donned the silver wings of Cupid, completely against her will. Lacy is busy filling orders and working with her mom, Violet (heir to a whole lot of money), on the upcoming National Pet Pageant.

Lacy didn't assume she would return to her hometown once she'd gone off to college twelve years ago, but when her fiancé, who she refers to as Pete the Cheat, broke her heart, the Garden District was exactly where she ended up. Her father, whom she loves very much, is the local veterinarian. Unfortunately, he is also about to be suspect number one in a murder case.

Wallace Becker has been killed. One of the last people to see him was her own father, and Detective Jack Oliver wants nothing more than to end the case and put her father behind bars. Lacy is suddenly saddled with far more than her normal duties as she throws herself into finding the real killer. But when she receives a letter that threatens her own life if she doesn't stop her hunt, Lacy finds herself in a spot where she could be the next victim.

This is the third *Kitty Couture Mystery* that author Julie Chase has penned, and it is *purrfectly* written. The backdrop of New Orleans is always lovely and the characters, both human and animal alike, are a whole lot of fun. Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

END GAME

By David Baldacci

His code name is the Blue Man. He's one of those powerful people who works for the government and works as a handler to two other government agents, Will Robie and Jessica Reel. To put it mildly, Robie and Reel are what you would call really good at their jobs. They are a cutthroat duo and are constantly backed up by the Blue Man. Problem is, after taking off on what was supposed to be just your normal relaxing vacation in a place called Grand, Colorado, Blue Man has up and disappeared.

Considering the amount of work the handler does, it's no surprise that he wanted a chance to get away. But with him now AWOL, it doesn't take a genius to know that Robie and Reel are immediately on the case. What they find out is that Grand should be condemned. Yes, Blue Man did go off on a fly-fishing trip and disappeared, and, yes, this area is supposedly the man's home town; however it is also a world of high crime, drugs on every street corner, and plays home to a group of people who work hard to destroy other peoples' lives. Robie and Reel are in a real mess.

David Baldacci has always shown from book one that he can write a fast-paced action thriller that does not, at any time, slow down. By pitting Robie and Reel against some massive criminals in this rural town, with firepower that even the Mob would be envious of, readers will begin the tale and they will most certainly not stop until the "End Game" has come. If you haven't bought this one for a stocking stuffer as of yet, now is the time.

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

A CASE OF SYRAH, SYRAH

By Nancy J. Parra

Taylor O'Brien is excited about the opening of her brand new business venture, Off The Beaten Path Wine Country Tours, in Sonoma County, California. She can't wait to start sharing the knowledge she's acquired living on her aunt Jemma's vineyard by taking small tours to see some of the area's hidden gems.

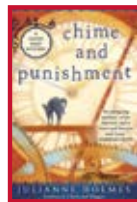
Taylor's sure her first tour group will be totally stress-free. What could be more fun than leading a group of yoga teachers from Divine Yoga, the studio where Taylor herself takes classes? Plus, the tour will end with a private tasting at a local winery.

The tour doesn't go exactly as Taylor has planned, especially for the head of Divine Yoga, the rather prickly and uptight Laura Scott. Angry at Taylor for not taking her business advice about marketing the new tour company, Laura stalks off ahead of the rest of the group and disappears, only to be found a short time later at the bottom of a cliff. Not only is Laura dead, but it looks like the murder weapon is a corkscrew embedded in her neck. And the corkscrew belongs to Taylor.

There is enough circumstantial evidence pointing to Taylor as the murderer that the police feel comfortable they've solved the crime, and arrest her. Thank goodness for Aunt Jemma, who knows her niece is innocent and puts up the winery as collateral to bail her out of jail. When the police continue to investigate the crime and come up empty, Taylor knows that it's up to her to clear her name and starts an investigation of her own, with some very surprising results. But it doesn't help her case when Ivy, Laura's sister-in-law, is also found murdered, and Taylor is unlucky enough to find her body.

"A Case of Syrah, Syrah" is the first in Nancy J. Parra's *Wine Country* mystery series. A delicious debut to what promises to be a fun series.

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



CHIME AND PUNISHMENT

By Julianne Holmes

This third tale in the *Clock Shop Mystery* series is a whole lot of fun!

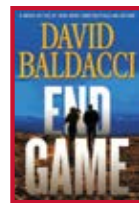
Main character, Ruth Clagan, returned to her hometown of Orchard, Massachusetts after suffering a heartbreaking divorce. She now has a love interest by the name of Ben, and spends her time running the clock business passed down to her called the Cog & Sprocket.

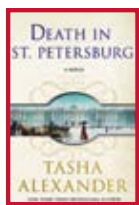
At the moment, she's working on a major project that is highly personal. In town there stands a clock tower that Ruth's great-great grandfather, one of the founding fathers of the town, designed. During WWII the inner workings of the magnificent clock had been taken out and melted down in order to aid the war effort. When they were being replaced in the 1950s, a spark had ignited a fire. Although the tower survived, the clock had been utterly destroyed. It was Ruth's family's wish to see it restored and bring pride back to the community.

Being thrown out of her own store by her friend and social media maven, Nadia, Ruth receives the annoyed look from her own cat Bezel and heads down the road to the Sleeping Latte. She needs to relax, but can't seem to. After all, the fundraising campaign begins at noon, and Ruth wants nothing more than to make her family's dream come true. But it's not only money that's getting in the way, it is also Orchard's town manager, an annoying woman by the name of Kim Gray. She is not a likable individual and most people in town cannot stand her constant yapping and rule-enforcement. But when Kim is actually found crushed under the bell of the mighty clock tower, things go from bad to so much worse.

With a slew of possible killers, author Julianne Holmes continues to add to this already fantastic series with yet another A+ tale.

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





DEATH IN ST. PETERSBURG

By Tasha Alexander

Lady Emily (an investigator with the style and flair that all should have), is beginning this book by accompanying her beloved husband, Colin, to the theatre in Russia where he's on assignment from the Crown. The show is well-done, and when the final curtain comes down on *Swan Lake*, people exit with smiles galore. Trouble is, the next "line" they hear screamed out across the snow is not something that belongs in the classic performance. It is announced in an unmistakable, frightened voice that the prima ballerina is lying dead on the cold ground outside. Rushing over to view the scene, believing that it could not possibly be true, they are faced with a very dead girl, lying on the blanket of bright white that is now decorated with rose petals of blood.

Lady Emily also finds herself face to face with the dead ballerina's lover. He is begging her to find out the murderer's name and help bring justice to the fallen woman. Tsarist Russia now comes alive as Lady Emily finds her investigation leading her into the grand Winter Palace that has its own set of historical secrets. What adds to the suspense, however, is the fact that another odd, somewhat ghostly dancer is making heads turn, as well. There seems to be one following Lady Emily wherever she goes, leaving the calling card of a bright red scarf behind at every site.

When it comes to suspects, there are a slew. Lady Emily must investigate everything from royalty to the best friend turned rival dancer, Katenka; a lover who may have other plans; and political radicals that have their own menu of schemes in the works. In other words, Lady Emily is working even harder than her beloved husband in this world of secrets and lies.

Lady Emily has been the star of this excellent series and does, yet again, pull readers along for a seriously frightening and unforgettable ride in St. Petersburg.

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

VEGAS TABLOID

By P. Moss

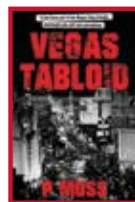
The words spew forth in colorful postcards of paragraphs, leaving the impression of fast fire bullets hastening to spread the gossip to the multitudes.

Set in Las Vegas, the most impressionable city in the world, where if you wait long enough you will see more than the mind can comprehend, Moss waltzes from scene to scene as the Orange Circus Ringmaster, Jimmy Dot, keeps the audience enthralled and gasping for the next scene.

Reminiscent, style-wise, of Bill Fitzhugh's recent offering "Human Resources," characters roll across the page with a twist at every turn, as the connen and the well-shoed pharmaceutical billionaires weave their magic together. Aging former show girls, now in wheelchairs, are pushed around the stage by swamis, sex-crazed midgets, and elegant cross-dressers as the stage turns beneath them.

A dark, sordid, fast-paced thriller that will peel your eyelids back. Fascinating, frightening and funny, Moss' bizarre narrative entertains.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of "Kettle of Vultures" for *Suspense Magazine* ■



MURDER AT CHATEAU SUR MER

By Alyssa Maxwell

One of the most interesting eras in American history came with the Gilded Age. During that time period it was in Newport, Rhode Island, where the fabulously rich who carried the title of the "Four Hundred Club," sat around loving their lives.

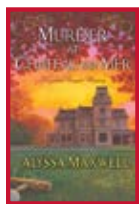
Today, Emma Cross, a reporter for the *Newport Observer*, is covering a polo match. With her pencils and tablet, she's making sure to take down all the society details. Emma, however, is not your average, everyday working gal; she's related to one of the most prominent Newport families, the Vanderbilts. While she's covering the match, she also runs into some of those family members who do not approve of a Vanderbilt woman working. There are also those who do not approve of her relationship with a man by the name of Jesse Whyte. Although a longtime family friend, he's still looked down upon as being nothing more than a "policeman."

Emma basically laughs this pride and prejudice away. After all, she was brought up on the poor end of the family and not a part of high society. Not to mention, she loves her job. She just wishes she could find a "real" story.

Turns out, a story is just about to happen. While the match continues, a strange woman starts making a scene; she demands to speak to Senator George Wetmore. The next day, Emma is asked to come to the Wetmore estate, Chateau sur Mer, where the same woman lays dead. The senator's wife begs Emma to investigate the killing and clear her husband's name. Scandal will destroy them, and certainly have them cast out of posh society for good.

This is the newest title in the *Gilded Newport Mystery* series, and the author most definitely does her homework. The historical facts, everything from the fashions to the way society ran back then, is written perfectly. Readers will not want to miss diving into this gilded world.

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



BLACKBERRY BURIAL

By Sharon Farrow

"Blackberry Burial," the second installment in the *Berry Basket Mystery* series, will have your pulse racing as a killer comes to light in the small town of Oriole Point.

Marlee Jacob, once a producer of cooking shows for The Gourmet Living Network, has now become "The Berry Girl," according to her employee Dean Cabot. Dean is also a fantastically funny guy who loves fashion and is desperately trying to convince Marlee that she should dye her hair the color of whatever berry is in season to better promote her website. Marlee has no interest in doing this. After all, The Berry Basket brand is growing, and she doesn't believe that gimmicks are needed to bring in business.

Piper Lyall-Pierce, wife of the mayor of Oriole Point, gives Marlee bad news. The local farm they were going to use to host the Blackberry Road Rally over the July 4th weekend is out. Marlee is annoyed because she wants to get the advertising printed, but now that has to be put on the back burner while she finds somewhere else to start the race. On top of that, there are certain people in town who are upset about the race this year because Piper dedicated it to the local Blackberry Arts School, and the only people who can compete are students, past and present, which excludes many of the locals.

Even though the Sanderling farm is said to be cursed, this becomes the new start for the rally. Trouble is, the "haunted" gossip proves to be true when Marlee's dog Charlie digs up a human skull on the property. Marlee's baker believes it's the body of a former student who vanished over twenty years ago, yet it soon becomes clear that there's a killer among them.

Once again Farrow has done a spectacular job, and even added some seriously awesome recipes so readers can chow down on dishes like Blackberry Balsamic Drumsticks while being thrilled by this great tale!

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

PROOF OF LIFE

By J.A. Jance

Beloved retired policeman, J.P. Beaumont, is back in action in this newest book by J.A. Jance.

For those who have followed the many thrilling paths that Beau has taken over the years, you can certainly agree that this is one cop who has earned the right to enjoy his leisure time with his new wife, Melissa Soames, at his side. Trouble is, after being a part of the Homicide Squad in Seattle for so long, he's having a problem figuring out what to do with himself. Doesn't make it any easier that his wife is still working as the Chief of Police in Bellingham and has a lot to do.

One of the few things Beau has been able to do is volunteer his services as a cold-case worker, but this is not as time-consuming as he needs it to be. He certainly doesn't foresee that a new job that will take up a great amount of his time involves one of the people in his past he hates the most. Maxwell Cole, a crime reporter and columnist for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, was once Beau's frat brother when they were in college. They had a personal fight way back when, but when Max perishes in a fire, Beau does feel anguish over the loss.

Erin Kelsey Howard, a relation of Max, had once been saved by Beau and now needs his help again. Apparently, Max had been working on a book about corruption and had told Erin that if anything should happen to him, he wanted her to go to Beau for help and not the police.

The chase is great and the mystery is filled with action. From a hit-and-run to a third person killed in an earthquake to a gang leader, the plot never stops with its' interesting storylines. Beau may be getting older, but he most certainly is not slowing down. Fans will continue to love this character for many years to come.

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

CREMAINS OF THE DAY

By Misty Simon

This is the first in a brand new series titled the *Tallie Graver Mysteries*, and it's truly one to jump on board with now!

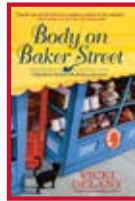
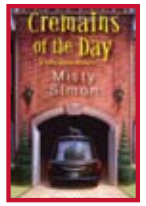
It's bad enough that Tallulah Graver's parents gave her their last name at birth, seeing as that they're the family in town that runs the local funeral parlor, but Tallie also must deal with the fact that she married well, was a true high-society gal, and then was left with a divorce, no money, and having to live in the apartment above her family's funeral parlor until she can get back on her feet.

For extra money, Tallie supplements her income by cleaning the houses of the rich people that were once her friends; she's now cleaning their tables instead of being served at them. But what would be worse is if she worked at the funeral parlor full-time and ended up going down the family business path that she already despises. What Tallie really wants is to save enough money to build her own small business next door to her best friend Gina's fantastic coffee shop: Bean There, Done That.

Very early on in this tale, Tallie is cleaning when she hears yelling erupt between the woman of the home and some strange man behind a closed door. Later that evening, at a funeral being thrown for the retired fire chief, she stumbles across a woman tied up in the coffee shop, and her own ex-husband lying out in the alley, having received a shot from a stun gun. Soon, Tallie's rich client is found in a closet with a knife sticking out of her chest, and Tallie begins receiving flowers from the dead woman delivered by a strange delivery man who seems to 'pop' up wherever Tallie happens to be.

As the mystery ensues, the characters and backstories offered up make this a perfect start to what is sure to be a well-read and highly popular series.

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



BODY ON BAKER STREET

By Vicki Delany

Anyone who thinks the life of a bookstore owner is all fun, games, and glamor has definitely never owned a bookstore. Case in point are Gemma Doyle and Jayne Wilson, owners of the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium and the adjoining Mrs. Hudson's Tea Room in the Cape Cod village of West London. Need I also add that the business is on Baker Street? No, I didn't think so.

Gemma is a little nervous as she prepares for the upcoming book signing by the illustrious Renalta Van Markoff, author of the controversial (to die-hard Sherlock Holmes' disciples, such as local resident Donald Morris) *Hudson and Holmes* mystery series. Renalta is known to be a real diva, and Gemma is praying everything goes smoothly. The event is a sell-out, and all is going along perfectly (except for a few more excessive demands by the author), until Donald, unable to contain his rage any longer, verbally attacks Renalta and her series for disgracing Sherlock's legacy. After a heated exchange, Renalta takes a quick sip from the bottle of water Gemma has thoughtfully opened in advance, and collapses on the table, dead.

The police immediately suspect Donald, of course, who had ready access to the bottle and could easily have tampered with it. He insists he didn't do it, and begs Gemma and Jayne to clear his name. There's no shortage of suspects: the author's bullied personal assistant, who's hiding a huge secret; her frustrated publicist, who has a few secrets of his own; an obsessively rabid fan; and a frustrated mystery-author wanna-be, who insists that Renalta stole the idea for the book series from her.

"Body on Baker Street" is the second *Sherlock Holmes Bookshop* mystery. Cozy mystery fans will love this one! Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Dieting Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

A WEE HOMICIDE IN THE HOTEL

By Fran Stewart

Peggy Winn, owner of the ScotShop (a store focusing on selling tartans/skirts, and shawls that match all Scottish clans) is gearing up to have a busy few days. After all, everyone is heading into town to participate and view the annual Highland Festival. Various sports will be competed in, like caber tossing, and bonfires will be enjoyed by one and all.

Peggy, her dog Scamp, and her own ghostly companion by the name of Dirk are ready to face the mob. Dirk's invisibility causes Peggy to look a bit odd to her friends and family members, especially when she answers questions that no one else can hear. But the upside of having a ghost is that he's a fantastic security guard. He simply shouts out to Peggy and she can stop the perpetrators before they ever get out the door.

Big Willie, longtime champion of these Scottish Games, walks through that door and the mystery begins. Willie has been missing for a while, but he's now back to compete. However, there are people who aren't pleased to see him, like Shay Stone Burns. It is her and her committee that have worked hard to make this year's Games trouble-free. In the past, there have been minor agonies at the events, from food poisoning to a big ghost scare, and Shay is adamant that this year all goes well.

Inside the ScotShop, Shay heads toward Big Willie with anger on her face. Peggy only catches a bit of the conversation, but Dirk is aghast at the woman's gall. A strange feeling comes over Peggy as if something is about to go horribly wrong. And when Big Willie is found dead in his hotel room, her ominous feelings come true.

This is a series filled with unforgettable stories that star a cast of characters readers will never be able to forget. It will be fun to see what Peggy and her ghost go up against next.

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





MAD HATTERS AND MARCH HARES

Edited by Ellen Datlow

Everyone who is a fan of the strange world that brilliant author Lewis Carroll created with Alice and her adventures in *Wonderland*, will absolutely love this book. Seventeen authors have come together for this anthology to pen their own stories on the critters that made *Wonderland* such a success. Using their vivid imaginations, everything from social satire to suspense to odd and weird puzzles have been formed.

It's impossible to touch upon all the ingenious creations in this anthology, so we'll choose just a few.

Not only are there stories in this book, but there are also visionary poems that truly fit the niche of Lewis Carroll and his "mad" creatures. Kris Dikeman is the first up with her poem called, *Gentle Alice*. Printed in the format of a cup of steaming tea that only the Mad Hatter could've placed at his table, this is a poem that places the reader in Alice's mind.

A tale that stands out comes in the form of *Some Kind of Wonderland*, by Richard Bowes. It has been 50 years since Scott Holman's Alice film, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, hit the theaters. Two friends who worked on the film, Gilda who played the mighty Duchess, and Justin who played the Cheshire Cat, are getting ready to go to the re-release of the film that was not exactly an all-out hit in 1966, but a favorite among reviewers. Readers are led down the proverbial rabbit hole as the writer conjures up a dark tale that touches upon hallucinations, drug abuse, and the creation of something that had its difficulties and promises so long ago. An unforgettable tale.

The passion that comes from the rest of the stories in this collection is substantial. Master anthologist, Ellen Datlow, has created one of the most original anthologies of all time. Truly inspirational and, at times, frightening, it is a fact that Lewis Carroll would be thrilled with every word.

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

STAR TREK DISCOVERY: DESPERATE HOURS

By David Mack

The new *Star Trek* series has debuted on the streaming service CBS: All Access, and so far has been unlike all of the other incarnations of the franchise. This season plays like a novel and each episode is a chapter in a book (though there are some elements that play out over the course of the hour). Serialized storytelling along with a unique lead character has created a show that has easily prompted discussion.

Author David Mack is no stranger to *Star Trek*, and he has written many outstanding novels set in Gene Roddenberry's universe. "Desperate Hours" is a prequel to "Star Trek: Discovery" and focuses on Lieutenant Michael Burnham, and her becoming the first officer of the Starship *Shenzhou*. She does not have much time to enjoy her promotion since a Federation colony is under siege from an ancient alien vessel that seems to grow smarter and more powerful when attacked. Burnham must work with a familiar face to fans of *Star Trek* to stop the threat before the colony, and the *Shenzhou*, pays the ultimate price.

Mack delivers a fun and intriguing tale that also gives much-needed insight into Burnham's character and heritage. Fans of the new series should definitely discover this.

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* ■

A CAJUN CHRISTMAS KILLING

By Ellen Byron

In this third title of the *Cajun Country Mystery* series, we head back to the Bayou and catch up with Maggie Crozat and her family, as they work hard to set up for the holidays and find a way to keep the family's Crozat Plantation B&B afloat. This is the family home turned hostelry that has been, unfortunately, linked to the four murders that have occurred in the small town of Pelican, Louisiana, in the past three months.

Trying to shrug off that creepiness, Maggie is looking forward to the holidays. Driving down Grand River Road, she stares at the bonfires being built; these ornate structures have become a tradition, lighting the way for the Cajun Santa Claus, Papa Noel, on Christmas Eve. However, even though their rivals in the B&B business are erecting a stunning replica of their very own Belle Vista, a truly beautiful plantation, Maggie's father, Tug, has decided not to do much of anything. Which is too bad, because they need the good publicity to bring in business.

When her father has a heart attack, problems besides the lack of money hit the Crozat family full-force. They may just lose their plantation because of a deal that was made between Tug and his twin brother Tig, who buys up historic properties and turns those buildings into boutique hotels. There are problems with the investors, which means the Crozat family plantation may just be closed forever. In addition, there is a guest at the B&B by the name of Donald Baxter who is spreading horrific reviews in regards to the Crozat B&B. When he's found murdered, however, Maggie must join forces with a longtime family enemy to find a killer and try desperately to save her family's history... and her own life.

Not only is this a great story, but the author has also included Cajun recipes that are downright mouthwatering. This series deserves to be around for a while!

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



A KNIT BEFORE DYING

By Sadie Hartwell

Josie Blair owns Miss Marple's Knits, a shop located in the very small town of Dorset Falls, Connecticut. Although Josie had lived in the big, bustling city while attempting to get her fashion design career off the ground, she is getting used to the slower pace and the beauty that the hills around her provide. She is also quite happy that her employee and friend, Evelyn Graves, is part of her life.

Josie took over this business when her Great-Aunt Cora died an untimely death and left the shop to her. Josie also moved in with her Great-Uncle Eb, a rather gritty sort of man, but one she loves dearly. She is not only the owner of the shop, but also owns a vacant building right across the street which she has just rented out. When the moving van pulls up, Josie is extremely happy to welcome her new tenants to town. After all, every new shop that appears in Dorset Falls means more business.

Lyndon and Harry are the partners who will run the antiques store beside Miss Marple's, and Josie gets a kick out of watching her friends fawn over Lyndon who is the perfect gentleman. What Josie fawns over is a box of antique crocheted items that she discovers in Lyndon's stock. These doilies are rather strange, and she decides to repurpose them while studying the mysterious needlework that decorates the objects.

Unfortunately, the new business is not going to bring any new customers to the area, seeing as that Josie finds Lyndon stabbed to death with an old pair of sheep shears inside his own store. A killer is afoot, and even though the law wishes to pin the crime on the other co-owner, Harry, a can of worms opens containing suspects and secrets galore.

This is the second *Tangled Web Mystery* and it is truly a well-designed, perfectly stitched crime that readers will love.

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

SLAY BELLS RING

By Karen Rose Smith

Caprice De Luca has a fun life; she loves her work as a home-stager, and she's preparing to marry her fiancé as soon as his annulment comes through. It's the Christmas season and she has just completed staging a historic Colonial that will sell easily. Trouble is, client Sara Merriweather is having a very difficult time dealing with the fact that her husband, Chris, wants to sell the house.

She confides in Caprice, telling her about her husband's strange behavior since he returned from a trip to D.C. with his friends. Chris, a veteran of the Vietnam War, seems distant; he's even shortened the walks he takes with their beloved malamute, Blitz. Not to mention, being the owner of Merriweather Crafts and using the carriage house on the property as a toy workshop, makes it seem even stranger as to why Chris would want to move. He loves kids, loves making toys, and plays the absolute best Santa Claus every year.

Caprice wishes she could help Sara, but she's called in to help her own over-reactive sister with the local Christmas pageant. Chris also appears there to help with set designs, completely disheveled and acting unlike himself. Unfortunately, that's the last time Caprice will see him alive.

What should be a joyful day in Kismet turns horrific when Santa rides down Santa Lane and ends up murdered. A list of suspects comes to light who had a reason to take out Chris; from men who served with him to an angry next door neighbor. In addition, a wealth of secrets are found inside Chris's workshop that boggle the mind and open the door to even more suspects. Caprice soon discovers that Chris was hiding quite a lot; what she doesn't realize is that because of her snooping she may just be the new prey in the killer's sites.

This is a great storyline that will keep you guessing to the very end.

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

STRONG TO THE BONE

By Jon Land

Jon Land is one of a select few authors who will paint multiple pictures with his words and characters; each canvas stunning in its own right. And when you, the reader and art aficionado, view these incredible mental paintings, created out of a paltry 26 letters, blended, tweaked, and intertwined with each other, you will be awestruck.

Every installment in this remarkable series is stunning and the latest is no different. Jon Land's newest *Caitlin Strong* adventure, "Strong to the Bone," is his most intricate and best by far.

In "Strong to the Bone," Land has taken four separate, intricate storylines: WWII Nazi internment camps within Texas, the current skinhead movement, Big Pharma, and date-rape, and he has blended them masterfully with an undercurrent of Order vs. Chaos. In this masterclass of how to write a thriller, Land has thrust Caitlin Strong, along with her band of outlaws—Cort Westley and Paz—into an unwinnable, unpredictable situation that demands to be read. Not only does Caitlin come out guns blazing in this epic adventure, but if she has any chance of winning this war, she has to fight and defeat the demons of her past. This is the most personal of the *Caitlin Strong* series, and she fights her demons the same way she fights the evil that invades her beloved Texas—with conviction, compassion, and a take-no-prisoners attitude.

If you have never read Land and his *Caitlin Strong* series, please start right now. I promise you'll not be disappointed. Your first action upon finishing will be to go back and read all that came before it. If you are already a fan of Jon and this series, this is your early holiday gift. I can promise you that by the time you finish, you will place "Strong to the Bone" in a place of prominence on your bookshelf.

Jon Land is the only author I have ever read who continually ups his game and never disappoints!

Reviewed by J.M. LeDuc, author of "Evil Awakened" ■



AMERICAN DRIFTER

By Heather Graham and Chad Michael Murray

Bestselling author Heather Graham has teamed up with debut author (yet quite famous actor) Chad Michael Murray, in order to release this new book that's all about love and how that love can be tested in the face of murder.

River Roulet is a proud Vietnam Veteran who is constantly plagued by his memories and images of war. The noise of the bombs, the screams...everything is colored with PTSD and he needs something that will somehow calm the darkness that's pervading his soul. What he decides to do is head to Brazil, hoping that the landscape, people, and smiles found in Rio de Janeiro can take away his nightmares. Upon his arrival, the city is preparing for the grand Carnival, which is everything River thought it would be and more as he tries to get the pieces of his life back together.

Natal is a journalist who just so happens to live with Tio Amato, a drug lord. Natal is also someone who makes River feel as if the passion he once had for life is coming back. But having a drug lord as part of the equation, of course, is not exactly calming. As their relationship turns into something more than friends, River ends up creating a tragedy that causes him and Natal to go on the run to save their lives.

Certainly not your typical romantic duo, this book provides fast-paced action, while delving deep into the psyche of a man who deserves happiness, yet must constantly face a war of some type in order to achieve it. Although these authors come from different backgrounds, Graham has definitely brought her intelligence and flair to the book, allowing Mr. Murray's hand at writing to become a true success right out of the proverbial gate. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



TWO KINDS OF TRUTH

By Michael Connelly

As most folks who follow Michael Connelly's cool character, Harry Bosch, know, the man has been working cold cases for the San Fernando Police ever since he was literally expelled off the force of the LAPD.

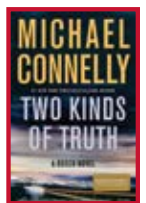
Upon the opening of this new tale, Harry is standing in the ancient San Fernando jail looking through files from an old case. Receiving a text from Bella Lourdes in the detective bureau, he is told that he is scheduled to get a visit from the District Attorney's office. Being that the relationship gone wrong with the LAPD forced his retirement, Harry is told by his lawyer not to do anything for them. But Harry liked his little world back there and did a fantastic job for L.A., so he basically needs to know why his old headquarters are coming to see him.

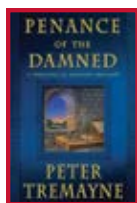
The first person he sees coming through the door is his ex-partner, Lucia Soto, with the current Deputy District Attorney, Alex Kennedy. And once the words "Preston Borders" are spoken, Harry stops in his tracks. We are talking about an old case of a killer who claims that Harry framed him and he has new evidence now to prove it. Being that Harry's reputation was already muddled, he finds that he will have to clear his name and somehow keep the jailbird in jail.

To add on to the strange situation, Harry is called to a drugstore where two pharmacists have now become two corpses. Harry and others are pulled into the dangerous world of prescription drugs and the past comes at Harry like a hurricane.

Readers will have to remember to breathe as these two cases meet up with each other along the way, sending Harry into the darkness of crime in order to find the truth. This is yet another in the long line of exceptional *Harry Bosch* stories that only Michael Connelly can pen.

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





PENANCE OF THE DAMNED

By Peter Tremayne

As we open on this new, exciting “mystery of Ancient Ireland,” the time is AD 671, and Colgú is the King of Muman. A horrible occurrence has made Colgú send for his sister, Fidelma of Cashel. Fidelma is an advocate of the law and Colgú needs her help: His friend, Chief Bishop, and personal advisor has been killed inside an old enemy fortress. In addition, a person has been found guilty and will be executed, which because of the political schemes, and the recent and tentative formation of peace, will cause a horrible backlash among and to the people if the execution is carried out.

Fidelma answers the request and comes to investigate with her husband, Eadulf, as well as the Warrior Enda. But before the trio can reach Colgú, they are met along the journey by a young woman who lets them know that it is Gorman, Commander of Colgú's own bodyguard, who is about to be killed for the crime.

Fidelma, who is a believer in Gorman and truly has faith that he could not possibly be a killer, finds herself suddenly thrown into a web of religious disagreements being had between the followers of current Irish law. Nannid, a rival leader of a group called the Penitentials, uses his efforts to stir the anger that is burning between the Irish people in order to bring back War. So not only must Fidelma prove that Gorman is innocent by finding the real killer and irrefutable proof, she must also use her intelligence to stop Nannid from getting what he wants and putting all the Irish people at risk.

History lovers will thoroughly enjoy the author's account of early Irish life. This is one Ancient world that has it all, and even more, for those readers who are interested in enjoying an intense mystery surrounded by a truly stunning backdrop.

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

DEATH ON NANTUCKET

By Francine Mathews

This fifth *Merry Folger* mystery starts slowly. A woman named Nora has come home to visit her father, Spence Murphy. Everyone knows who Spence is, a journalist who has become famous for his writings, but the cab driver doesn't know who Nora is. Even some of the family have never heard of her, an adopted daughter. Meanwhile, Meredith Folger is planning her wedding to Peter Mason in a few months on the beautiful island.

The gentle surroundings, seaside houses of the privileged, and the prosaic lives of the inhabitants, lull the reader along pleasantly until ... there's a body. It belongs to Nora. Now old resentments start bubbling to the surface. Spence lives in a huge, rambling beachside house called Step Above. He's getting more deaf and confused as he ages. His family is surprised to learn that Nora had been to see Spence a month ago, but much more surprised when her body is discovered a month later, on the decrepit roof walk where no one ventures. It's learned that Nora, a former journalist, was planning on writing a book that could cause trouble.

Detective Merry Folger is assigned to investigate Nora's suspicious death, her body too decomposed to glean many details. Her ogre of a boss is trying to make her life so hard that she'll quit the police force. The case is hard enough. She doesn't think any of the family members will feel much grief over the passing of their patriarch. When dried apricot seeds are found mixed in with the coffee, and the coffee cup found beside the body is discovered to contain the residue of coffee, milk, and cyanide, the investigation is off and running. Family animosities swirl, making it hard for Merry to solve this cozy-feeling crime. The deeper she delves, the more tangles she discovers, blocked by dark histories that have deep roots. The story is lovely and atmospheric, with a sinister crime to solve.

Bonus: the reader learns how to prepare bluefish properly.

Reviewed by Kaye George, Editor of “Day of the Dark: Eclipse Stories” ■



MACRAMÉ MURDER

By Mollie Cox Bryan

Talk about taking a break from the ‘real world’ and literally heading to paradise. Cora Chevalier, her new boyfriend, Adrian Brisbane, and her friend and business partner, Jane Starr, do exactly that. Leaving behind stress in their small town of Indigo Gap, North Carolina, they head to the Big Island Craft Retreat being held on stunning Sea Glass Island. Just getting there, already feeling the stress fade away, Adrian, a school librarian, and Cora, the proprietor of the Kildare House Craft Retreat back home, have been dating for a few months and decide to take a romantic walk along the beach. There, they stumble over a very private wedding in progress. The bride is wearing a tiara that literally puts the beauty of the island, itself, to shame.

Out of the blue, Adrian becomes anxious and basically wants to get the heck out of there as fast as possible. Cora shrugs his behavior off, but then overhears an angry conversation back at the hotel between strangers regarding a tiara. Turning from strange to frightening, Cora wakes up the next morning to sirens and a message from the hotel telling everyone to stay in their rooms because there's an emergency on the beach.

Turns out, the emergency just so happens to be a dead woman; the evidence suggests a jellyfish sting. When Cora and her friends find out that the woman had just gotten married, Cora's ‘bad feeling’ appears. Although her friends want her to just leave the whole thing alone, it becomes impossible when Adrian is sought for questioning by the local police.

Twists and turns prevail and characters run amok as Cora attempts to find the truth behind what happened to the poor woman, and what a fancy tiara has to do with it. This *Cora Crafts Mystery* series began extremely well, and has continued to deliver great tales.

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

A KILLER BALL AT HONEYCHURCH HALL

By Hannah Dennison

Kat Stanford, antiques dealer and amateur detective, has just finished up moving her stock into the two gatehouses set at the main entrance to Honeychurch Hall. She's gotten through the basic renovations and is working diligently to get her company, Kat's Collectibles & Valuation Services, off the ground. She is with her mother, Iris (who happens to be a bestselling romance author), when the owner of Honeychurch, Lady Edith, and her son, Rupert, begin arguing.

Rupert made a call to Kat and told her that something horrible had occurred in the Tudor Wing. He must sell some artwork to make repairs and needs her help. Edith will not allow this, but instead gives her permission for Kat to price something lesser in both monetary and personal value.

As she and her mother are escorted through the Hall by Rupert, Kat learns far more than just what a ceiling looks like when the pipes behind it have burst. Her mother, a woman who claims that she knows nothing about the interior of the Hall, even though she and her brother had grown up inside it because their parents had worked as servants, keeps talking about what inside the Hall is so “familiar,” and how she “knows” everything from hiding places within the walls to various hanky-panky that went on at the annual Honeychurch Ball.

As Rupert leaves them to their work, Kat begins to view the pictures. Soon, she finds a hidden recess in one of the walls. When she tries to check it out, she ends up falling through and down into pitch blackness. Not only has she found a hidden spot inside Honeychurch, but she has also found ... a corpse.

Going from interesting and fun to full-blown awesome suspense, readers will love the secrets that are revealed. This series keeps getting better and better, to the point where you are yearning for the next tale of Honeychurch to be published ASAP.

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

LOCKDOWN

By Laurie R. King

"Lockdown," which deals with school violence, is timely in an unfortunate, familiar way. We know something terrible will happen. But how, and to whom? Suspense builds, then builds some more, as the reader heads toward certain catastrophe. The tale is told through the viewpoints of those nervous about the upcoming Career Day at the California school, a place of violence and gangs. This year's event is supposed to counteract what happened last year: an assault on one of the speakers, the shooting of a sixteen-year-old student, and the attempted murder of a police officer, Sergeant Olivia Mendez. All of this was perpetrated by Taco Alvarez, who is presently standing trial.

We first meet a father and son, Thomas and Brendan. Brendan is a jock who is obsessed with guns and who is planning something, while Thomas, a cocky self-made man, does his best to exert absolute control over his son. Next is Linda, the principal, worrying about the upcoming event, hoping everything will go well. She is new to the school and out to prove herself by changing the reputation of the gang-ridden institution. Then there are several students: Sofia, who seems to have it together, but is haunted by the murder of her sister; Mina; and Nick, all of whom are hiding something. Chaco is a budding delinquent, the cousin of Taco, and he has plans too. The most mysterious one is the janitor, known as Tio, but who isn't anyone's uncle.

In the center of all of their lives is the recent disappearance of a child named Bee Cuomo.

The action flashes back and forth to fill in the background of what's happening, to uncover lurking secrets, and to propel us inevitably toward disaster.

Reviewed by Kaye George, Editor of "Day of the Dark: Eclipse Stories" ■

PURRING AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE

By Liz Mugavero

It's the annual lighting of the tree in Frog Ledge. Connecticut is all about being picturesque, and with the winter blanket of snow on the ground and the happy, red-cheeked faces of the kids, Frog Ledge basically looks like a Rockwell painting.

Tonight, the town green is packed. Included in this crowd is Kristan "Stan" Connor, owner of the local shop, Pawsitively Organic Pet Patisserie. She's standing beside Vivian O'Sullivan who is basking with pride over the fact that her seasonal love, Seamus McGee, is once again doing his part for the town and playing Santa Claus. Seamus's home is in Ireland. But the McGee family, which includes Stan's own boyfriend, Jake, do live here, yet Seamus only appears once a year to don the red suit.

Stan is on the planning committee for the event because it's the perfect advertising opportunity. Her new pet bakery is opening, and after the lighting ceremony Seamus is going to head over to her shop to take pics with the town pets. What happens, however, ruins all of Stan's plans.

The custom sleigh made for Santa by one of Jake's employees is being towed toward the Christmas tree behind a snowmobile. It is when her attention is drawn away from the festivities that Stan misses the sleigh skidding to a stop and Santa's elf, Stan's own neighbor, jump from the sleigh completely frightened. When the town's resident state trooper, and Jake's sister Jessie, rushes up to the scene, not only do they gaze on a dead body, but they also find that the corpse is most definitely not Seamus McGee. Apparently the real Santa has vanished.

This is the sixth *Pawsitively Organic Mystery*, and Mugavero yet again delivers an unforgettable storyline. Plus, for those who truly love their pets, there are some great recipes in the back so you can create that perfect treat to put under the tree for your own furry friend.

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



DRESSED TO CONFESS

By Diane Vallere

Prosper City, Nevada, is hosting the annual Sagebrush Festival, and no one is more excited than Margo Tambllyn, proprietor (with her loveable and slightly eccentric dad) of Disguise DeLimit, the local costume shop. The theme of this year's family-friendly event is board games, which means attendees will have the opportunity to participate in everything from Clue to Monopoly to Conspiracy.

Margo's shop has been given the task of outfitting the festival's headline performers, the Domino Divas. The group hasn't performed together since 1968, on the day that the Prosper City Savings and Loan was robbed. The only thing stolen that day was a large block of gold originally owned by Pete Prosper, a prospector for whom the town was named. Rumors about the possible involvement of the Divas in the robbery immediately began to circulate, ending with the group dissolving and most of the members leaving town. By the way, the gold was never found.

It's clear right from the start of the Divas' dress rehearsal that the other group members don't get along with the self-proclaimed Diva-in-Chief, Ronnie Cass. One of Ronnie's favorite tricks is to deliberately show up late, forcing everyone to wait for her. So nobody is particularly worried when Ronnie is late for the group's opening performance. But this time, Ronnie has a very good excuse for not showing up on time. Or, at all. Because Margo, sent to find Ronnie in her dressing room, finds her dead.

As the police investigate what is definitely a murder, suspicion falls on Don Digby, Margo's father's best friend, who was romantically involved with Ronnie a long time ago. It also looks like Don and Ronnie were involved in the unsolved robbery. As conspiracy theories and suspects pop up all over Prosper City, Margo realizes that it's up to her to clear Don's name.

"Dressed to Confess" is a fun read, with a likeable protagonist and a fast-moving plot. I was entertained and, yes, impressed!

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

KNIT TO KILL

By Anne Canadeo

The members of everyone's favorite, Black Sheep Knitting Group, are currently gearing up to celebrate the wedding of one of their members, Lucy Binger. The friends have decided to unwind for a weekend before the big event, so when a member proposes taking a jaunt to Osprey Shores—a gated community on the Maine Island, Knit Shop's owner, Maggie, and the rest hop in the car to head for some fun.

On their first night there, however, fun turns into frenzy when Maggie and the group overhear a loud argument: a man named Derek Pullman has just accused Dr. Julian Morton of cheating at cards. Very soon the good doctor is found dead after falling off a cliff, although the initial investigation looks like he had more than a little help with the "fall." These ladies have certainly had experience when it comes to unmasking murderers and soon they are up to their proverbial necks trying to solve the crime.

This is a great cozy, with added extras of scrumptious recipes and a whole lot of knitting knowledge that the reader will love.

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



A DEADLY ÉCLAIR

By Daryl Wood Gerber

Bryan Baker is an entrepreneur who helps many small business dreamers achieve their goal. Mimi Rousseau is one of those people who Bryan helped after her best friend Jo introduced them. Now, what was once only a dream to have her own bistro has come to fruition, and Mimi couldn't be more ecstatic (and nervous) about the whole thing.

Although business at the Bistro Rousseau (which is also an inn) is growing in popularity in the beautiful Napa Valley, Mimi is more than a little anxious about hosting their very first wedding party. She needs this to go off without a hitch so she can pay back her benefactor.

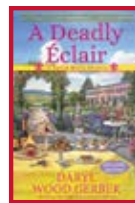
Her employees are working hard to make sure that the food, the ambience, and everything else is perfect for the bride: thirtysomething talk show hostess of "Everybody Loves Angelica," Ms. Angelica Barrington. Angelica is also Bryan's niece, so there's a family connection.

Suffice to say, the food and ambience are extremely amazing. The trouble comes from an entirely different source. At the wedding dinner, Angelica's father acts more than a bit strange; Lyle, her fiancé, acts like some kind of kept man or perhaps someone hiding guilty secrets; and even Angelica's best friend, Francine, a gossip columnist, acts like she's above it all.

The reviews are amazing for Mimi; what she could have done without, however, was the dead body of Bryan, who's found with an éclair stuck in his mouth. Scandal can kill, but what's worse is the fact that Mimi is suspect number one because in Bryan's will her loan is absolutely forgiven. Now she has to defend herself and find the real killer while trying desperately to stay in business.

This is the first in a new series (*The French Bistro Mysteries*) by a great author who has proven time and time again that she writes nothing but the best. There are even scrumptious recipes included that will have readers absolutely drooling.

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



DITCHED 4 MURDER

By J.C. Eaton

This is the second in the *Sophie Kimball Mystery* series (the first being "Booked 4 Murder"), and this follow-up certainly shows why Sophie Kimball, her mother Harriet, the funniest book club ever written, and an adorable dog by the name of Streetman, will be around for a good, long time to come.

For those who missed the first, go back and read it now. Although these are standalones, you won't want to miss the humor and suspense that this cast consistently brings. Sophie, called "Phee" for short, moved from the icy cold winds of Minnesota to Arizona and is much closer to her mother. Some days, that's great; other days, like when the weather makes her feel like she's going to sweat to death, Minnesota is missed.

Harriet is a bit annoyed and shares her views with Phee. It seems that Aunt Ina (seventy-four and still loving life) has picked one of the hottest weekends to throw her second wedding. Ina has also decided to wear white (*gasp!*) which causes Harriet to be even more annoyed.

Phee works as a bookkeeper, helping retired policeman turned private investigator, Nate Williams. This weekend, Phee has been roped into selecting gourmet pastries and doing other 'wedding planner' duties for Aunt Ina's wedding, while Nate will be investigating a suspicious death of a man who fell off his golf cart while making a day of it, and landed on some pretty jagged river rocks. So what does one have to do with the other? You'll have to read to find out.

Harriet Plunkett and her book club, Booked 4 Murder, once again steal the show. Yes, Phee is great and the crime is more than interesting, but when mom's voice enters the mix, you just can't help but love her. These characters are written so well that it feels like they're in the room with you, and this fan cannot wait for Book 3 of the series, "Staged 4 Murder," to arrive.

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



STOWED AWAY

By Barbara Ross



It's early June in the seaside town of Busman's Harbor, Maine, and that can mean only one thing. The Snowden Family Clambake Company will be open for business in just one week. Both locals and visitors can't wait to be ferried over to Morrow Island, where Julia Snowden and her family have been cooking up a wicked good seafood feast with all the trimmings for generations. The one blight on the beauty of Morrow Island is the sight of the old family mansion, Windsholme, which was heavily damaged by a tragic fire the year before. In addition to doing the prep work to ensure they open on time, they're also facing a crucial decision on whether to tear the structure down or spend the money on restoring Windsholme to its former glory.

Wealthy neighbor Quentin Tupper arranges for a consultation with an architect who's an expert in early examples of shingle-style homes in Maine, Wyatt Jayne. When Wyatt arrives, Julia can't believe her eyes. The architect (whose real first name is Susan) and Julia were prep school roommates, and was the ringleader of the "mean girls" clique who made Julia's life a misery.

To make up for her previous bad behavior, Wyatt invites Julia, her boyfriend, Chris, and Quentin for dinner on the *Garbo*, a mega yacht owned by her wealthy boyfriend, reclusive millionaire Geoffrey Bower. Bower made a "killing" when the U.S. housing market collapsed, and since then has been the constant target of harassment and even death threats. The first time Julia sees Geoffrey, it's a lovely evening on board the *Garbo*. The second time Julia sees Geoffrey, he's dead at the same dinner table, the victim of a poisoning, and Wyatt is the number one suspect. When Wyatt turns to Julia for help, Julia is faced with the most difficult decision she's ever had to make.

"Stowed Away" is the sixth in Ross's *Maine Clambake Mystery* series. This series just keeps getting better and better!

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

GLASS TOWN

By Steven Savile

The name will sound familiar, seeing as that Steven Savile has written a wealth of sensational novels, and for popular TV shows, like *Doctor Who*. With this release, Savile makes his U.S. debut!

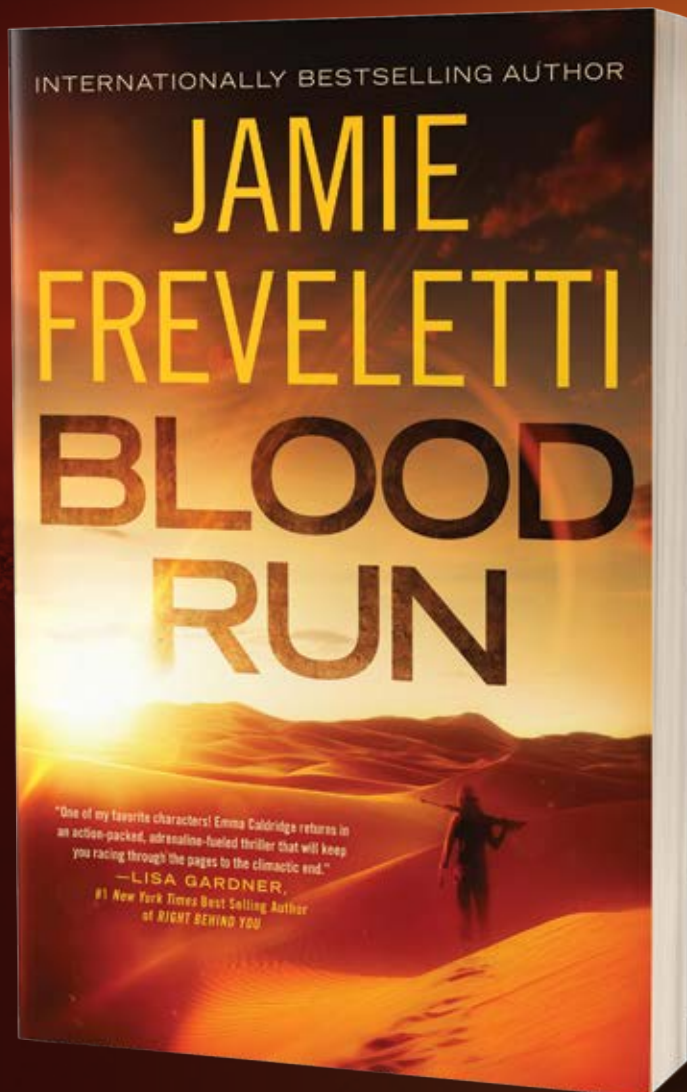
In 1924, two brothers fell for an actress who mysteriously disappeared while filming Hitchcock's debut, *Number 13*, which, too, is now lost; as well as a gangster who vanished the same day.

Time has moved on, but that "crime of the century" is not forgotten. Joshua Raines is a man, decades later, who's actually linked to this mystery, and very soon he becomes obsessed with the case. Not a surprise, considering that a confession has been handed down to him through his family tree. Only Joshua can unmask a real killer, solve a very real crime from the past, and try to figure out if a lady did get harmed so long ago, or if she is simply part of a scheme that continues to this day.

This is an incredible plot! Bottom line: Savile, whether delivering for the screen or books, *always* delivers. Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

BLOOD RUN

BY INTERNATIONALLY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JAMIE FREVELETTI



SMALLPOX...

a deadly virus the world
never expected to see again.

Now it's back.

But so is Emma Caldrige,
and she's determined
to stop a ruthless government
from unleashing it as
a biochemical weapon.

**COMING
NOVEMBER 2017**

C
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THOR: RAGNAROK 2017

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

The third and best *Thor* movie (and possibly the funniest in the Marvel franchise to date) takes a detour into the strange and wonderful, with a mix of a buddy road trip film. The film opens in action, with a trapped Thor dealing with a seemingly unstoppable foe, and from that point the tension escalates along with the laughs. Thor and his villainous brother Loki end up tossed out of Asgard, while their sister who brings death and destruction in her wake tries to take over the kingdom. Toss in a bizarre planet run by a wicked Grandmaster who oversees brutal gladiator games, and the end result is another winner. The cast is stellar, and even the director puts himself into the proceedings in a hilarious way. Ragnarok means the end of everything, but hopefully it does not mean the end of the *Thor* films. We'll see next year when he pops up in the new *Avengers* movie. ■

MOVIES

By Jeff Ayers

JUSTICE LEAGUE 2017

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

What Marvel has done right has eluded DC with their *Man of Steel* and *Batman vs. Superman* titles. *Wonder Woman* was terrific, but with *Justice League* the warm feeling that DC was heading in the right direction instead steers them off a cliff. One reason *The Avengers* worked was that audiences were introduced to the characters ahead of time and liked them, so when they all teamed up it was cool and rewarding. Half of the *Justice League* are new characters and the movie has to cram enough material in a short time frame to get viewers to like them. Flash and Aquaman are fun characters and it would have been nice to see them in action before this, while Cyborg is intriguing, but still a bit of a mystery. *Wonder Woman* is awesome, and Ben Affleck as Batman appears to not be sober through most of his performance. It is also pretty obvious who I'm leaving out, and that reintroduction is handled somewhat poorly. The villain looks like a CGI amalgam of a goat and a photocopier. Trying to explain the plot is difficult since none of it makes much sense, though it does include putting boxes together and insects with teeth. It is either this movie or a bad moving day. The director Zack Snyder left the film for personal reasons and Joss Whedon took over. It is easy to see which person did what part. Overall, better than I thought it would be, but still misses the mark. ■



COCO 2017

Genre – Animation/Adventure/Comedy (PG)

Pixar knows how to tell wonderful stories (purposefully forgetting the last two *Cars* movies). The latest deals with heavy themes that will hit the adults watching much harder than the kids, while also telling a tale the whole family will enjoy. 12-year-old Miguel has grown up in a household that shuns music due to a relative leaving the family to pursue fame and fortune as a musician. The Rivera family turned to shoemaking, and that has been the industry they have pursued for a couple of generations. Miguel is expected to pick up the trade, but he wants nothing more than to play music. When he learns who his great-grandfather was, it sends Miguel to the land of the dead on the day the deceased family members can return to the land of the living, but the conditions that put him there will jeopardize everyone alive or dead. The storyline seems quite predictable at first, but once Miguel crosses over, the phenomenal animation and real story kicks in with an end result both surprising and emotional. Pixar has done it again. ■



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."

Featured Artist

Hazel Arts

MEMORIES UNFADED



BEHIND BLUE EYES

*B*eaauty...tranquil...silent dreamer...when hearing any of these adjectives used to describe an artist, you expect a certain air of mystery to come from both the artist and the work they create.

When it comes to Hazel, a freelance artist living in Dubai whose work is portrayed on DeviantArt, she fits that 'mysterious' bill quite readily. Those who stare at her creations will be inspired; the emotion she has for her craft draws you in until you feel as if you are one with the work. She, herself, speaks about the mystery of the well-known *Mona Lisa*, yet is an artist who owns the same ability to make viewers wonder exactly what Hazel was thinking about when she formed her work in the digital landscape.

Here, she sits down with *Suspense Magazine* and offers up some in-depth information on how her growth as an artist commenced, as well as great advice for those future artists out

there who are working towards carving out their own niche in a world filled with emotion, light, and color.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Did you have the desire to create when you were very young? If not, can you share with readers what made you start down the artist path?

Hazel S.M. (H.S.M.): *Artists are born, not made. I had a gift for creating art for as long as I can remember but hardly an interest in "the arts." I have been an outdoor person, inclined towards photography and history. Art, for me, was an art and only for melancholy souls. But I enjoyed art, as it generates powerful messages and sentiments. The magic of Mona Lisa still amazes me, her mysterious smile gives her everlasting charm.*

I used to view artworks of the masters, and still can't help but wonder what they were feeling at the time they were creating these gems. So the enigmatic world of art captivated my attention, even though I never thought I would be pursuing art as my passion.

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

H.S.M.: *Over the course of my life, I have dabbled and switched to different careers constantly.*

My earliest career choice was to be an airhostess. This stemmed from the fact that I loved travelling and interacting with new people, also the smart and dignified "uniform" always appealed to me—professional with a touch of glamour. Gradually though, I gave up on it when I was exposed to sports activities at school. Watching fellow students reach the height of glory, basking in the limelight and earning numerous accolades, I dreamt of being a fine sportswoman. It helped that I was selected quite frequently at sports' meets. Unfortunately, due to insufficient sports infrastructure, this dream did not translate into a career.

So I just let myself be...me: serving people, giving them good company coupled with a few jokes here and there. Then just when I was confused about what I wanted to be, the answer stared me right in the face. I loved being with people and people loved being with me. Many a time people complimented me on my openheartedness, jolliness, and my ability to light their spirits and...voila, a career idea was born: Motivational Speaker.

I used to deliver speeches with the intention of inspiring the people and encouraging them to look at life from different viewpoints. I wanted to be the one who can change the world with a positive approach towards life, and by making a change in their lives. So I would have definitely opted for Motivational Speaker if not an artist.

S. MAG.: Looking at your work, it is easy to see the amount of emotion and feeling that goes into each creation. I know this is incredibly difficult, but if you had to choose a favorite image of yours, which would that be and why?

H.S.M.: *All of my works are like chapters of a book, each telling a different story of my life; some are melancholy, while others are all about happiness. So choosing a particular image is like tearing a page of my life; which, in turn, would make it incomplete. But there are some works which are closer to my heart, like "Paint the sky, make it yours"...for many reasons. Mainly because it represents my journey through art, the many hours of pure frustration and practise involved, but how it was worth the level of skill I have now. It is a connection to my mind, soul and dreams.*

ALONE WITH THE MOON



ART OF IMAGINATION

Art is an adventure for me and by this journey I explore the world of emotional things, the passion I feel. It shows my struggle in the beginning and how I overcame all the difficulties to be where I am today. I feel like it's talking to me, where words failed to express my feelings.

And through this art, I have come to understand that if you can't help yourself then nobody will help you!

S. MAG.: Is there a particular digital specialty and/or technique in the art world that you like above others: a specialty that you utilize more often to create your works? If so, what would that be and why?

H.S.M.: A particular technique or specialty that is found in my work is colour scheme.

I use colours to bring out emotions, feelings, moods, and thoughts in my artworks, filling my images with deep blue, rich purple and magenta, which conveys the mood of my ambiance. As I believe people relate to my work this way, and manage to evoke and stimulate hearts of the audience and engage their feelings. Hence a connection is established between the viewers and the art.

Briefly put, I let colours do the talking in my art.

S. MAG.: Do you ever experience a mind/creative "block" while working? If so, what do you do or where do you go to get that inspiration back to finish a project?

H.S.M.: *Artist block is every artist's worst nightmare since it attacks from all sides and one can't do anything about it. So the best solution, according to me, is to just unplug, step away from my work, and relax my mind. This way, a door in the mind opens to intercept new ideas and creations. Being the driven person that I am, I try to regain my lost inspiration ("dry spell") by indulging in activity related to art to give my creativity a boost. At times I seek solace in silence to tap my imagination instead of wracking my brain to come up with the next good set of ideas.*

Poetry, too, helps me develop the emotions and poetic angle of my work. Another thing I do to increase my creativity is to move on with another project which is completely different from my comfort zone—some new methods or techniques which I dare not doing.

I listen to music and watch tutorials, as it's famously said that "Love and Creativity" intertwine.

S. MAG.: Are you ever surprised by a creation you've made? Or when it comes to your work, do you have the piece already done in your mind before beginning?

H.S.M.: *Well, I'm never surprised by the creations I make since the idea is quite well formed in my mind. It's only a matter of time before it finds expression in the work. Initially, I usually create a draft and then set about to develop it further by using stocks, colours and details.*

Speaking of surprise, it's mostly the viewers' reaction which leaves me surprised. Many a time, I have posted works of art that to me seem



MUSIC OF LONELINESS



OUR FINAL JOURNEY IN THE END

ordinary and lacking in perfection. But the huge response it garners leaves me overwhelmed and stunned to say the least.

I have a very systematic approach to create art. For me, starting on a piece without having any idea or concept does not hold well. So it's rarely that an idea develops with the "progression" of my work.

S. MAG.: Looking back on 2017, is there an artist you can name whose work you were inspired by? Is there a particular muse of your own or an idol, perchance, who you watch for to see what new works they create?

H.S.M.: There is no definitive answer to this, and I can never answer this question as many artists have inspired me in various ways.

One of them is nature. Yes, I call nature an artist since I draw from its inspiration, colours and movements; it influences my work. I feel inner joy when I'm in the midst of nature. Taking a walk surrounded by nature freshens an artist's mind, opens doors to creativity, originality and refinery.

Poetry is another artist which influences my work the best. It's like melodious songs which talk about the coming and going of life. This enriches my emotions and refines my mind and brings me closer to nature.

But my biggest inspiration from whom I draw a lot is my inner-self. Never very handy with words, I find that giving expression to my feelings and moods with a stroke of a brush, comes naturally to me. My thoughts, feelings and emotions largely influence the artist within me. It's my main outlet for my feelings to overwhelm my works.

S. MAG.: Is there any advice you can give to up-and-coming artists on how best to create and keep enhancing their own paths as they move forward in their careers?

H.S.M.: Enjoy and love what you are doing. Anything done without passion is useless, so put all your passion and love into it. Next is, believe in yourself, as it will take a long way. Keep your inspiration high and never compare your skills with other contemporary or talented artists.

Try to be yourself, as you are unique. Watch videos many times until it stays in your mind.

And the most important thing is, never give up on your dreams because it takes a dream to get started, desire to keep going, and determination to finish, as said by a famous author, because your artistic journey is waiting for you.

S. MAG.: Are you a fan of any other "creative" genres, such as movies, books, etc.? In addition, do you have any hobbies you like to spend time doing?

H.S.M.: Well, besides art, I'm involved in many activities. I love reading mostly magazine and newspaper articles and writing poetry. Listening to my favourite songs in my playlist when I'm doing arts, and singing and dancing comes natural to me.

I also try to learn new things about history, watching documentaries and movies. I also cook and bake occasionally. Being an outdoor person, I try to keep myself fit by indulging in sports activities, especially badminton, tennis and walking. Exercise is a must for me.

S. MAG.: What was your best moment of 2017 when it came to your work? What can readers and fans look forward to you working on in the New Year?

H.S.M.: Artistically speaking, this year has really been bountiful for me in terms of my achievements and the success I got, which can't be expressed in words. I thoroughly enjoyed my artistic journey where I met many wonderful and inspiring artists who not only supported, but also inspired me in many ways.

But the highlight of my career was my first published interview by rameexgfx at <https://sdtuts.com/interview-with-digital-artist-hazel-silentdreamer-art/>. That was the turning point in my life; it not only encouraged me to take myself seriously, but made me mature as an artist.

My new year plans are to expand my skills in Photography and traditional art, as both of them are very close to my heart; I always admired the photography of famous artists but never thought of pursuing my interest. So my main goal is to polish this pillar of art, whereas painting/sketching has always been my passion, which I neglected for quite some time.

Next goal is to make tutorials out of my work. There are many things to learn and look out for, and I hope the same success follows me in the coming year. Lastly, I want to thank all my well-wishers and fans who have supported me throughout this year.

It will be quite interesting to see the next steps Hazel takes as she enters into a New Year with many awesome goals on her horizon. To see more of Hazel's work, you can find her at <http://silentdreamer-art.deviantart.com> as well as on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009869864304>. ■

Mike's SURF SHOP

By Ryan Benson

A black Escalade pulled off the highway into the dirt lot of a rickety surf shop. The small business could have passed for any of the other beach shops dotting the California coast, a fact the SUV's two occupants had learned first-hand.

The stone-faced men sat silent in the parked car. The man in the passenger seat spoke first. "Okay, tenth time's the charm. Why do we get these needle-in-a-haystack jobs? I can hear them now, 'Send Ramon and Pablo; they're hounds.'"

"Considéralo un cumplido," Pablo said.

"I don't need this kinda compliment, Pablo." Ramon pulled the sleeves of his silk suit down his arms, covering most, but not all of his tattoos. He ran a comb through his slicked-back hair. "This guy stole a lot of money from the cartel. Think he still has it?"

"No se," said Pablo. "No es importante."

"Si, es verdad. Let me do the talking."

The well-dressed men disembarked and moved towards the building. A welcome Pacific wind cooled the air.

"Mike's Surf Shop?" Ramon read the sign. "No points for creativity."

He entered the surf shop first and, like a happy cat, swiped at the brown fringe hanging from the lintel. Pablo followed, ducking his bald head to dodge the fringe. The entire shop exuded a tiki hut vibe—brown and cramped. They spread out amongst the dense bramble of board shorts and wetsuits.

From behind the counter, a stout, dark-haired man studied the two customers, their clothing and intensity stood in stark contrast to his usual "Brah" clientele. He exchanged side-eyed glances with the sinewy girl cleaning a surfboard on the far side of the room.

"Como estas?" Ramon waved.

"Good afternoon," the shopkeeper responded.

Ramon moved towards the counter. He pointed to a small box of board wax. "Que es esto?" Ramon said. He mimed washing his underarms as he smiled.

"No hablo Espanol," the shopkeeper said.

"Sure..." Ramon grabbed goggles off a rack and fumbled as he tried to adjust the strap. "I think these are broken." He tossed the goggles onto the floor. "You the 'Mike' from 'Mike's Surf Shop'?"

"Yup. Can I help you?"

"No thanks," said Ramon.

"We're surfers, can't you tell?" Pablo laughed, pawing at the boards near the girl.

"Jennifer, check this inventory into the computer," Mike said. The young woman put her head down and hurried to the shopkeeper, knocking bikini bottoms to the floor. Ramon picked one up and ran the fabric between his fingers.

"Don't mind my daughter," said the shopkeeper. "She's clumsy."

"Hey, no problem," said Ramon. "Surf gods must be men. How much do these stretch?" He held the bikini at arm's length and whistled. "Jennifer, you got one of these on under that Hawaiian muumuu?"

Jennifer sheepishly looked away, her hair falling forward to obscure her face.

"You're too fit to wear a tent anyway," said Ramon. "I can tell you surf. Look at those shoulders. You can't hide the Cameron Diaz body you got going on." He raised his voice. "Hey, Pablo. Te gusta, Cameron Diaz?"

Pablo smiled and gave thumbs up. "Por supuesto. Ella es mi favorita."

"Sir, we have all styles of swimwear for women and men," said Mike. "Why don't you take out the trash, Jennifer?"

The girl again nodded and hauled the less than half-filled barrel out the rear door.

"Maybe you know a person we're looking for," said Ramon. He motioned to Pablo, who handed Ramon a missing person poster. "His name is Carlos Colón. Some people south of the border are looking for him."

"No... No, he doesn't look familiar," said Mike.

Ramon held the poster and looked back and forth between it and Mike. "It's funny; you got the eyes and the thin nose like Carlos. You're just fatter and older. You sure you aren't Mexican, Miguel? You got a good tan for a gringo."

"It's SoCal. Everyone does."

"Not like yours, mi amigo. I grew up here, but I live in Mexico now. I got my feet in both worlds, know what I'm saying?"

Mike shook his head no.

"What's your last name, Miguel?"

"Smith. Mike Smith."

Ramon smiled. "Hey Pablo, get my wallet from the car. I wanna buy something from Mr. Smith." Pablo left without a word.

"I need a suit," said Ramon. He pointed to a nearby rack. "These my size?"

"Yes," said Mike. "All sizes."

"Carlos went missing a year ago." Ramon placed red shorts on the counter. "A year away from friends could age a man. Make him stress eat." He squinted his eyes and studied Mike's face.

Ramon glanced out the window and caught Pablo stalking to the back of the building. He'd donned out-of-season black leather gloves. "You know, Miguel; your daughter looks a lot like you. Strong genes, no?" Ramon wagged his finger at the poster. "She looks a bit like Carlos, too."

"My daughter?" Mike eyed the harpoon gun laying on the counter several steps away.

Ramon followed Mike's line of sight to the marine weapon, and snatched it before Mike could make a move. "I always wanted to use one of these."

"Good for fishing," said Mike.

Ramon waved it back and forth. He aimed it at imaginary targets and made shooting noises. "*Pew, pew*. Is that the sound? Or is it *bang, bang*?"

"Neither," said Mike under his breath.

"But the thing is, you only get one shot with a harpoon gun—like in life," said Ramon.

Mike's nails dug into the wooden counter turning his knuckles white.

"Carlos Colón spent a lot of time surfing the waves in Todos Santos. From what our mutual 'friends' say, it was his life," said Ramon, pacing before the shook shopkeeper. "Maybe he'd open a surf shop."

"It's not as fun as you think," said Mike. "Razor thin margins." He removed his hands from the wood. "I have a list of other shops. The name's Colón, right?"

"Don't bother," said Ramon. "I found his shop."

Mike looked at the harpoon leveled at his chest.

"You don't get another shot, Carlito," said Ramon. "Let's see what kind of sound this makes."

The human target closed his eyes, spilling the tears held by his lashes.

BANG!

Mike groped his chest. Failing to find wetness, he opened his eyes.

A stunned Ramon stumbled back and doubled over. The harpoon gun fell from his hand.

BANG! BANG!

Ramon's well-clad body rocked back twice. He crashed into the towels and pulled them over his body as he hit the floor.

Mike's chest rose and fell as he sucked air. He watched a tide of crimson expand around the motionless body.

Jennifer stood tall in the back door frame—dress torn and blood covering her mouth and hands. Smoke twisted from the barrel of the gun in her hand.

Spanish spilled from Mike's lips. "Es esto a quien huyes, Carlos? What have you gotten me into?"

His "daughter" responded with a voice deeper than Mike's. "So you remember Spanish after all. Stop complaining, big brother. You may have a decade on me, but I'm paying your bills. Besides, I'm the one stuck wearing the dress every damn day."

"What happened to your clothes? I thought you ditched your gun."

Carlos nodded to Ramon's corpse. "His perverted friend got frisky—and then got the shock of his life. No means no, right?" Carlos winked. He grabbed a t-shirt off the rack, looked in the mirror near the sunglasses, and wiped the red off his face. "Damn, some of this blood is mine." He threw down the t-shirt, pulled back his hair, and secured it with an elastic band from his wrist. "If you had let me keep my shooter, the dance with that varon would've been a lot cleaner. At least I got his gun in time to save you."

"Gracias." Michael looked down at Ramon. He leaned on the counter and breathed in and out to fight the nausea. "Now what?"

"Grab what will fit in a carry-on bag, Miguel. Vamonos. I hear the surfing in Hawaii is phenomenal." ■



HAPPY HOLIDAYS EVERYONE. “The weather outside is frightful,” well at least in some parts of the world. However, the one thing that is common no matter where you live is that we all love reading books. We love diving into worlds that have been created just for us. You don’t need to be a young kid to feel the suspense of Christmas morning. To *Suspense Magazine*, December means that we give you our “Best of the Year” in books and one author who has achieved “The Crimson Scribe” award.

Last year, we chose Greg Hurwitz with “Orphan X.” While Greg and the authors before him will always hold the title, we’re sure they’re very excited to see another join the club of “Crimson Scribe” winners. This year was extremely competitive, with it being our closest vote ever to pick the winner.

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

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

Christmas is close, but you still have time to put these authors on your shelf, and of course you could always use those Amazon gift cards to check them out. But don’t stop at the books listed here; check out their backlist, as I’m sure you will find hundreds of hours of entertainment. I could go on and on talking about how tremendous they are, but I won’t bore you with any more details. I will simply let the “Best of 2017 List” as presented by *Suspense Magazine*, and “The Crimson Scribe” award winner, speak for themselves. Now on with the show!

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine ■

COZY BEST of 2017

“TURKEY TROT MURDER” by Leslie Meier (Kensington; September 26, 2017): *It’s late autumn in Tinker’s Cove, Maine, and the last surviving flowers on Lucy Stone’s porch have fallen victim to the first frost of the season. But as the part-time reporter learns, this cold November morning will claim more than potted plants...*

Besides the annual Turkey Trot 5K on Thanksgiving Day, Lucy expects the approaching holiday to be a relatively uneventful one—until she finds beautiful Alison Franklin dead and frozen in Blueberry Pond. No one knows much about Alison, except that she was the daughter of wealthy investor Ed Franklin and struggled quietly with drug addiction. Police blame her death on an accidental overdose, but Lucy can’t understand what terrible forces could lead a privileged woman to watery ruin...

Alison’s funeral service is just as puzzling. Many believe Ed’s young—and very pregnant—new wife, Mireille, divided the family, leaving Alison to wither on the vine. Did Mireille truly adore her stepchild as Ed claims, or did she pit father against daughter for personal gain?

As a state of unrest descends on Tinker’s Cove, Lucy is thrown into a full-scale investigation. Now, in a race against time, Lucy must beat the killer to the finish line—or she can forget about stuffing and cranberry sauce...



Press Photo Credit: Stephanie Foster

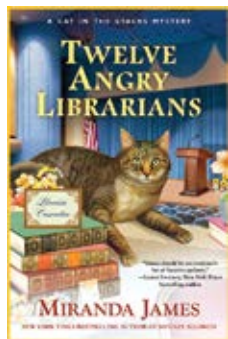
Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Leslie Meier (L.M.): *The best book, bar none, that I read this year was Amor Towle’s “The Gentleman in Moscow.” It was all about maintaining civilized, genteel standards in difficult times and I loved every page. I didn’t want it to end.*

S. MAG.: Who’s your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

L.M.: *This is a hard one, I love Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, also Lord Peter Wimsey, but these days I can’t resist one of Cara Black’s Parisian books with sexy super-sleuth Aimee Le Duc. J’adore Paris!*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?



L.M.: *Pitch my series, who could resist? Hollywood, are you listening? Here goes: Strong family ties, gorgeous Maine setting, quirky locals and MURDER! ■*

“TWELVE ANGRY LIBRARIANS” by Miranda James (Berkley; February 21, 2017): Charlie is stressed out. The Southern Academic Libraries Association is holding this year’s annual meeting at Athena College. Since Charlie is the interim library director, he must deliver the welcome speech to all the visiting librarians. And as if that weren’t bad enough, the keynote address will be delivered by Charlie’s old nemesis from library school.

It’s been thirty years since Charlie has seen Gavin Fong, and he’s still an insufferable know-it-all

capable of getting under everyone's skin. In his keynote, Gavin puts forth a most unpopular opinion: that degreed librarians will be obsolete in the academic libraries of the future. So when Gavin drops dead, no one seems too upset...

But Charlie, who was seen having a heated argument with Gavin the day before, has jumped to the top of the suspect list. Now Charlie and Diesel must check out every clue to refine their search for the real killer among them before the next book Charlie reads comes from a prison library...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Miranda James (M.J.): *I've had some wonderful moments with fans, but if I had to pick just one, it would be something that happened at the annual Houston cat club show four or five years ago. I was sitting at a table with my books, and a teenage girl started to walk by. She glanced at the books casually, halted, and then approached the table. Her face lit up. She told me, "I love these books." She was thrilled to discover that there was one she hadn't yet read. Seeing a young reader so obviously excited about my books was truly a special moment for me.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

M.J.: *Murder, She Wrote with male librarian and Maine Coon cat.*

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

M.J.: *I am gobsmacked, as the Brits would say, to see one of my books named to a "best of the year" list of any kind. There are so many excellent cozies published every year, and to have one of my books named is an unexpected treat.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

M.J.: *2018 will bring the next book in the series, "Claws for Concern." And in October, the one after that will be out. It's entitled "Six Cats A-Slayin'." ■*



"A CATERED COSTUME PARTY" by Isis Crawford (Kensington; August 29, 2017): *When sisters Bernie and Libby Simmons agree to cater an extravagant Halloween party in their little upstate New York town of Longely, they figured a ghost or two and a blood curdling scream might be part of the menu, but they never expected to be haunted by the deadly specter of murder...*

Halloween is coming, and Darius Witherspoon isn't giving up on his plan for a catered costume party—despite the recent disappearance of his wife, Penelope. He may be heartbroken, but perhaps throwing a big shindig in her honor will boost his spirits.

Darius hires Bernie and Libby to provide the treats. They'd prefer to avoid the festivities altogether, but as always, there are bills to be paid. And in the midst of the celebration, Darius is discovered hanging from a noose outside one of the ballroom's French doors...

Based on the note Darius left, which includes a sum of money and a request for them to "do something" if anything should happen to him, Bernie and Libby rule out suicide. Once the serving trays have been cleared and the decorations taken down, it's up to the sisters to unmask a killer...

Press Photo Credit: Sherry Chayat

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Isis Crawford (I.C.): *After careful consideration, I have to say that my favorite book of 2017 is "The Girl with all the Gifts" by M.R. Carey. It's about a thirteen-year-old girl genius who happens to be a zombie. I read it several months ago, and I'm still thinking about it. The book is fast and suspenseful with a lot of twists and turns, but most of all—and this is the reason I picked it—it's a heart-wrenching exploration of what it means to be 'different' and if science has the right to experiment on beings that think and feel, even if they aren't like us. Also, you don't see the end coming!!*

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

I.C.: *I was absolutely delighted when I found out that “A Catered Costume Party” had been chosen as one of the best books for 2017 by Suspense Magazine. I heard about it at the end of a long slog of a week and it was like a ray of sunshine. Suddenly, everything seemed better. It’s lovely to think of people out there reading and enjoying something that I’ve written. After all, that’s the whole point of the exercise!*

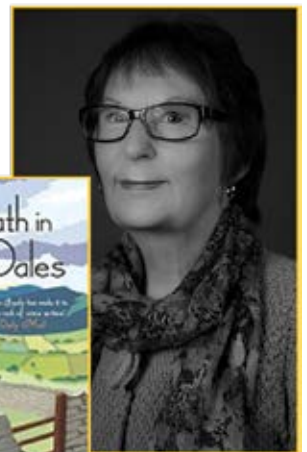
S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

I.C.: *Libby and Bernie will make their 2018 appearance in “A Catered Cat Wedding,” a book I’ve had lots of fun writing. After all, when the cats behave better than the humans, you know you’re on to something. Outside of that, I’ll be busy planning another Libby and Bernie mystery, working on one of my old manuscripts that didn’t get published the first time around, visiting with my family (I have six grandchildren), and spending time in California, Maryland, and possibly Dubai. ■*

“A DEATH IN THE DALES” by Frances Brody (Minotaur Books; February 14, 2017): *A murder most foul.* When the landlord of a Yorkshire tavern is killed in plain sight, Freda Simonson, the only witness to the crime, becomes plagued with guilt, believing the wrong man has been convicted. Following her death, it seems that the truth will never be uncovered in the peaceful village of Langcliffe...

A village of secrets. But it just so happens that Freda’s nephew is courting the renowned amateur sleuth Kate Shackleton, who decides to holiday in Langcliffe with her indomitable teenage niece, Harriet. When Harriet strikes up a friendship with a local girl whose young brother is missing, the search leads Kate to uncover another suspicious death, not to mention an illicit affair.

The case of a lifetime. As the present mysteries merge with the past’s mistakes, Kate is thrust into the secrets that Freda left behind and realizes that this courageous woman has entrusted her with solving a murder from beyond the grave. It soon becomes clear to her that nothing in Langcliffe is quite as it appears, and with a murderer on the loose and an ever-growing roster of suspects, this isn’t the holiday Kate was expecting...



Press Photo Credit: John Orange

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Frances Brody (F.B.): *Especially heartening is when my stories bring pleasure to readers who are having a difficult time. Here’s a short excerpt from a fan’s e-mail. The book was “Death of an Avid Reader.”*

Hello again,

Today I finished reading the above book while I was in the hospital having my chemotherapy. The nurse who was looking after me said ‘you must like her books; you were reading another one of her books on your last cycle.’ I said ‘yes very much, when I see one of her books in my local library I don’t read what the book is about, I know it will be a good read.’

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

F.B.: *(Depending on the circumstances!) Favorite word: Yes. Least favorite word: No.*

S. MAG.: Who’s your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

F.B.: *The villains who send a shudder down my spine are those portrayed as irredeemably evil. There’s Michael Rogers in Agatha Christie’s “Endless Night,” and the aptly named Jack Havoc (it’s an alias) from Margery Allingham’s “Tiger in the Snow.”*

I don’t believe that Miss Marple ever finished a piece of knitting. If, in her and my parallel universe, it pleases her to know she is my heroine, she might knit me a rather special imaginary sweater. ■

DEBUT

BEST of 2017

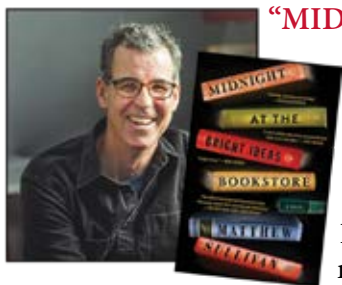


“SEE WHAT I HAVE DONE” by Sarah Schmidt (Atlantic Monthly Press; August 1, 2017): *Lizzie Borden took an axe*

*And gave her mother forty whacks.
When she saw what she had done,
She gave her father forty-one.
Or did she?*

On the morning of August 4, 1892, Lizzie Borden calls out to her maid Bridget: *Someone’s killed father*. The discovery of the brutal axe-murders of Andrew and Abby Borden under their own roof in Fall River, Massachusetts paralyzes the small community. No one can understand why anyone would want to harm the respected Borden. But secret witnesses to the crime have a different tale to tell—of a father with an explosive temper; a spiteful step-mother; and two spinster sisters, with a bond even stronger than blood, desperate for their independence.

As the police search for clues, Emma comforts an increasingly distraught Lizzie whose memories flash in scattered fragments. Had she been in the barn or the pear arbor to escape the stifling heat of the house? Before or after she last spoke to her stepmother? Were they really gone and would everything be better now? Through the overlapping perspectives of the unreliable Lizzie, her older sister Emma, the housemaid Bridget, and the enigmatic stranger Benjamin, we return to what happened on that fateful day. ■



“MIDNIGHT AT THE BRIGHT IDEAS BOOKSTORE” by

Matthew Sullivan (Scribner; June 13, 2017): Lydia Smith lives her life hiding in plain sight. A clerk at the Bright Ideas bookstore, she keeps a meticulously crafted existence among her beloved books,

eccentric colleagues, and the BookFrogs—the lost and lonely regulars who spend every day marauding the store’s

overwhelmed shelves.

But when Joey Molina, a young, beguiling BookFrog, kills himself in the bookstore’s upper room, Lydia’s life comes unglued. Always Joey’s favorite bookseller, Lydia has been bequeathed his meager worldly possessions. Trinkets and books; the detritus of a lonely, uncared for man. But when Lydia flips through his books she finds them defaced in ways both disturbing and inexplicable. They reveal the psyche of a young man on the verge of an emotional reckoning. And they seem to contain a hidden message. What did Joey know? And what does it have to do with Lydia?

As Lydia untangles the mystery of Joey’s suicide, she unearths a long buried memory from her own violent childhood. Details from that one bloody night begin to circle back. Her distant father returns to the fold, along with an obsessive local cop, and the Hammerman, a murderer who came into Lydia’s life long ago and, as she soon discovers, never completely left.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Matthew Sullivan (M.S.): *This is a bit unfair, but I just finished reading an incredible thriller that is due to be published next year. It’s called “Atlas” by Stephen Giles and it’s the story of a young boy living with his housekeeper in England in the 1960s while his mother is “away.” The boy begins to suspect that the housekeeper killed his mom and buried her in the cellar, and the story quickly turns into this wonderfully tense, understated, claustrophobic thriller that I could not put down.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

M.S.: *Child survivor of horrific attack becomes bookseller... redemption ensues.*

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

M.S.: *From blank page to publication, this book was about a ten-year process. My kids were tots when I began writing it and one of them just started high school. There were several times when I was ready to abandon the whole thing. My agent discovered my manuscript in his slush pile. This is just to say that for all of the joys I get from writing, the process of getting to this stage was sometimes very brutal. So it's difficult to put into words how grateful I am, not only to have finally completed the process, but especially to have such warm support from readers. Thank you.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

M.S.: *I'm working on another literary mystery, this one set in a rural Northwest lake town. It's been a fun story to explore. I'm not sure when it will be ready for readers...hopefully faster than the last one!* ■

"THE DRY" by Jane Harper (Flatiron Books; January 10, 2017): After getting a note demanding his presence, Federal Agent Aaron Falk arrives in his hometown for the first time in decades to attend the funeral of his best friend, Luke. Twenty years ago, when Falk was accused of murder, Luke was his alibi. Falk and his father fled under a cloud of suspicion, saved from prosecution only because of Luke's steadfast claim that the boys had been together at the time of the crime. But now more than one person knows they didn't tell the truth back then, and Luke is dead.



Press Photo Credit: Nicholas Purcell

Amid the worst drought in a century, Falk and the local detective question what really happened to Luke. As Falk reluctantly investigates to see if there's more to Luke's death than there seems to be, long-buried mysteries resurface, as do the lies that have haunted them. And Falk will find that small towns have *always* hidden big secrets.

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

Jane Harper (J.H.): *I love Lee Child's Jack Reacher series. They are fast-paced page-turners with a fantastic main character—everything I enjoy in a book!*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

J.H.: *Death in a drought-stricken Australian town set to combust.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect in 2018?

J.H.: *My second novel "Force of Nature" is released in the U.S. in February 2018. It is an Australian mystery set in a remote bushland area. Five corporate city women enter a hiking trail on a corporate retreat, but several days later, only four come out the other side. The main character from "The Dry," Aaron Falk, returns, but "Force of Nature" can be read as a standalone mystery.* ■

"MAGICIANS IMPOSSIBLE" by Brad Abraham



(Thomas Dunne Books; September 12, 2017): Twenty-something bartender Jason Bishop's world is shattered when his estranged father commits suicide, but the greater shock comes when he learns his father was a secret agent in the employ

Press Photo Credit: Kirsty Reeves

of the Invisible Hand; an ancient society of spies wielding magic in a centuries-spanning war. Now the Golden Dawn—the shadowy cabal of witches and warlocks responsible for Daniel Bishop's murder, and the death of Jason's mother years before—have Jason in their sights. His survival will depend on mastering his own dormant magic abilities; provided he makes it through the training.

From New York, to Paris, to worlds between worlds, Jason's journey through the realm of magic will be fraught with peril. But with enemies and allies on both sides of this war, whom can he trust? The Invisible Hand, who've been more of a family than his own family ever was? The Golden Dawn, who may know the secrets behind his mysterious lineage? For Jason Bishop, only one thing is for certain; the magic he has slowly been mastering is telling him not to trust anybody.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

Brad Abraham (B.A.): *Impossible Winner by The Dead Weather.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

B.A.: *Harry Potter meets James Bond.*

S. MAG.: Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist in the movie?

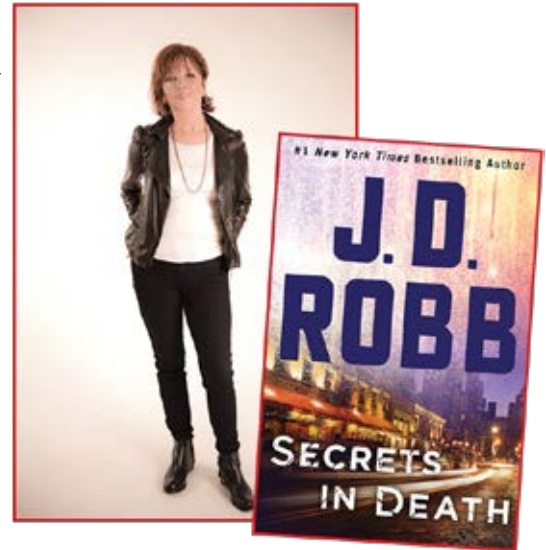
B.A.: *Ryan Gosling and Idris Elba.* ■

BEST of 2017 *Romantic* SUSPENSE

“SECRETS IN DEATH” by J.D. Robb (St. Martin’s Press; September 5, 2017): The chic Manhattan nightspot *Du Vin* is not the kind of place Eve Dallas would usually patronize, and it’s not the kind of bar where a lot of blood gets spilled. But that’s exactly what happens one cold February evening.

The mortally wounded woman is Larinda Mars, a self-described “social information reporter,” or as most people would call it, a professional gossip. As it turns out, she was keeping the most shocking stories quiet, for profitable use in her side business as a blackmailer. Setting her sights on rich, prominent marks, she’d find out what they most wanted to keep hidden and then bleed them dry. Now someone’s done the same to her, literally—with a knife to the brachial artery.

Eve didn’t like Larinda Mars. But she likes murder even less. To find justice for this victim, she’ll have to plunge into the dirty little secrets of all the people Larinda Mars victimized herself. But along the way, she may be exposed to some information she really didn’t want to know... ■



“HELLO AGAIN” by Brenda Novak (St. Martin’s Paperbacks; October 3, 2017): *She can make sense of a complex criminal mind.*

Press Photo Credit: Bruce Wilder

Evelyn Talbot, a psychiatrist at a maximum-security prison in Alaska, studies some of the world’s worst serial killers. But she’s about to meet her most elusive patient at Hanover House yet: Dr. Lyman Bishop, AKA the Zombie Maker given his fondness for performing ice-pick lobotomies on his victims. A brilliant cancer researcher, Bishop is either the most cunning psychopath Evelyn has ever encountered—or he is wrongly convicted.

What happens when a criminal can see into her own?

When a new ice-pick fatality occurs, it seems Bishop really was wrongly convicted. Except...Evelyn has a personal connection to the victim and *that* suggests the killer may be someone from her own past: Jasper Moore, her high school boyfriend who tortured her and left her for dead when she was only sixteen. Jasper also murdered three of her friends—and was never caught. Is he trying to send a message with this copycat crime? The only thing Evelyn knows for sure is that if Jasper *is* on her trail, she might not be able to escape again...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Brenda Novak (B.N.): *One of my favorite fan experiences happened just recently at a book signing in Cincinnati—for “Hello Again,” in fact. I had a woman who’d just had major surgery three days before getting early clearance from her doctor so she could*

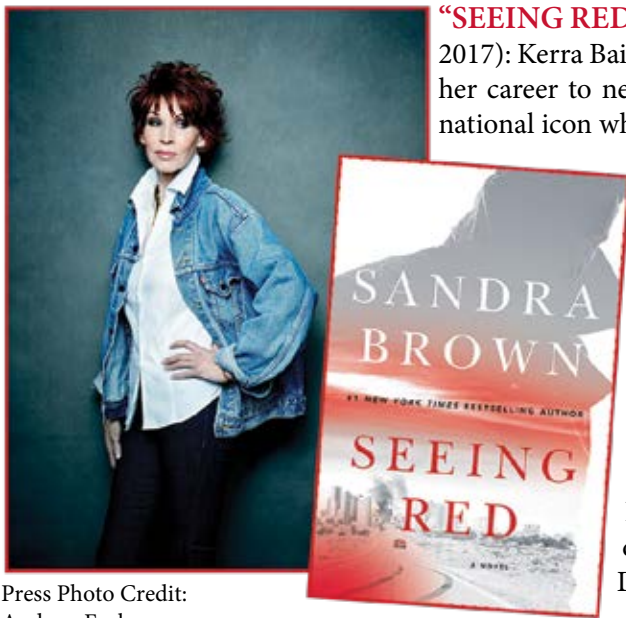
drive, because she wanted to meet me so badly. In order to make it to the same event, another woman drove twelve hours—all the way from New York—and a third was going to be out of town so she sent her husband in her stead. He stood in line for almost the entire length of the signing in order to get her a signed book. That those readers cared so much that I was in town touched me deeply.

S. MAG.: What is the best book you read in 2017?

B.N.: *The best book I read in 2017 would have to be Kristin Hannah's "The Nightingale." I wasn't sure I wanted to read about World War II, but I fell headfirst into that beautiful story and read it almost in one sitting.*

S. MAG.: Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist in the movie?

B.N.: *"Hello Again" has actually been optioned for a major motion picture, so I've spent a great deal of time thinking about who should play the leads. The producer who's hoping to bring it to life would like to see Anne Hathaway as Evelyn Talbot and Jake Gyllenhaal as Amarok, and I agree that they'd be spectacular. We'll see if it ever graces the big screen! ■*



Press Photo Credit:
Andrew Eccles

"SEEING RED" by Sandra Brown (Grand Central Publishing; 1st Edition; August 15, 2017): Kerra Bailey is a TV journalist hot on the trail of a story guaranteed to skyrocket her career to new heights. Twenty-five years ago, Major Franklin Trapper became a national icon when he was photographed leading a handful of survivors to safety after the bombing of a Dallas hotel. For years, he gave frequent speeches and interviews but then suddenly dropped out of the public eye, shunning all media. Now Kerra is willing to use any means necessary to get an exclusive with the Major—even if she has to secure an introduction from his estranged son, former ATF agent John Trapper.

Still seething over his break with both the ATF and his father, Trapper wants no association with the bombing or the Major. Yet Kerra's hints that there's more to the story rouse Trapper's interest despite himself. And when the interview goes catastrophically awry—with unknown assailants targeting not only the Major, but also Kerra—Trapper realizes he needs her under wraps if he's going to track down the gunmen...and finally discover who was responsible for the Dallas bombing.

Kerra is wary of a man so charming one moment and dangerous the next, and she knows Trapper is withholding evidence from his ATF investigation into the bombing. But having no one else to trust and enemies lurking closer than they know, Kerra and Trapper join forces to expose a sinuous network of lies and conspiracy—and uncover who would want a national hero dead.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.) Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Sandra Brown (S.B.): *I had a fan moment on a recent USO tour to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. One of the officers stationed there approached me and thanked me for coming. I introduced myself and, much to my surprise, he said, "I know who you are. I met you in Afghanistan." That was on another USO tour in 2011. I was pleased to hear that he's been reading and enjoying my books ever since meeting me.*

S. MAG.: Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist in the movie?

S.B.: *I would love for Chris Pine to play Trapper. Not cute and comical like he was in Wonder Woman but scruffy and dangerous like he was in Hell or High Water.*

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

S.B.: *To me, the "Best of" distinction represents validation. It's recognition of years of hard work. That's rewarding. ■*



"A MERCIFUL DEATH"

by Kendra Elliot (Montlake Romance; January 17, 2017): FBI special agent Mercy Kilpatrick has been waiting her whole life for disaster to strike. A prepper since childhood, Mercy grew up living off the land—and off the grid—in rural Eagle's Nest, Oregon. Until a shocking tragedy tore her family apart and forced her to leave home.

Now a predator known as the cave man is targeting the survivalists in her hometown, murdering them in their homes, stealing huge numbers of weapons, and creating federal suspicion of a possible domestic terrorism event. But the crime scene details are eerily familiar to an unsolved mystery from Mercy's past.

Sent by the FBI to assist local law enforcement, Mercy returns to Eagle's Nest to face the family who shunned her while maintaining the facade of a law-abiding citizen. There, she meets police chief Truman Daly, whose uncle was the cave man's latest victim. He sees the survivalist side of her that she desperately tries to hide, but if she lets him get close enough to learn her secret, she might not survive the fallout...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

Kendra Elliot (K.E.): *In 2018 fans can expect the third and fourth books in the Mercy series, "A Merciful Secret" and "A Merciful Silence." Warner Brothers TV optioned the TV rights for Mercy, so I hope to have more news on that front next year.*

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

K.E.: *Having my book chosen as a "Best of 2017" is a big deal to me. A lot of fabulous suspense books were published last year, and I'm humbled that the readers voted for mine. I came up with the Mercy concept over three years ago, and I'm thrilled that my vision has resonated with readers.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

K.E.: *To pitch Mercy in ten words or less...A survivalist turned FBI agent's past conflicts with her present.* ■

"This twisty thriller is chock-full of heroic exploits, nasty villains, and hard-boiled action."

—Boyd Morrison, #1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

COIN FRAUD, BLACKMAIL, & LOST TREASURE



JACK FERRELL RETURNS

"A darkly demented tale that's utterly irresistible. The much-appreciated return of Jack Ferrell serves up a smorgasbord of deceit and duplicitousness across a landscape steeped in classic crime noir. Be warned: You won't be able to put it down!"

—Jon Land, *USA Today* Bestselling Author

DARKURBAN Fantasy BEST of 2017



“RELICS” by Tim Lebbon (Titan Books; March 21, 2017): There’s an underground black market for arcane things. Akin to the trade in rhino horns or tigers’ bones, this network traffics in remains of gryphons, faeries, goblins, and other fantastic creatures.

When her fiancé Vince goes missing Angela Gough, an American criminology student, discovers that he was a part of this secretive trade. It’s a big-money business—shadowy, brutal, and sometimes fatal. As the trail leads her deeper into London’s dark side, she crosses paths with a crime lord whose life is dedicated to collecting such relics.

Then Angela discovers that some of these objects aren’t as ancient as they seem. Some of them are fresh.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Tim Lebbon (T.L.): *I’d have to go for “The Forgotten Girl” by Rio Youers. I’ve always known he was a good writer, but this book made me realise he’s a GREAT writer. Lyrical, funny, incisive, and brilliantly exciting.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

T.L.: *Most books I write to certain kinds of music, and “Relics” was written largely to Alice in Chains. There’s something about their music that I find almost hypnotic, and it’s great to be able to get into the writing zone to some great vibes. Check My Brain is one of my very favourites.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

T.L.: *Hunters of mythological creature relics discover that some are fresh.* ■

“POWER GAME” by Christine

Feehan (Berkley; January 24, 2017): When radical terrorists take hostages in Indonesia, Captain Ezekiel Fortunes is called to lead the rescue team. Part of a classified government experiment, Zeke is a supersoldier with enhanced abilities. He can see better and run faster than the enemy, disappear when necessary and hunt along any terrain. There are those in the world willing to do anything for power like that...

A formidable spy genetically engineered to hide in plain sight, Bellisia rarely meets a man who doesn’t want to control her or kill her. But Zeke is different. His gaze, his touch—they awaken feelings inside her that she never thought possible. He’s the kind of man she could settle down with—if she can keep him alive...

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

Christine Feehan (C.F.): *Nalini Singh is an amazing author with stories that grip you and stay with you long after the book is over. Nalini is best known for her paranormal romance novels, and I’d read anything she writes because her stories are character-driven, well-researched and extremely entertaining.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

C.F.: *An enhanced military team called the GhostWalkers are betrayed by one of their own. Or; science fiction, military intrigue, betrayal and passion wrapped in suspense.*



Press Photo Credit:
Michael Miller

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

C.F.: *I'm very excited to debut a new series in January with "Judgment Road," the first in my Torpedo Ink Motorcycle Club series. I will also have another Carpathian Series novel called "Dark Sentinel," a Leopard Series novel called "Leopard's Run," a Shadow Series novel called "Shadow Keeper" and another GhostWalker novel called "Covert Game." 2018 is very busy for me!* ■

"FEVERSONG" by Karen Marie Moning (Delacorte Press; January 17, 2017): As Mac, Barrons, Ryodan, and Jada struggle to restore control,



enemies become allies, right and wrong cease to exist, and the lines between life and death, lust and love, disappear completely. Black holes loom menacingly over Dublin, threatening to destroy the earth, yet the greatest danger is the one MacKayla Lane has unleashed from within: The *Sinsar Dubh*—a

sentient book of unthinkable evil—has possessed her body and will stop at nothing in its insatiable quest for power.

The fate of Man and Fae rests on destroying the book and recovering the long-lost Song of Making, the sole magic that can repair the fragile fabric of the earth. But to achieve these aims, *sidhe*-seers, the Nine, Seelie, and Unseelie must form unlikely alliances and make heart-wrenching choices. For Barrons and Jada, this means finding the Seelie queen, who alone can wield the mysterious song, negotiating with a lethal Unseelie prince hell-bent on ruling the Fae courts, and figuring out how to destroy the *Sinsar Dubh* while keeping Mac alive.

This time, there's no gain without sacrifice, no pursuit without risk, no victory without irrevocable loss. In the battle for Mac's soul, every decision exacts a tremendous price.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Karen Marie Moning (K.M.M.): *Best book I read in 2017? Toss up between "Career of Evil" by Robert Galbraith and "A Court of Wings and Ruin" by Sarah J. Maas.*

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

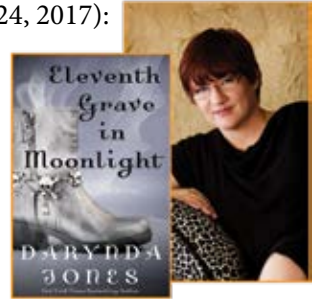
K.M.M.: *Favorite word: #amwriting. Least favorite word: Deadline.*

S. MAG.: Who's your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

K.M.M.: *Favorite fictional villain: Moriarty. Favorite hero/heroine: Sherlock, BBC version.* ■

"ELEVENTH GRAVE IN MOONLIGHT" by Darynda Jones (St. Martin's Press; January 24, 2017):

A typical day in the life of Charley Davidson involves cheating husbands, errant wives, missing people, philandering business owners, and, oh yeah...demons, hell hounds, evil gods, and dead people. Lots and lots of dead people. As a part time Private Investigator and full-time Grim Reaper, Charley has to balance the good, the bad, the undead, and those who want her dead.



Now, Charley is learning to make peace with the fact that she is a goddess with all kinds of power and that her own daughter has been born to save the world from total destruction. But the forces of hell are determined to see Charley banished forever to the darkest corners of another dimension. With the son of Satan himself as her husband and world-rocking lover, will Charley be able to defeat the ultimate evil and find a way to have her happily ever after after all?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Darynda Jones (D.J.): *One of my best reader experiences for 2017 happened when a couple flew all the way from New York City to Albuquerque, NM, simply to come to a book signing. When I found out, naturally I invited them to dinner and (thanks to impeccable timing) my eldest son's birthday party. We were able to spend time together and they are just great people. It was so much fun. But the icing on the cake happened when they got back to NYC and found out they were pregnant. I am insanely proud to say that they named their little girl after the heroine in the Charley Davidson series, and Charlotte "Charley" Conway is a happy, healthy baby girl with wonderful, doting parents.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

D.J.: *That's easy! (Don't Fear) The Reaper by Blue Oyster Cult.*

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

D.J.: *This is a HUGE honor! There are so many fantastic books out there and to be chosen as one of the "Best of" is beyond amazing. Thank you!* ■

HISTORICAL BEST of 2017



“THE ORPHAN’S TALE” by Pam Jenoff (MIRA; February 21, 2017): Sixteen-year-old Noa has been cast out in disgrace after becoming pregnant by a Nazi soldier and being forced to give up her baby. She lives above a small rail station, which she cleans in order to earn her keep... When Noa discovers a boxcar containing dozens of Jewish infants bound for a concentration camp, she is reminded of the child that was taken from her. And in a moment that will change the course of her life, she snatches one of the babies and flees into the snowy night.

Press Photo Credit:
Mindy Schwartz Sorasky

Noa finds refuge with a German circus, but she must learn the flying trapeze act so she can blend in undetected, spurning the resentment of the lead aerialist, Astrid. At first rivals, Noa and Astrid soon forge a powerful bond. But as the facade that protects them proves increasingly tenuous, Noa and Astrid must decide whether their friendship is enough to save one another—or if the secrets that burn between them will destroy everything.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Pam Jenoff (P.J.): *“The Light We Lost”* by Jill Santopolo. Like reading Eric Segal’s *“Love Story,”* only set around a couple who met on 9/11.

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

P.J.: Shortly after *“The Orphan’s Tale”* came out, I received an email from the niece of the real life circus performer who inspired my aerialist character, Astrid, saying that she had heard about the book and thanking me.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

P.J.: Girl rescues infant from train, joins German circus sheltering Jews. ■



“PRUSSIAN BLUE” by Philip Kerr (Marian Wood Books/Putnam; 1st Edition; April 4, 2017): *The French Riviera, 1956*: Bernie’s old and dangerous adversary Erich Mielke, deputy head of the East German Stasi, has turned up in Nice—and he’s not on holiday. Mielke is calling in a debt and wants Bernie to travel to London to poison a female agent they’ve both had dealings with. But Bernie isn’t keen on assassinating anyone. In an attempt to dodge his Stasi handler—former Kripo comrade Friedrich Korsch—Bernie bolts for the German border. Traveling by night and hiding by day, he has plenty of time to recall the last case he and Korsch worked together...

Press Photo
Credit: Nina Subin

Obersalzberg, Germany, 1939: A low-level bureaucrat has been found dead at Hitler’s mountaintop retreat in Bavaria. Bernie and Korsch have one week to find the killer before the leader of the Third Reich arrives to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. Bernie knows it would mean disaster if Hitler discovers a shocking murder has been committed on the terrace of his own home. But Obersalzberg is also home to an elite Nazi community, meaning an even bigger disaster for Bernie if his investigation takes aim at one of the party’s higher-ups...

1939 and 1956: two different eras about to converge in an explosion Bernie Gunther will never forget.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

Philip Kerr (P.K.): I think soundtracks are very important. Witness Chinatown, the best noir soundtrack ever, in my opinion, and composed by the great Jerry Goldsmith. So let’s assume Jerry is unavailable to do the soundtrack for my book adaptation. Fortunately there are many songs and melodies available from 1939 that would be appropriate. And there is Wagner, of course. But in the final analysis I might well ask Klaus Doldinger who did the music for *Das Boot* (1981).

S. MAG.: Who would you like to see play your protagonist/

antagonist in the movie?

P.K.: *I often get asked who I would like to see playing Bernie Gunther. In the beginning I had Klaus Maria Brandauer in mind. He seemed to have the wit and the cheek to play the part; not to mention a very good cleft in his chin. These days I rather think that Daniel Craig would be good. And if not him then perhaps Nikolaj Coster-Waldau who currently plays Jamie Lancaster in Game of Thrones. He's Danish but looks German.* ■

"IN FARLEIGH FIELD: A NOVEL OF WORLD WAR II" by Rhys Bowen

(Lake Union Publishing; March 1, 2017): World War II comes to Farleigh Place, the ancestral home of Lord Westerham and his five daughters, when a soldier with a failed parachute falls to his death on the estate. After his uniform and possessions raise suspicions, MI5 operative and family friend Ben Cresswell is covertly tasked with determining if the man is a German spy. The assignment also offers Ben the chance to be near Lord Westerham's middle daughter, Pamela, whom he furtively loves. But Pamela has her own secret: she has taken a job at Bletchley Park, the British code-breaking facility.

As Ben follows a trail of spies and traitors, which may include another member of Pamela's family, he discovers that some within the realm have an appalling, history-altering agenda. Can he, with Pamela's help, stop them before England falls?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Rhys Bowen (R.B.): *I've just had a letter from a woman in the Houston area who lost her home in the floods. She told me how the audio versions of my books kept her hoping through a time of despair because I transported her to another world. It felt very humbling.*

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

R.B.: *"In Farleigh Field" was a big step into the unknown for me. To leave the security of writing series to write a stand-alone novel was taking a big chance. But it was something I'd dreamed of writing. So to find that it made your best of 2017 list was a wonderful affirmation.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

R.B.: *In February, Lake Union will publish my next big stand-alone novel, also partly set in WWII. It's called "The Tuscan*

Child" and is the story of a British airman who crashes in Tuscany and the secret he left behind there. It's also the first book I have written with two stories in two time periods, so quite a challenge. ■

"BENEATH A SCARLET SKY" by Mark Sullivan

(Lake Union Publishing; May 1, 2017): Pino Lella wants nothing to do with the war or the Nazis. He's a normal Italian teenager—obsessed with music, food, and girls—

but his days of innocence are numbered. When his family home in Milan is destroyed by Allied bombs, Pino joins an underground railroad helping Jews escape over the Alps, and falls for Anna, a beautiful widow six years his senior.

In an attempt to protect him, Pino's parents force him to enlist as a German soldier—a move they think will keep him out of combat. But after Pino is injured, he is recruited at the tender age of eighteen to become the personal driver for Adolf Hitler's left hand in Italy, General Hans Leyers, one of the Third Reich's most mysterious and powerful commanders.

Now, with the opportunity to spy for the Allies inside the German High Command, Pino endures the horrors of the war and the Nazi occupation by fighting in secret, his courage bolstered by his love for Anna and for the life he dreams they will one day share.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

Mark Sullivan (M.S.): *A boy saves Jews, and spies on Nazis in Italy.*

S. MAG.: Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist in the movie?

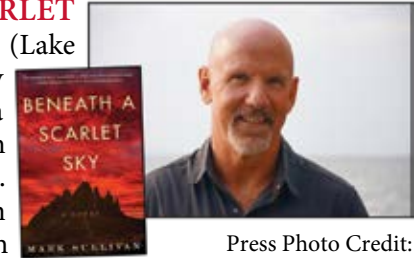
M.S.: *Tom Holland, who is attached to play Pino Lella in the upcoming film from Pascal Pictures and Sony Columbia, is perfect for the role. I couldn't be happier.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

M.S.: *The aria "Nessun Dorma" or "None Shall Sleep" from the opera "Turandot" by Giacomo Puccini.*

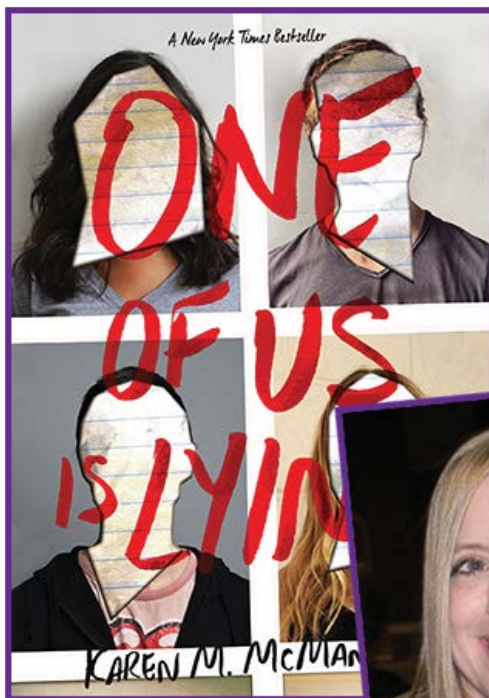
S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a "Best of" mean to you?

M.S.: *It's an honor, and means I did justice to Pino's incredible true story.* ■



Press Photo Credit:
Elizabeth Sullivan

Young ADULT BEST OF 2017



“ONE OF US IS LYING” by Karen M. McManus (Delacorte Press; May 30, 2017): Pay close attention and you might solve this.

On Monday afternoon, five students at Bayview High walk into detention.

Bronwyn, *the brain*, is Yale-bound and never breaks a rule.

Addy, *the beauty*, is the picture-perfect homecoming princess.

Nate, *the criminal*, is already on probation for dealing.

Cooper, *the athlete*, is the all-star baseball pitcher.

And Simon, *the outcast*, is the creator of Bayview High’s notorious gossip app.

Only, Simon never makes it out of that classroom. Before the end of detention Simon’s dead. And according to investigators, his death wasn’t an accident. On Monday, he died. But on Tuesday, he’d planned to post juicy reveals about all four of his high-profile classmates, which makes all four of them suspects in his murder. Or are they the perfect patsies for a killer who’s still on the loose?

Everyone has secrets, right? What really matters is how far you would go to protect them.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?



Karen M. McManus (K.M.M.): *I absolutely loved “The Hate U Give” by Angie Thomas. It’s powerful and relevant, with a cast of characters so vivid that I’m still thinking about them months after I finished reading.*

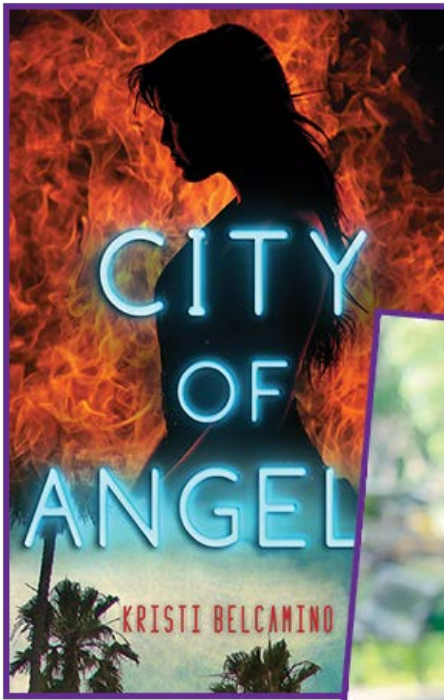
S. MAG.: Who’s your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

K.M.M.: *Favorite villain: I can’t say the name without spoiling the end, but it’s the person pulling strings in the background in “And Then There Were None” by Agatha Christie. I like my villains smart, twisted, and sneaky.*

Favorite hero/heroine: I have a soft spot for Katniss Everdeen from the “Hunger Games,” because that’s the book that inspired me to try writing young adult novels.

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

K.M.M.: *The Breakfast Club, with murder. In fact, my film agent did pitch the book to Hollywood and it’s currently in development with Universal Cable Productions and the E! Network as a television series.*



“CITY OF ANGELS” by Kristi Belcamino (Polis Books; May 18, 2017): Nikki Black, 17, a self-imposed lone wolf since her mother died, fled suburban Chicago to escape her painful past. But when her so-called boyfriend reveals why he really lured her to Southern California—to star in child porn flicks—she ends up on the streets of L.A. with only the clothes on her back and a twelve-year-old addict named Rain trailing in her shadows. The girls seek refuge at a residential hotel above a punk rock bar in downtown L.A. a few months before the city erupts into chaos during the 1992 riots. At The American Hotel, Nikki makes friends and for the first time in years feels as if she has a real family again.



All that changes when Rain disappears. Everyone except Nikki, including the police, thinks Rain succumbed to the seductive allure of addiction and life on the streets. Nikki finds herself fighting for her own life the closer she gets to unveiling a sinister cover-up by a powerful group that secretly controls the city of angels.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Kristi Belcamino (K.B.): *It was not published in 2017, but the best book I read this year was Cornelia Read’s “A Field of Darkness.” As far as books published in 2017, my*

favorite was Isabella Maldonado’s “Blood’s Echo.”

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

K.B.: *I think I traumatized a reader once. She walked in late to one of my readings. I was reading a passage where a serial killer who preys on little girls talked about his first kidnap and murder. Come to find out, she’d thought she was going to hear another Minnesota author read: Kate DiCamillo (NOT Kristi Belcamino) who writes children’s books (“The Tale of Despereaux,” etc.). Oops.*

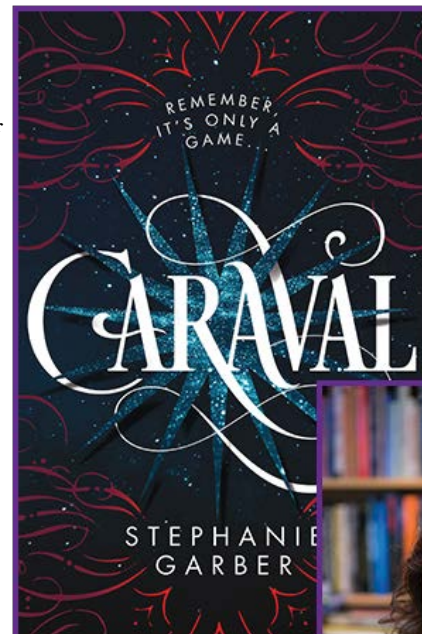
S. MAG.: Who is your favorite must-read author?

K.B.: *Lisa Unger is my auto-click author. I will buy everything she writes forever and ever.* ■

“CARAVAL” by Stephanie Garber (Flatiron Books; First Edition; January 31, 2017): Scarlett has never left the tiny island where she and her beloved sister, Tella, live with their powerful, and cruel, father. Now Scarlett’s father has arranged a marriage for her, and Scarlett thinks her dreams of seeing Caraval, the far-away, once-a-year performance where the audience participates in the show, are over.

But this year, Scarlett’s long-dreamt of invitation finally arrives. With the help of a mysterious sailor, Tella whisks Scarlett away to the show. Only, as soon as they arrive, Tella is kidnapped by Caraval’s mastermind organizer, Legend. It turns out that this season’s Caraval revolves around Tella, and whoever finds her first is the winner.

Scarlett has been told that everything that happens during Caraval is only an elaborate performance. But she nevertheless becomes enmeshed in a game of love, heart-break, and magic with the other players in the game. And whether Cara-



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val is real or not, she must find Tella before the five nights of the game are over, a dangerous domino effect of consequences is set off, and her sister disappears forever.

Welcome, welcome to Caraval...beware of getting swept too far away.

■ **"MISSING"** by Kelley Armstrong (Crown Books for Young Readers; April 18, 2017): The only thing Winter Crane likes about Reeve's End is that soon she'll leave it. Like

her best friend did. Like her sister did. Like most of the teens born in town have done. There's nothing for them there but abandoned mines and empty futures. They're better off taking a chance elsewhere.

What Winter will miss is the woods. Her only refuge. At least it was. Until the day she found Lennon left for dead, bleeding in a tree.

But now Lennon is gone too. And he has Winter questioning what she once thought was true. What if nobody left at all? What if they're all missing?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

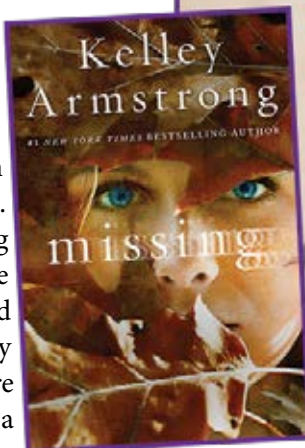
Kelley Armstrong (K.A.): *That's always tough to answer! I'll go with a suspense book that I thoroughly enjoyed: "Stillhouse Lake" by Rachel Caine. I've enjoyed other work by her, but this one really stood out as a fresh new direction, with a riveting plot.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

K.A.: *It'd be the Beatles Hey Jude. The male lead is named Jude and the song features prominently in the book. I've always seen it as a song about self-worth and a young man moving forward past a difficult time, and that fits for the character. The female lead would get Mean by Taylor Swift. It's perfect for a young woman dealing with abuse and dreaming of the life she'll have when she leaves home.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect from you in 2018?

K.A.: *I'll have another YA thriller out in May. This one is "Aftermath," about a young woman who must return to the city where her brother took part in a school shooting. In adult, the third book in my Rockton series ("This Fallen Prey") comes out in February.* ■



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BEST OF HORROR 2017

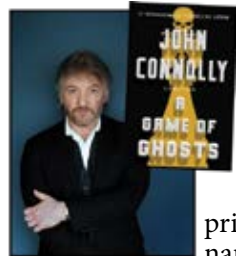
"SLEEPING BEAUTIES" by

Stephen King and Owen King (Scribner; September 26, 2017): In a future so real and near it might be now, something happens when women go to sleep: they become shrouded in a cocoon-like gauze. If they are awakened, if the gauze wrapping their bodies is disturbed or violated, the women become feral and spectacularly violent. And while they sleep they go to another place, a better place, where harmony prevails and conflict is rare.

One woman, the mysterious "Eve Black," is immune to the blessing or curse of the sleeping disease. Is Eve a medical anomaly to be studied? Or is she a demon who must be slain? Abandoned, left to their increasingly primal urges, the men divide into warring factions, some wanting to kill Eve, some to save her. Others exploit the chaos to wreak their own vengeance on new enemies. All turn to violence in a suddenly all-male world. ■



"A GAME OF GHOSTS" by John



Connolly (Atria/Emily Bestler Books; 1st Edition; July 4, 2017): It is deep winter and the darkness is unending. A private detective named Jaycob Eklund has vanished and

Charlie Parker is assigned to track him down. Parker's employer, Edgar Ross, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has his own reasons for wanting Eklund found. Eklund is no ordinary investigator—he is obsessively tracking a series of homicides and disappearances, each linked to reports of hauntings. Now Parker is drawn into Eklund's world: a realm in which the monstrous Mother rules a crumbling

criminal empire, in which men strike bargains with angels, and in which the innocent and guilty alike are pawns in a game of ghosts...

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

John Connolly (J.C.): *The one I enjoyed most was "A Legacy of Spies" by John le Carré. It was like encountering old friends you'd never expected to meet again.*

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word?

J.C.: *Axolotl.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

J.C.: *A Parker book entitled "The Woman in the Woods," the US release of "he," and perhaps a monograph using a seventies horror film as the basis for a discussion of genre and nostalgia, among other things...* ■

"THE KILL SOCIETY" by Richard



Kadrey (Harper Voyager; First Edition; June 6, 2017): Sandman Slim has been to Heaven and Hell and many places in between, but now he finds himself in an unknown land:

the far, far edge of the Tenebrae, the desolate home of the lost dead. Making his way inland with nothing but his unerring instinct for trouble to guide him, he collides with a caravan of the damned on a mysterious crusade, led by the ruthless Magistrate. Alone and with no clue how to get back home, he throws in with this brutal bunch made up of human souls, Hellion deserters,

rogue angels—and Father Traven.

Slim didn't land in Tenebrae by chance. His little stunt of trying to open Heaven has set off a tsunami across the universe. Now, the afterlife is falling apart because of the ensuing warfare. And when Heaven finds out Slim is close by, the angels put a fat bounty on his head.

It's one thing to ride with a ferocious criminal pack across the treacherous plains—it's another to do it when everyone in the land of the dead is itching to keep you there permanently. But Slim's not too worried. He's been fighting cosmic forces bent on destroying Heaven, Hell, Earth, and him for years. A pack of vicious bounty hunters, vengeful angels, and dangerous enemies with friendly smiles isn't going to stop him fixing the chaos he's caused...one way or another.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Richard Kadrey (R.K.): *Though it didn't come out this year, my favorite book was "Slash: A Punk Magazine from Los Angeles, 1977-80." It's a collection of old Slash magazines from the heyday of LA punk. I started out as a reporter, so primary source documents are dear to my heart. Seeing this intense part of the LA music scene from the inside is great material for the Sandman Slim books and it brings back memories of some frantic days and nights.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

R.K.: *Wild in the Streets by Circle Jerks.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

R.K.: *Cormac McCarthy does Mad Max.* ■

SUSPENSE THRILLER

BEST of 2017



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Thomas Engstrom

“THE WHISPERING ROOM” by Dean Koontz (Bantam; November 21, 2017): “No time to delay. Do what you were born to do. Fame will be yours when you do this.”

These are the words that ring in the mind of mild-mannered, beloved schoolteacher Cora Gundersun—just before she takes her own life, and many others’, in a shocking act of carnage. When the disturbing contents of her secret journal are discovered, it seems certain that she must have been insane. But Jane Hawk knows better.

In the wake of her husband’s inexplicable suicide—and the equally mysterious deaths of scores of other exemplary individuals—Jane picks up the trail of a secret cabal of powerful players who think themselves above the law and beyond punishment. But the ruthless people bent

on hijacking America’s future for their own monstrous ends never banked on a highly trained FBI agent willing to go rogue—and become the nation’s most wanted fugitive—in order to derail their insidious plans to gain absolute power with a terrifying technological breakthrough.

Driven by love for her lost husband and by fear for the five-year-old son she has sent into hiding, Jane Hawk has become an unstoppable predator. Those she is hunting will have nowhere to run when her shadow falls across them.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

Dean Koontz (D.K.): *Paul Simon’s So Beautiful or So What. My series lead, Jane Hawk, understands the inherent beauty of life and what sacrifices it often takes to live a beautiful life. The antagonists in this series have a deranged definition of beauty and are about nothing but power, so that these lines from the Simon song go some way toward summing them up: “Ain’t it strange the way we’re ignorant / How we seek out bad advice / How we jigger it and figure it / mistaking value for the price.”*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

D.K.: *I would first persuade the doubting gate guard that I have authorization to park at the building where I have a meeting instead of to hell and gone in a far lot. I would be on time for the appointment, wearing the ever stylish black while eschewing ultra-skinny-legged jeans for more traditional jeans that don’t cling quite like leotards. I would do the usual ten or twelve minutes of pleasant conversation about the business, and for my pitch under ten words, I would say, “Just read the damn book.” Happily I didn’t have to make a pitch to Anonymous Content and Paramount; they actually read “The Silent Corner” and “The Whispering Room” in manuscript and made an offer for the series. Sometimes, even in Hollywood, business is logically done and the material matters more than the pitch.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect from you in 2018?

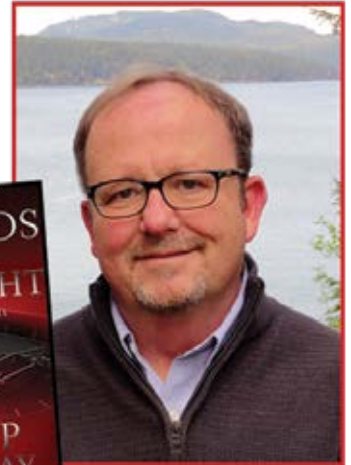
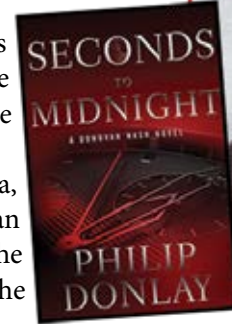
D.K.: *I’ll still be crazy after all these years. As for novels, the third Jane Hawk, “The Crooked Staircase” hits stores in early May*

and the fourth, *"The Forbidden Door"* follows in the fall. Both are complete, and after four books with Jane, I find her more intriguing than ever. ■

"SECONDS TO MIDNIGHT" by Philip Donlay (Oceanview Publishing; March 7, 2017): While on a routine Eco-Watch flight above northern Canada to study one of the most powerful solar flares in history, Donovan Nash and Michael Ross narrowly miss colliding with another aircraft a Boeing 737 that's not supposed to be there. With the mysterious 737 trailing smoke, Donovan and Michael watch as the stricken aircraft makes an emergency landing on a frozen lake.

As the Boeing breaks through the ice and begins to sink, a figure escapes into the frigid water and manages to climb up onto the ice. Donovan reaches the lone survivor and discovers it's a young woman. Just before she blacks out, she whispers a dire warning, "Don't let them know I'm alive; they'll kill everyone."

While Donovan searches for answers at the bottom of a frozen lake in Canada, his wife, Lauren, runs from operatives embedded in the top levels of the Russian government. With communication in the Northern Hemisphere crippled by the massive solar storm, Donovan, Michael, and Lauren battle for each second, as the clock ticks toward a possible Armageddon.



Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Philip Donlay (P.D.): *I'd had surgery, and after the procedure I was wheeled up to the recovery room where I finally opened my eyes. A nurse looked down at me and asked: "Are you the Philip Donlay that wrote "Category Five"?" I felt better instantly when she told me she'd loved the book. I was in good hands.*

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite must-read author?

P.D.: *This is an easy question, and a tie: Daniel Silva and David L. Robbins. I've yet to meet either one of them, and if I ever do, I'm going to geek out a little, just saying.*

S. MAG.: What is the best book you read in 2017?

P.D.: *The book that stands out so far is: "Land of Wolves" by TJ Turner. There are so many captivating elements within this book that are written perfectly. I finished this book months ago and it's still with me. ■*



"NO EASY TARGET" by Iris Johansen (St. Martin's Press; April 25, 2017): Margaret Douglas has worked hard to put her painful past behind her. Raised off the grid in an abusive home, her only escape was the nearby forest where she sought refuge whenever she could. There, in the peaceful woods, she discovered a strange gift: the ability to understand animals and to communicate with them. And so those creatures became her only friends, her only joy during a desolate childhood. Now Margaret wants nothing more than to live a quiet life, close to the animals and under the radar. But her abilities have not gone unnoticed and there are those who would use them for their own purposes. Determined not to be a pawn in anyone's game, every time someone gets too close, Margaret uproots her life and outruns them.

When John Lassiter breaks into Margaret's apartment, she vanishes again, but Lassiter has good reason to be persistent. As a CIA operative, he owes his life to his men, one of whom is being held captive by an unrelenting enemy—an enemy who has set his sights on Margaret. Which means that Lassiter must control her to use her as bait.

With danger in hot pursuit, Margaret finds herself matching wits with a man who refuses to stop or be stopped. Turning from the hunted to the hunter, Margaret must use everything she has ever learned to not only survive, but to defeat a great evil. And to prove once and for

all that she's no easy target.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Iris Johansen (I.J.): *I have had many wonderful experiences with fans while on tour. Perhaps the most touching and fitting for this particular book took place several years ago. I was signing a book whose central character was a search and rescue volunteer. She had a wonderful Golden Retriever named Monty. While I was signing a very attractive young woman came into the room leading a beautiful Golden Service dog. She waited until I had finished signing and then came up to speak to me. She said that she had read my book and had been inspired to join Search and Rescue. She had named her beloved partner Monty after the dog in my story. I felt very humble.*

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

I.J.: *I'm very grateful that my book was chosen 'Best.' "No Easy Target" was not an easy book to write. I'm so happy that all the love and research I did with Margaret and her friends came through with flying colors. Many thanks!*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

I.J.: *Next year Eve Duncan and her friends and family appear once again in April with a thriller called "Shattered Mirror." It has surprises that I think you'll enjoy. Then in July my son, Roy, and I are bringing you a Kendra Michael book "Double Blind." Those are always so much fun for us and I hope for you. In October you'll meet a new heroine and I've involved her in an adventure that I believe you'll agree is high octane. Which doesn't mean you won't recognize a few old friends. The book is "Vendetta." ■*

"ONE PERFECT LIE" by Lisa Scottoline (St. Martin's Press; First Edition; April 11, 2017): On paper, Chris Brennan looks perfect. He's applying for a job as a high school government teacher, he's ready to step in as an assistant baseball coach, and his references are impeccable.

But everything about Chris Brennan is a lie.

Susan Sematov is proud of her son Raz, a high school pitcher so athletically talented that he's being recruited for a full-ride scholarship to a Division I college, with a future in major-league baseball. But Raz's father died only a few months ago, leaving her son in a vulnerable place where any new father figure might influence him for good, or evil.

Heather Larkin is a struggling single mother who lives for her son Jordan's baseball games. But Jordan is shy, and Heather fears he is being lured down a dark path by one of his teammates, a young man from an affluent family whose fun-loving manner might possibly conceal his violent plans.

Mindy Kostis succumbs to the pressure of being a surgeon's wife by filling her days with social events and too many gin and tonics. But she doesn't know that her husband and her son, Evan, are keeping secrets from her—secrets that might destroy all of them.

At the center of all of them is Chris Brennan. Why is he there? What does he want? And what is he willing to do to get it?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

Lisa Scottoline (L.S.): *I will never forget the time that I had finished my presentation, and I was signing books in the line and a woman came up with a man behind her, and they had obviously been talking and they seemed very happy together. I mean you could feel the love. I said, "Are you guys married?" and they said, "No, we just met." And what happened next was that they started dating after they met in my line and then they came back the next year, and they were married! And I thought that was so wonderful and we all celebrated, and then finally what happened is, the third year, they came back for my next book and they were divorced.*

Oh well. LOL. But they were still friends, and they joked that they shared custody of me. You can't beat that, can you?



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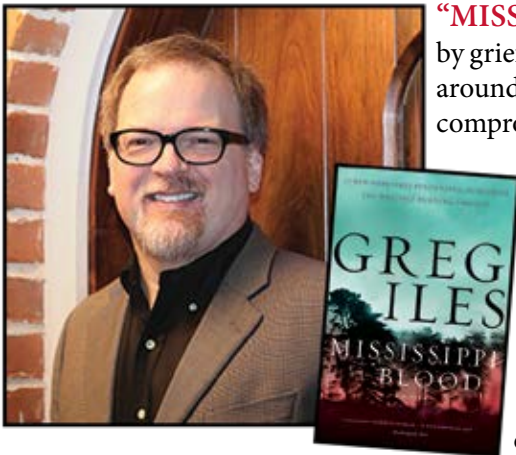
S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a “Best of” mean to you?

L.S.: *I am so honored and thrilled to see that Suspense Magazine picked “One Perfect Lie” as one of the best books of 2017, and I’ll tell you why.*

I have written 30 books over 25 years, so I’m not exactly the new kid on the block, and I will be frank with you, sometimes it’s hard to get attention when you’re not brand spanking new. I try to deliver something fresh and original every time I turn in the manuscript, because I know I’m lucky enough to have readers that will follow me book to book and I always want them to feel that I delivered for them. And recognition like this is especially sweet for a veteran writer like me because I really do endeavor to improve my craft every time around, even after all these years. And the wonderful thing about writing is that it not only benefits from experience, but there’s still room to grow. My secret goal, (now not so secret), is to produce a uniformly excellent body of work so that my name stands for quality, readability, and a great story, well told. So thank you so much for this great honor and I treasure it always.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

L.S.: *I’m super excited about 2018, because I have three books coming out this year, “After Anna,” a domestic thriller standalone in April, then there’s “I See Life Through Rosé Colored Glasses,” a collection of humorous essays that I wrote with my daughter Francesca Serritella in July 2018, and the next installment of the Rosato & DiNunzio series, entitled “Feared,” will be out in August 2018. It sounds busy, but I’m truly delighted and grateful to be able to be writing so much. I’m a single mother, so I spent a lot of my time raising my daughter, but now that she’s grown, I truly feel as if this is my time, and I’ve devoted it to something I love, which is telling stories that appeal to me and trying to make them as great as possible, so they appeal to readers too. I count my blessings every day, and though suspense fiction will always be my first love, I love to be able to write humor, too. Because who doesn’t want to laugh? And who doesn’t need to? And probably every mystery writer needs a little comic relief from time to time. ■*



“MISSISSIPPI BLOOD” by Greg Isles (William Morrow; March 21, 2017): Shattered by grief and dreaming of vengeance, Penn Cage sees his family and his world collapsing around him. The woman he loves is gone, his principles have been irrevocably compromised, and his father, once a paragon of the community that Penn leads as mayor, is about to be tried for the murder of a former lover. Most terrifying of all, Dr. Cage seems bent on self-destruction. Despite Penn’s experience as a prosecutor in major murder trials, his father has frozen him out of the trial preparations—preferring to risk dying in prison to revealing the truth of the crime to his son.

During forty years practicing medicine, Tom Cage made himself the most respected and beloved physician in Natchez, Mississippi. But this revered Southern figure has secrets known only to himself and a handful of others. Among them, Tom has a second son, the product of a 1960s affair with his devoted African American nurse, Viola Turner. It is Viola who has been murdered, and her bitter son—Penn’s half-brother—who sets in motion the murder case against his father. The resulting investigation exhumes dangerous ghosts from Mississippi’s violent past. In some way that Penn cannot fathom, Viola Turner was a nexus point between his father and the Double Eagles, a savage splinter cell of the KKK. More troubling still, the long-buried secrets shared by Dr. Cage and the former Klansmen may hold the key to the most devastating assassinations of the 1960s. The surviving Double Eagles will stop at nothing to keep their past crimes buried, and with the help of some of the most influential men in the state, they seek to ensure that Dr. Cage either takes the fall for them, or takes his secrets to an early grave.

Unable to trust anyone around him—not even his own mother—Penn joins forces with Serenity Butler, a famous young black author who has come to Natchez to write about his father’s case. Together, Penn and Serenity battle to crack the Double Eagles and discover the secret history of the Cage family and the South itself, a desperate move that risks the only thing they have left to gamble: their lives.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Greg Isles (G.I.): *"In Harm's Way: The Sinking of the USS Indianapolis" by Doug Stanton.*

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

G.I.: *There are too many to single any one out. The most moving tend to be those where fans who are terminally ill have made a trip to see my hometown, the setting of my trilogy, and I've ended up meeting them or getting them signed books. That happens to quite a few authors, I think, especially those who have written a trilogy, or a series. People want to live to find out what happens in the end of a particular story. That's about the highest tribute any writer could hope for.*

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word? Least favorite?

G.I.: *Favorite: "no-count." Least favorite: "plethora" or "New normal."*

S. MAG.: Who's your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

G.I.: *Favorite Villain: HAL 9000. Hero: Augustus McRae, from Lonesome Dove.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

G.I.: *Natchez Burnin' by Howlin' Wolf.*

S. MAG.: Hollywood pitches are often very brief. How would you pitch your book in ten words or less?

G.I.: *This trilogy is 2,300 pages long. It can't be done.*

S. MAG.: Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist in the movie?

G.I.: *Penn Cage = Matthew McFadyen. Quentin Avery = Morgan Freeman. Frank Knox = Tommy Lee Jones.*

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

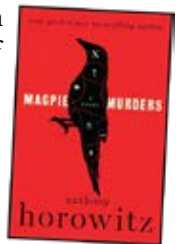
G.I.: *It means that I may have come close to what I was trying to accomplish: to deal honestly with America's troubled racial history that people could connect with, and would be willing to stick with all the way through.*

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2018?

G.I.: *I'm going to keep that secret for now. I don't like spoilers. ■*

"MAGPIE MURDERS" by Anthony Horowitz (Harper; June 6, 2017): When editor Susan Ryeland is given the manuscript of Alan Conway's latest novel, she has no reason to think it will be much different from any of his others. After working with the bestselling crime writer for years, she's intimately familiar with his detective, Atticus Pünd, who solves mysteries disturbing sleepy English villages. An homage to queens of classic British crime such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, Alan's traditional formula has proved hugely successful. So successful that Susan must continue to put up with his troubling behavior if she wants to keep her job.

Conway's latest tale has Atticus Pünd investigating a murder at Pye Hall, a local manor house. Yes, there are dead bodies and a host of intriguing suspects, but the more Susan reads, the more she's convinced that there is another story hidden in the pages of the manuscript: one of real-life jealousy, greed, ruthless ambition, and murder. ■



"NEVER LET YOU GO" by Chevy Stevens (St. Martin's Press; March 14, 2017): Eleven years ago, Lindsey Nash escaped into the night with her young daughter and left an abusive relationship. Her ex-husband, Andrew, was sent to jail and Lindsey started over with a new life.

Now, Lindsey is older and wiser, with her own business and a teenage daughter who needs her more than ever. When Andrew is finally released from prison, Lindsey believes she has cut all ties and left the past behind her. But she gets the sense

that someone is watching her, tracking her every move. Her new boyfriend is threatened. Her home is invaded, and her daughter is shadowed. Lindsey is convinced it's her ex-husband, even though he claims he's a different person. But has he really changed? Is the one who wants her dead closer to home than she thought?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Chevy Stevens (C.S.): *My absolute favorite was a debut novel called "Our Little Secret," by Roz Nay, a fellow Canadian. I was completely engrossed in the twisty story. The characters were so real, they could have stepped out of the book and it wouldn't have surprised me. This novel will be published by St. Martin's Press on April 24, 2018, and has already won the Douglas Kennedy prize in France and was on the Globe and Mail bestseller list in Canada.*



S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

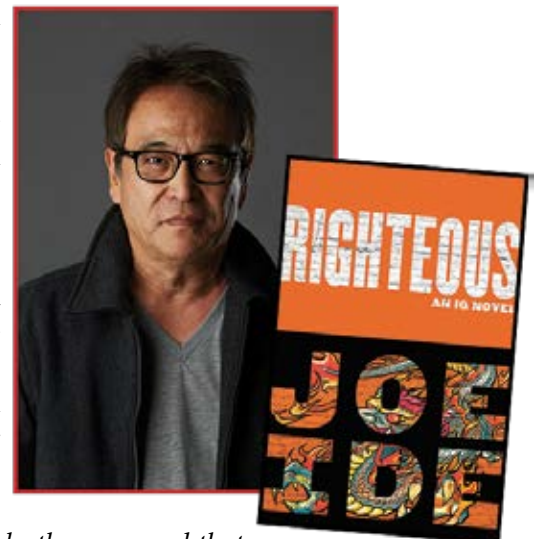
C.S.: *I've been lucky to meet some wonderful people over the years, but two fans stand out. One was a German student who wrote to tell me that my books helped him feel less lonely when he was an exchange student living in the U.S. Then, when I was on tour in Germany, he made a trip to Berlin to meet me. I felt very honored. There is also a young woman who started writing me when she was fourteen and came to my book signing in New York. She has kept in touch over the years and is now in university! I try to stay in touch with my fans on Facebook and I have gotten to know a few of them over the Internet. Knowing that you have made an impact on someone's life is a very special feeling.*

S. MAG.: If your book had a soundtrack, what would be its signature song?

C.S.: *I don't have an imaginary soundtrack or song for most of my books, but when I was writing "That Night" I listened to a lot of Eric Church, in particular, his song Springsteen. I must have listened to it a hundred times over when plotting the book, or just whenever I wanted to capture that hot-summer-day feeling. Even now, if I hear it on the radio, I'm taken straight back to those days and that book.* ■

"RIGHTEOUS" by Joe Ide (Mulholland Books; October 17, 2017): For ten years, something has gnawed at Isaiah Quintabe's gut and kept him up nights, boiling with anger and thoughts of revenge. Ten years ago, when Isaiah was just a boy, his brother was killed by an unknown assailant. The search for the killer sent Isaiah plunging into despair and nearly destroyed his life. Even with a flourishing career, a new dog, and near-iconic status as a PI in his hometown, East Long Beach, he has to begin the hunt again—or lose his mind.

A case takes him and his volatile, dubious sidekick, Dodson, to Vegas, where Chinese gangsters and a terrifying seven-foot loan shark are stalking a DJ and her screwball boyfriend. If Isaiah doesn't find the two first, they'll be murdered. Awaiting the outcome is the love of IQ's life: fail, and he'll lose her. Isaiah's quest is fraught with treachery, menace, and startling twists, and it will lead him to the mastermind behind his brother's death, Isaiah's own sinister Moriarty.



"It is wonderful and strange to be chosen 'Best.' To think of all the excellent books there are and that "Righteous" was considered special. It didn't feel special when I wrote it. All I remember is sitting in my pajamas typing, drinking too much coffee, dripping taco juice on my keyboard and talking to my dog. Why that should warrant any attention at all is surprising, and that its included among some truly great books is as confounding as it is amazing. The announcement will take an honored place on my bulletin board between a picture of my wife and a calendar marked with the date my first book published. Many thanks, Suspense Magazine."

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Craig Takahashi

—Joe Ide ■

And the Winner is...



Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



“THE MARSH KING’S DAUGHTER”

by Karen Dionne (G.P. Putnam’s Sons; 1st Edition; June 13, 2017): Helena Pelletier has a loving husband, two beautiful daughters, and a business that fills her days. But she also has a secret: she is the product of an abduction. Her mother was

kidnapped as a teenager by her father and kept in a remote cabin in the marshlands of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Helena, born two years after the abduction, loved her home in nature, and despite her father’s sometimes brutal behavior, she loved him, too...until she learned precisely how savage he could be.

More than twenty years later, she has buried her past so soundly that even her husband doesn’t know the truth. But now her father has killed two guards, escaped from prison, and disappeared into the marsh. The police begin a manhunt, but Helena knows they don’t stand a chance. Knows that only one person has the skills to find the survivalist the world calls The Marsh King—

because only one person was ever trained by him: his daughter.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What is the best book you read in 2017?

Karen Dionne (K.D.): *The best book I read in 2017 is “The Hunger” by Alma Katsu, a tense and gripping reimagining of the Donner Party tragedy with a supernatural twist. Katsu’s take is so fresh, her characters so real, and the story so involving, I knew after just a few pages that I wasn’t going to put this book down until I’d devoured it in one gulp (pun intended). “The Hunger” publishes in March 2018, but can be preordered now. I predict this will be one of the big books of 2018, and can’t wait to hear what others think of it!*

S. MAG.: Do you have a memorable fan experience you can share?

K.D.: *My most memorable fan experience happened some years ago at ThrillerFest in New York. I had just gotten off the elevator in the Grand Hyatt hotel lobby, when I saw Jeffery Deaver step into another elevator going up. His elevator was empty, so I quickly changed course and got on with him. Deaver got off after only two floors, but the ride was long enough for me to go all fangirl on him and gush about how much I love his books. It’s so exciting to meet an author you admire in person, and even more so when you have a chance to tell them how much their work means to you. Or wait—was this question supposed to be about a memorable experience I had with one of my fans?*

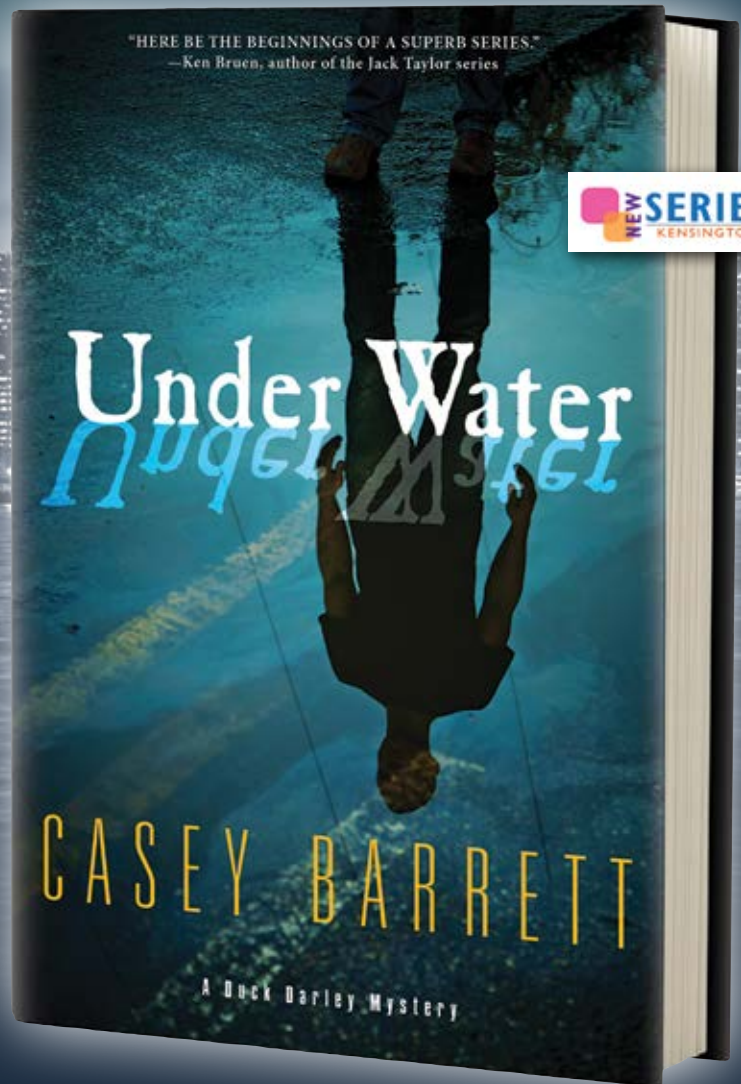
S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a “Best of” mean to you?

K.D.: *When I found out that “The Marsh King’s Daughter” had won Suspense Magazine’s Crimson Scribe Award, I was absolutely staggered. There were so many wonderful books published in 2017, it’s astonishing that mine was singled out in this way. I love that Helena’s story resonates with readers, and now to receive recognition from my peers as well is incredibly exciting. I’m truly honored, and more grateful than I can say. ■*



How Deep Does It Go?

In this chilling debut mystery, **secrets and murder lurk just beneath the surface of New York City** as a former competitive swimmer turned investigator searches for the missing sister of his former teammate.



“Olympic swimmer Barrett dives into the disturbing side of competitive sport in his savage thriller debut.”

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**



THE VERDICT IS IN: *Marcia Clark is First-Rate*

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Coral von Zumwalt

Marcia Clark. Whether speaking about a bestselling author; or a lawyer who began her career as a criminal defense attorney and ended up a prosecutor in the L.A. District Attorney's Office, handling some of the most high-profile cases the world has ever seen, her name is well-known.

It was back in 1997, when her book on the O.J. Simpson case, "Without a Doubt," was published, reaching #1 on the *New York Times* (as well as a plethora of others') bestseller lists. Her first fiction star, Rachel Knight, came to the forefront of the suspense scene, and then in 2016, readers and fans were introduced to a brand new hard-to-forget criminal defense attorney by the name of Samantha Brinkman. With her newest Brinkman case, Book # 3, "Snap Judgment," being released,

Suspense Magazine sat down and talked with this fantastic author about what Brinkman is up to next, and what the New Year holds for this creative mind.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): With Samantha Brinkman (as well as Rachel Knight), you have truly created tough, intelligent female leads. Do you remember when you first "thought" of Samantha Brinkman? What traits, if any, do the two of you share?

Marcia Clark (M.C.): *It was really weird, the way Samantha first came to me. It wasn't so much a thought as a visitation. I'd finished writing the Rachel Knight series and decided I wanted to try writing a stand-alone. But after a couple of months, trying one premise after another, I knew I just wasn't cutting it. I was exhausted and depressed and drained of inspiration. And then... Samantha appeared. Literally, just "appeared." Hand on hip, annoyed—even a little exasperated—and said, "Uh, hello? What about me?"*

It took me a little while to figure her out—her childhood, her teen years, etc. But she was basically there, just waiting for me to get off my ass and tell her story.

As for shared traits, I'm not sure I know. Or maybe I just don't want to know. Samantha is a mixed bag. I fear her as much as I envy her. And she goes a little—okay, a LOT further—than I would to get the job done. But I have to admit, I like her style. And I take no credit for that. Because if I tried, she'd kill me.

S. MAG.: Can you give readers a sneak peek at the new book? How did the idea come about for this particular plot?

M.C.: *In "Snap Judgment" I took on some very current issues that'd been on my mind: revenge porn and human trafficking.*

Our story begins with Alicia Graham, a beautiful young freshman in college who'd been somewhat sheltered because she'd been a driven, over-achiever in high school. She'd fallen in love with Roan Sutton, an incredibly good-looking, sexy sophomore whose devotion to her was as flattering as it was exciting. Until that devotion turned into obsession.

And then...

S. MAG.: Being that you were both a criminal defense lawyer and a prosecutor during your career, can you share with us how handy it is to have that wealth of knowledge—and both points of view—in your coffers when it comes to putting together a

story?

M.C.: *I've gotta admit, it really does come in handy. I know first-hand what both sides would do, and how they would react to each other—both in terms of legal strategy, and in terms of how they'd bounce off one another on a personal level. That experience allows me to bring a reality to both sides of the lawsuit without having to do a lot of research—at least on that front.*

On the other hand, when it comes to tech issues...forget it. I have to read and read, and ask a LOT of questions.

S. MAG.: Is there one character in the law enforcement world—whether it be FBI, lawyer, policeman or woman—that you would've loved to create and/or write about?

M.C.: *My lawyers always wind up doing a lot of detective work, so I get the best of both worlds already. I think, if anything, I'd like to get away from lawyers and cops and write from the point of view of a criminal. That could be fun.*

S. MAG.: Are any of your books based on real cases that you worked on during your law career? If so, can you share one of those with us?

M.C.: *Not specifically, no. But bits and pieces of all the cases I've worked on crop up here and there in all my books. It'd be impossible to avoid that.*

S. MAG.: Talk about a day in the “Writing Life of Marcia Clark.” Such as, are you a person who likes writing in the morning, evening, or whenever the mood strikes? Are there certain things you need in your environment to help you delve into the book and leave real life behind for a while?

M.C.: *I don't have the luxury of writing only when the mood strikes. My life right now is a mosaic with many pieces, so I have to fit those pieces together as efficiently as possible to squeeze it all in. But when I carve out time to get a book done, I generally try to sit down early in the morning—around seven a.m.—and work until at least two or three in the afternoon. And I write continuously; that is, I write every day, seven days a week, until I have a first draft. It helps to keep my mind in the game and keep the pacing up.*

As for what I need? I need to be able to see trees and sky to remind myself there's a real world out there.

And I need to stay away from the damn refrigerator.

S. MAG.: Can you give readers your outlook on the horrendous tragedies that are occurring in the U.S. lately (i.e., the Texas church shooting, the Las Vegas attack), and what you believe we can do as a people, nation, and even what the world of law enforcement can do to stop this increase in crime?

M.C.: *These aren't just tragedies. Tragedy is a sad result that was unavoidable. These horrific disasters are avoidable. At the very least, gun laws need to be enforced. Background checks must be done in every case. Too many times I've seen that a shooter who should never have been able to pass a background check somehow managed to amass a stockpile of weapons. That's just for starters.*

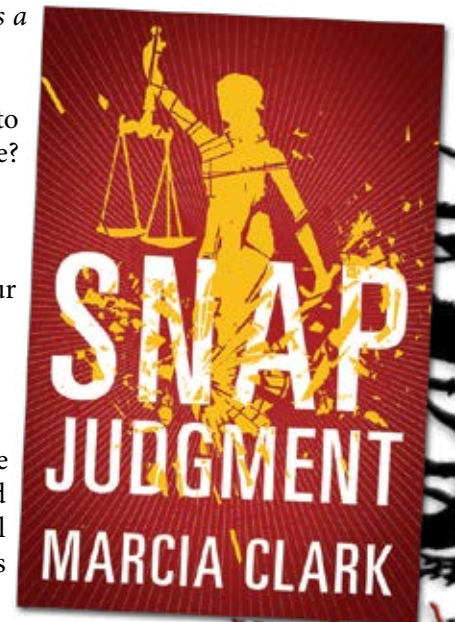
S. MAG.: Who would you choose, out of your characters, as being one you would love to see on the big or small screen in the future? What actor do you think would best fit the role?

M.C.: *This is a lot like asking for me to name my favorite children. I. Can't. Do. It.*

S. MAG.: What comes next for Marcia Clark readers? Are you already working on your next novel?

M.C.: *I am. I'm working on the fourth installment in the Samantha Brinkman series.*

Straight and to the point, just like her characters. It is so much fun getting the proverbial bird's eye view from a woman who has stood in many courtrooms as the world watched. It will be exciting to see what Marcia Clark's “criminal” character would be all about. Let us hope that creation is in the works. For more information on Marcia Clark's books and upcoming projects, check out www.marciaclarkbooks.com. ■



Cameron's Debut Writing *Jack Ryan* has it all in "POWER AND EMPIRE" SIT DOWN WITH MARC CAMERON

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



Marc Cameron, author of the exciting *Jericho Quinn* series, has now added his name to the list of extraordinary writers who have had the mantle of furthering the journey of Tom Clancy's beloved character, "Jack Ryan," handed down to them. Not only has he kept the ideals of that world on path with the new thriller "Power and Empire," but Marc has also continued to create his own series, as well as put together a brand new plot that will have readers flocking to the bookstores later in 2018.

Marc was kind enough to take a break from all his work to talk with *Suspense Magazine* about the new responsibility he's taken on, as well as speak about his research that comes from not only his past experiences in law enforcement, but also from the Alaskan frontier that he calls home.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Let us begin with your "arrival," so to speak, in the Tom Clancy universe. With Mark Greaney's departure just recently (as well as, Grant Blackwood's), how did it come about that you were handed the reins to continue the journey?

Marc Cameron (M.C.): "Mystery Mike" Bursaw introduced me to Mark Greaney in Long Beach during my first Bouchercon. We became friends over the course of several subsequent conferences. Eventually, Mark offered to write a blurb for my latest *Jericho Quinn* novel, "Field of Fire." Unbeknownst to me, he'd decided to step away from the Clancy franchise. He'd done seven—all of them terrific. The long and short of it is that he recommended me to Tom Colgan, who edits the Clancy books—and Tom eventually offered me the job. My wife and I were in Florida researching my eighth *Jericho Quinn* novel when I got the call from my agent. I've been a Tom Clancy fan since I read "The Hunt for Red October" back in the eighties, so the call left me more than a little stunned.

S. MAG.: Is there an overwhelming feeling of responsibility when taking over such an iconic character, like Jack Ryan, Sr.? In addition, is there a need to transform the characters just a bit by adding your personal style into the mix?

M.C.: "Overwhelming responsibility" is a good way to put it. Jack Ryan and John Clark are indeed iconic, and I owe it to Tom Clancy's legacy and his readers to do the best I can to get them right. Mark Greaney did an excellent job, so following in his footsteps was, in and of itself, a daunting task. That said, I'd been a Clancy fan from the beginning, and felt like I knew the characters pretty well. Even so, I did a lot of rereading and note taking. It was some of the most enjoyable prep I've ever done in the run-up to writing a book.

I think realistic characters are always growing and changing some, but I tried very hard not to transform Tom Clancy's

“What I hoped to do is put his characters into situations that I imagined, and then have them act and react true to the way he created them.”

characters into something I imagined. I did not attempt to imitate his inimitable style. What I hoped to do is put his characters into situations that I imagined, and then have them act and react true to the way he created them.

S. MAG.: Speaking of an iconic character, you are the mind behind the incredible Jericho Quinn. Now you add Jack Ryan to the coffers. Is there any particular character out there you have always wanted to write and/or wish you had created, and why?

M.C.: *I used to write a lot of James Bond adventure stories when I was in high school and college—before there was such a term as “fan fiction.” It would be fun to write a Bond someday.*

That said, I’ve got my hands full with Jericho, Jack Ryan, and now the characters in a new mystery from Kensington that will be out later in 2018.

S. MAG.: Can you give readers a sneak peek of what the new title “Power and Empire” is all about?

M.C.: *The intrigue is at the highest levels of the government in The Peoples Republic of China. Seemingly unrelated events—a maritime disaster, a terrorist attack on a United States Naval vessel, and other attacks in Argentina, Africa, and the South China Sea—all look like they are going to culminate at the G20 Summit in Tokyo. President Ryan and his administration work to sort out how everything is connected, while John Clark pits himself against a cartel of human traffickers in Texas to save a thirteen-year-old girl who holds the key that will help connect the dots.*

S. MAG.: Are you already working on the next book?

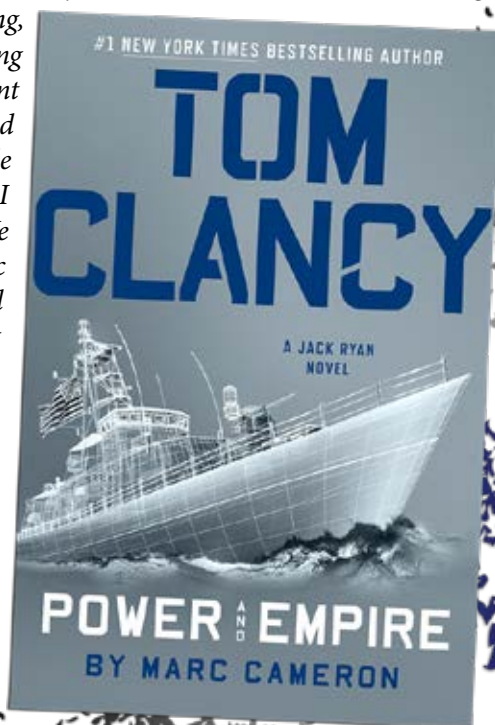
M.C.: *I’m finishing up the next full-length Jericho Quinn novel now, but will start the next Tom Clancy/Jack Ryan novel in early January. My editor and I have already talked through the plot, and I’m really excited to jump into it.*

S. MAG.: Do you travel a great deal to gather data for your novels, or are you more of a computer historian?

M.C.: *My wife and I travel quite a bit to research both the Jericho Quinn and Tom Clancy books. That said, there is not enough time to go to all the places where the books are set. I do a lot of reading, interviewing, and YouTube watching to fill in the blanks. If I can’t go somewhere that I’m planning to set a major scene, I at least like to talk to someone who has been there. We spent several weeks in Argentina and Japan doing research for “Power and Empire” and stumbled onto some real gems regarding the character of the countries and the people who live there. There are always a certain number of “unknown unknowns” that I just never would have conceived had we not taken our bones to the actual place. We try to spend more than a few days in each location, sometimes just sitting in a public square to get a feel for things. We work hard to get to know the people, understand their humor, and their connection with the land and history. And still, I spend a lot of time on Google Street View making sure I get the details right.*

S. MAG.: You’ve already stated that Jericho Quinn will continue as you move forward with the Jack Ryan novels, so can you give a bit of information to fans out there about what’s up next for Quinn?

M.C.: *I hope Jericho Quinn continues for a while. I certainly have more adventures in mind for him. “Triple Frontier,” the next Quinn story, is a novella set in the tri-border region of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. It was fun to write. We see a lot more of Jericho’s brother, Bo, and get to learn a little of the two brothers’ backstory.*



The next full-length novel has him and his team in Cuba, the land of Ronnie Garcia's birth, facing a new kind of threat. I really, really like the plot.

S. MAG.: Living in Alaska, is this a great locale for a writer who needs that extra quiet in order to get the job done? Is the "frozen tundra" also an inspiring place for background scenery for those spies and adventurers you pen?

M.C.: *More than half of my last full-length Jericho Quinn, "Field of Fire," was set in bush Alaska. Over the years I've written a lot of pages in cabins, tents, and snow caves. I traveled to remote villages quite a bit before I retired from the U.S. Marshals, often sleeping on the floor of school libraries for the night. I met many interesting people, which always inspires me to write. Alaska is so vast and the terrain so varied, that it lends itself to all sorts of stories. Barrow sees no sun for a couple of months every winter, and no darkness for a couple of months every summer. That alone makes for some extremely interesting—and quirky—characters. It's minus four degrees outside my house as I write this, making my writing chair in front of the fireplace awfully inviting.*

Several years ago, I helped track, and eventually arrest, a murder suspect on Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska. I fell in love with the old-growth forests, the rugged people, and their dependence on the sea. "Open Carry," my new mystery featuring Deputy U.S. Marshal Arliss Cutter, is set there. Kensington plans to release it later in 2018.

S. MAG.: Spending thirty years in law enforcement, do you ever pull from personal experience when it comes to what your characters face? Is it easier, having that specific knowledge in your background, to write thrillers?

M.C.: *I draw on many of the people I met over the course of my career as a municipal police officer, detective, and then as a deputy U.S. marshal. I knew I wanted to write while I was still on the job, and paid attention to many of the larger-than-life good guys I worked with, and bad guys I investigated, hunted, arrested, and transported. If I learned anything, it was that we're each the star of the little movie playing inside our own heads. The vast majority of the people I arrested thought of themselves as good guys. Few of them were what I would consider truly evil—though there were a handful of that type as well.*

When you drill down, law enforcement and writing are both people-businesses. I am fortunate to have had a career that was sort of Mystery/Thriller Plot 101. Well...I wouldn't exactly call it fortunate, but I've experienced my share of human conflict and violence. I have first-hand experience of what it's like to have someone try to kill me during fights, and those experiences make it much easier to imagine my characters in similar situations—much like I assume men and women who've deployed with the military might find it easier to write the details that match their experiences.

S. MAG.: Did you ever have the opportunity to meet Mr. Clancy in person? If not, is there one question you would love to ask him as you start on this path?

M.C.: *Sadly, I never did get to meet Tom Clancy. I would have loved to have gotten him started talking about Jack Ryan and John Clark. Writers have a lot more going on in their heads about characters and plots than we're ever able to get into the published story. Tom Clancy put so much on paper that it would be fascinating to hear the backstories he imagined that never made it into the books.*

It is easy to state that, after reading "Power and Empire," Mr. Clancy would be extremely pleased with the imagination and fantastic writing that Marc has brought to the Jack Ryan family. To learn more about Marc Cameron and the future projects he has in the works, head to www.marccameronbooks.com. ■

TOM CLANCY POWER AND EMPIRE

By Marc Cameron

Yes, Jack Ryan is back: Jack Ryan, Sr., Junior, and all the characters that make these books so interesting. This time around, there's a new writer at the helm taking over Mr. Clancy's beloved and iconic character. The writer's name is Marc Cameron.

Delving directly into a tragic moment, an oil tanker owned by the Chinese blows sky high, erupting into flames while located in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This is a horrible occurrence in a world that's already plagued by terrorism, violence, and countries attempting to keep peace, even when there are those out there who seek destruction. Turning to the President of the United States Jack Ryan who has shown again and again, before presidency and after, that he can get the U.S. out of the worst situations possible, the U.S. Coast Guard is sent to rescue what's left of the crew on the tanker, but Mother Nature is not helping.

An oddity enters the situation when a car is pulled over during a normal traffic stop in a rural town in Texas. Unfortunately, there's nothing normal about it. A gunfight occurs and the cops in the Lone Star State end up finding a computer thumb drive on one of the victims that they hand over to the FBI. Turns out this is a piece of a massive puzzle that will have China and America on the brink of war; this is a situation that only Jack Ryan has the power to diffuse...if only he can stay alive to do it.

Marc Cameron has written a perfectly played "chess match" that would certainly make Tom Clancy proud. Jack Ryan has remained, through more than a few authors who have taken on the job, a formidable hero that no one has been able to match. Having the new "spice" that Cameron has added to the series offers a fresh voice to a world that will continue for some time.

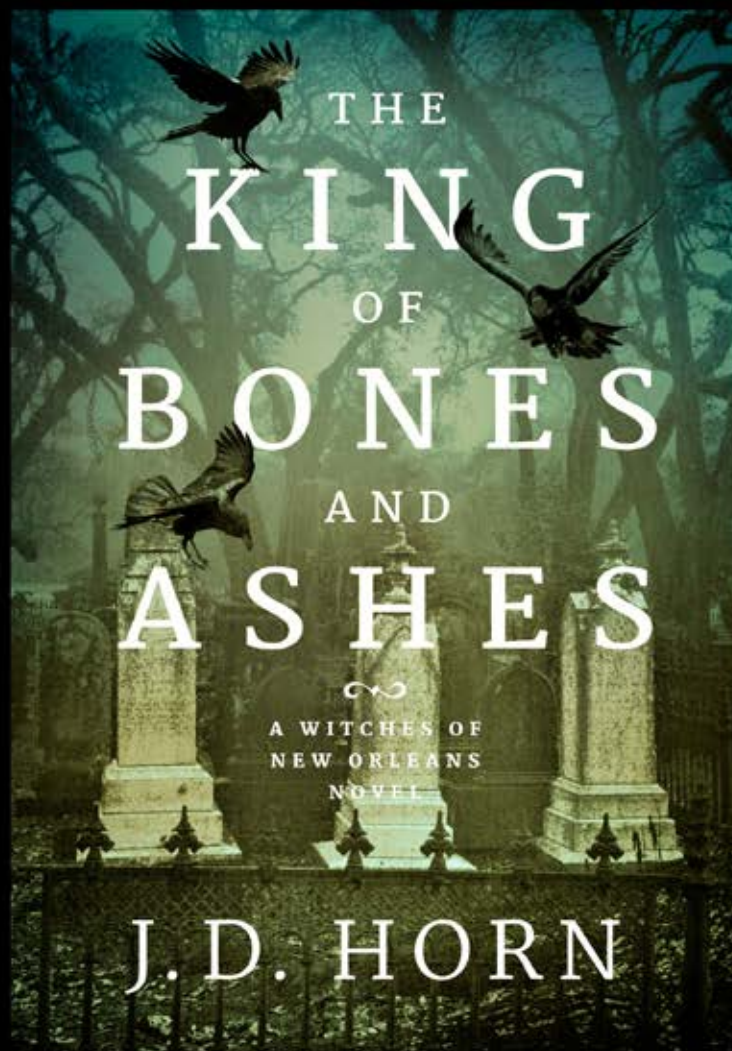
Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine ■

Horn's rich characterizations and setting, sparkling magic, and creepy villains bolster the narrative, and his focus on women as major players is particularly refreshing. The terrifying conclusion will have readers looking forward to the next installment."

—Publishers Weekly

"Palpable descriptions of magic both enchant and disturb . . . as Horn expertly weaves disparate story lines into a breathless, enthralling ending."

—Booklist



Coming January 2018 from 47North

The Literary Powerhouse Known as “Rice”

Sitting Down with Anne Rice & Christopher Rice



Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Anne Rice Press Photo Credit: Nicholas Latimer
Christopher Rice Press Photo Credit: Cathryn Farnsworth

Christopher Rice has earned many accolades for his works of supernatural suspense, as well as his erotic romance series, *The Desire Exchange*. With each new bestseller he creates, Chris has shown that he’s not “following” in the footsteps of the iconic writer whom he calls Mom; instead, he has made a solid name for himself with his incredible talent and passion for the written word.

Anne Rice, one of the most celebrated writers of our time, whose characters, such as Prince Lestat of the world-renowned series *The Vampire Chronicles*, has teamed up with her son to gift fans with yet another incredible read. This duo brings forth a new book in the *Ramses the Damned* series, offering a stunning mix of beloved characters and brand new immortals, in “Ramses the Damned: The Passion of Cleopatra.”

This mother/son team recently took a moment to sit with *Suspense Magazine* and discuss what may be in the future for Ramses; the work being put in to bring everyone’s favorite vampire to TV; and, explaining how and why their collaboration works so incredibly well.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): There are both great stories and “horror” stories when it comes to writers teaming up to create. Can you tell readers when the idea to write together occurred? And perhaps, tell us a bit about the upsides of working together?

Christopher Rice (C.R.): *Every collaboration is different. The authors involved have to discover the process that works best for them. We discovered ours quite early. It involved sitting down together to hammer out the beats of the plot and then one of us going off to write the latest draft by ourselves. Then we’d sit down together again and go through it scene by scene and talk about what was and wasn’t working. For me, the entire process was made easier by the fact that we were inside a world that had already been built in the previous book. So, simply put, there was less to argue about. My job as collaborator was*



to be faithful to the characters everyone fell in love with the first time out.

Anne Rice (A.R.): *Chris has pretty much covered it. What was significant for me was that he wrote the first draft, working out completely the plot we had envisioned, feeling it all organically as he went along. He did the heavy lifting of making a book come to life. Then, as he explained, we sat down, talked about it and he went back for another complete pass. After that, I read his draft, amazed at how he had made the new ideas work, and added two chapters of my own, mostly pertaining to the characters from the earlier novel who were dear to my heart, and adding some material involving one of the new characters. I also made many small stylistic changes throughout. ...It was exciting and altogether smooth. In fact, I found it a pleasure.*

S. MAG: Once you begin the story, how do you separate the work: by character, chapter or plotline...? It would be wonderful to be taken through “A Day of Rice Writing” from both your perspectives.

C.R.: *We put our heads together during the outlining and review phases, and then I went off and wrote two complete drafts on my own. The final draft was Mom’s responsibility. That’s where she layered in and added elements that she felt were still missing from the book. My greatest fear with this novel was that it would feel like a jarring, discordant follow up to the previous book because of my involvement. This was my first time writing a historical piece. Everything I’d done up until this point had been contemporary. Even the paranormal stuff. But this back and forth approach, punctuated by intense conversations, really got us over that potential hurdle.*

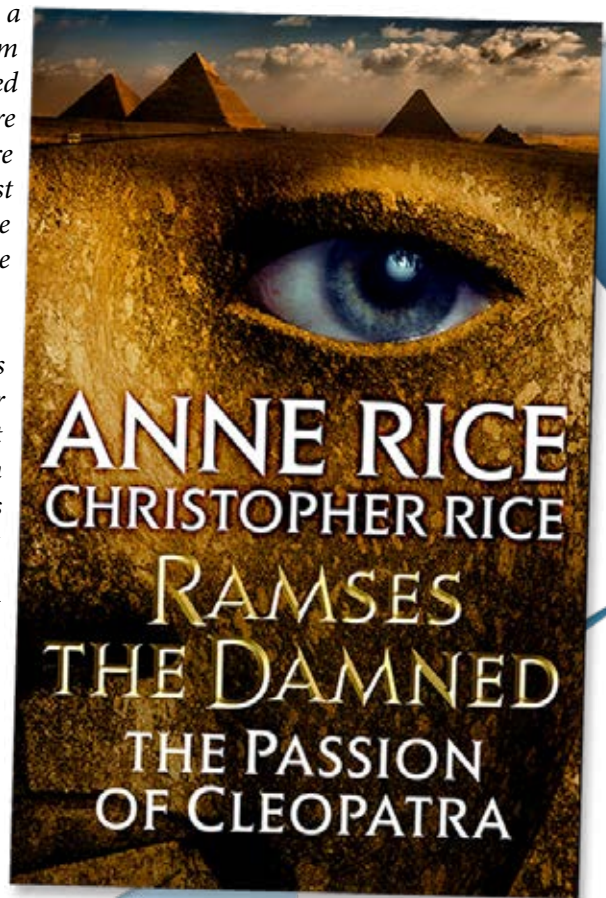
A.R.: *I think Chris is being modest. He did the final draft, too, really. I went over it, yes, and added material as I’ve explained and made stylistic changes, but really he made that second draft work organically just as he had made the first draft work. I was very pleased. When reviewers tell us they can’t tell who wrote what, I’m thrilled, positively thrilled.*

S. MAG.: Can you tell us about “Ramses the Damned: The Passion of Cleopatra”? Perhaps even give our readers a little sneak peek that cannot be found anywhere else?

C.R.: *“The Mummy” or “Ramses the Damned” is one of Mom’s most popular books. For years, readers have been asking for a sequel. And what I’ll say is...we’ve exerted every effort to give them a worthy follow up that matches the original in tone, adventure, eroticism and seductive atmosphere. We didn’t set out to “reboot” what had worked about the first novel. We didn’t do some massive time jump into the future that dropped Ramses and Julie into a completely alien landscape where they spent several chapters struggling to figure out mobile phones. The first book ends with a cliffhanger and we pick up right from that point, while also introducing a new set of characters and a whole new layer to the mythology.*

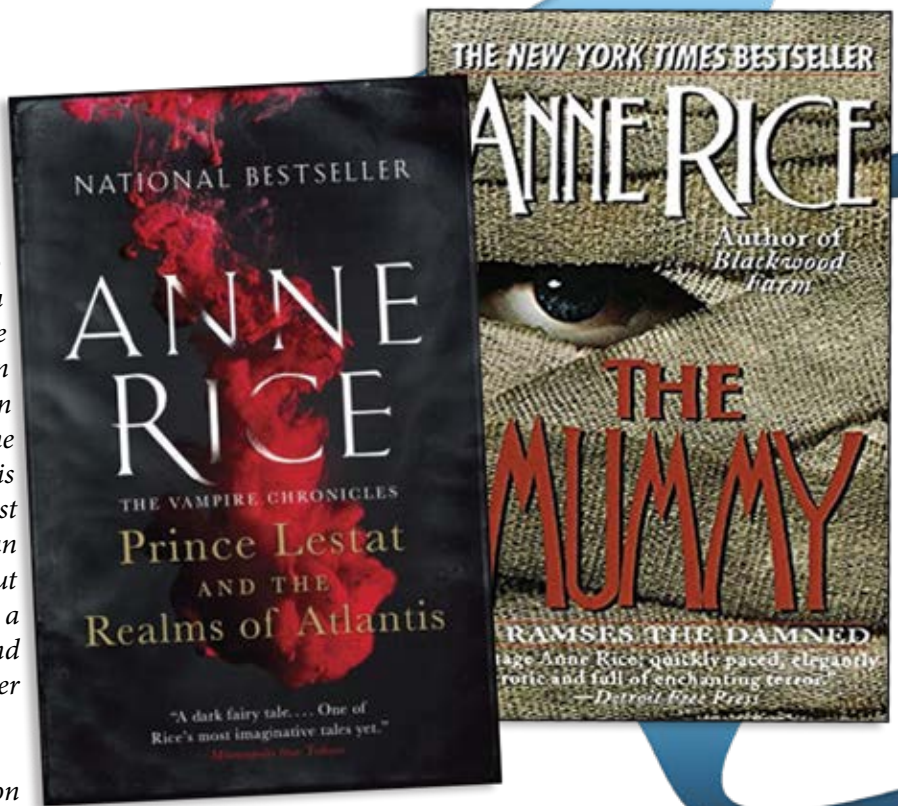
A.R.: *In this new book, we go back into the history of the elixir that has given immortality to Ramses, to Cleopatra, and to Julie. We discover who first gathered the ingredients and compounded it. We also meet new adversaries along the way, other immortals determined to do harm to our hero and our various heroines. And, as Christopher said, all this happens in 1914, the same year in which the earlier novel is set, right before the outbreak of WWI. I was very pleased to be working with the old characters again and to welcome the characters Chris created. I particularly loved Bektaten, who was really Christopher’s creation, and I loved his writing around Elliott, the Earl of Rutherford, who was a big character in the earlier book. Seemed to me that Chris had a very special feeling for Cleopatra and he wrote almost every word surrounding that character, though she had been a major part of the earlier book.*

S. MAG.: Are there plans to go into the land of film or TV when it comes to Ramses? If you had to choose, is there a particular actor who



would be the best at playing the character?

C.R.: When we do put the story on screen, our casting choices will benefit greatly from the new push for diversity in Hollywood. In years past, there were only a handful of actors and actresses of certain non-white backgrounds and ethnicities that would spring quickly to mind. Now, casting has a global reach. There's a great actor of Middle Eastern descent out there who could play Ramses. Perhaps he hasn't been discovered yet, or perhaps he hasn't been given a starring role in something substantial. The same goes for Bektaten, a character new to this novel, an ancient queen who descends from a lost Atlantis-like kingdom centered in pre-Egyptian Northern Africa. One of the things I love about the first book—and our follow up—is that it's a visit to the old mummy mythology that exalts and celebrates the people of color who sit at the center of it.



A.R.: I agree with Chris on the diversity question completely. I would love to see an extended series of Ramses the Damned on prestige television, with enough episodes to tell the stories of both books. We have a wealth of genius British talent to choose from when it comes to Julie Stratford, of course, but I can't help but picture Lily James. Lily James was so memorable in Downton Abbey and in War and Peace as Natasha. In fact, she was perhaps the best Natasha I've ever seen. I suspect we would find ourselves in competition with a lot of others wanting Lily James. When it comes to Elliott, I'd love to see Colin Firth in the role. I just saw him in Tom Ford's genius film, A Single Man. Just great! Of course, all the fine British actors today are much in demand. Seems American audiences cannot get enough of them in supernatural and fantasy television and film. It's a lot of fun to dream about casting, isn't it?

S. MAG.: You both have written across a spectrum of genres. Do you have a favorite that you feel the most comfortable within, or does it basically all depend on the character and idea as to what path you go down genre-wise? Is there a genre you have not written in as of yet that you would like to try?

C.R.: It's all about characters and their relationships to one another. That's really what it comes down to for me, no matter what genre I'm writing in. I'm a classic dramatist in that I enjoy charting journeys of self-discovery that happen through conflict. That's the meat I try to get to no matter what I'm writing. But I also tilt towards violence and spectacle and action. Lately, I've enjoyed writing about sex again. I was too bruised by reviews of my early work that took a haughty, pseudo-sophisticated attitude towards my explicit sex scenes. Because I was an out gay writer, I fell prey to a kind of self-censorship in later books that was tinged with a bit of internalized homophobia. I'm done with that now. Sex is great. Sex in books is great. And taking a dismissive attitude towards it doesn't make you sophisticated. I used to be one of those people on panels at conferences that said you can only put sex in if it serves the plot. Hogwash. Your sex can serve your characters, and your characters are your plot.

A.R.: What has worked for me all my writing life is the supernatural novel or romance. For me it is always about outcasts, outsiders, those who are alone and feel it keenly and seek to make their existence have meaning. I love working in historical settings; and I love using the richness of historical background as I create my characters and stories. I am continuing with The Vampire Chronicles now, even though we are developing the Chronicles into a television series; and I want very soon to write a novel from the point of view of a ghost. I've written one novel from the point of view of a powerful spirit ("The Servant of the Bones"), and now I want to go on to a ghost.

S. MAG.: Being that history is a large part of Ramses, can you tell us how you feel about the research portion of your work?

Is there a certain location/time period that you are interested in exploring in the future?

C.R.: Mom's a devoted history buff so I'll follow her just about anywhere. When it comes to this book, there's a great treasure trove of evolving scholarship about Cleopatra. There's always been a sense that Cleopatra's story is more complicated than we realize because her tale was written by her conquerors. How much can we really trust the Roman accounts of her? The harlot queen. The calculating seductress. She was given these brands almost exclusively by powerful Roman men. The most recent scholarship suggests a much more complicated and nuanced figure than any of those labels suggest.

A.R.: I love doing research. I absolutely love reading history, biography, and specialized studies of various centuries and cultures. I read history for pleasure and for fun. Much of my research never even finds its way into a novel. Even before I wrote my first novel, "Interview with the Vampire," I'd been researching my home town of New Orleans for years. I really didn't have to check out anything before I plunged into the late 1700's in that book. It was all there, fresh in my mind...the style of the plantation houses, the style of clothing, the raw and savage milieu of New Orleans in those early days, all of it. I love doing that kind of work, and of course it's easier today with the ability of the Internet.

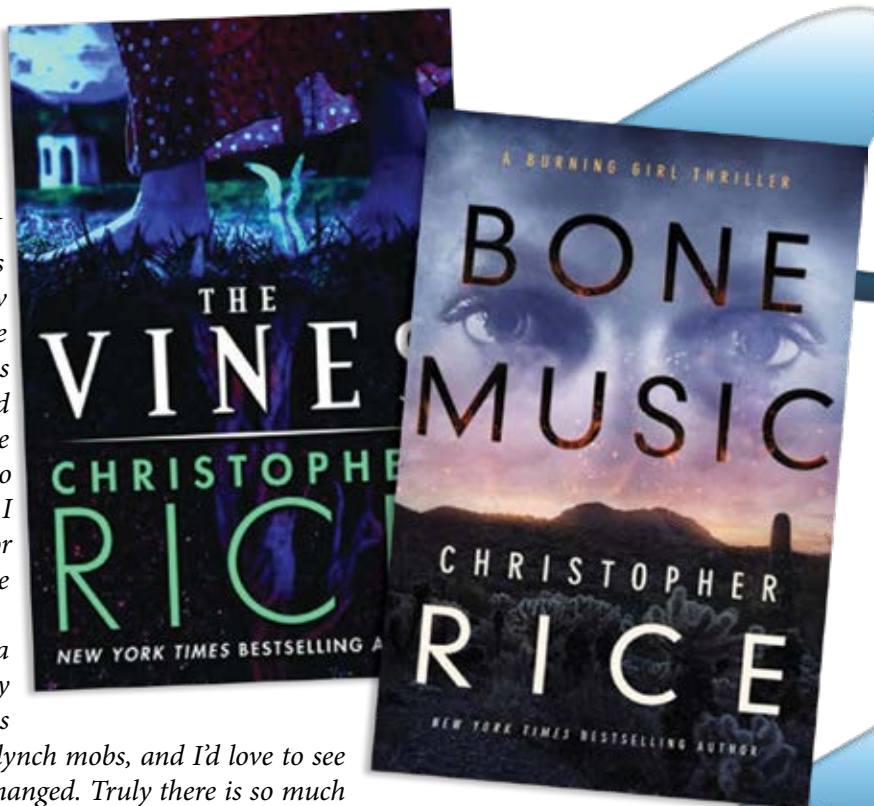
S. MAG.: Being that the literary world has become a digital one, can you tell us how you feel (the positive and negative) when it comes to the demand of social media placed upon an author? If you could change one particular aspect of this to make things easier, what would that be?

C.R.: It's a great way of organizing and communicating with the readers you have. I think we're leaving the age where most authors think social media is a tool for adding or recruiting thousands of new readers. Beyond publishing, across the board, anonymity on the Internet concerns me. I'm not talking about publishing under a pseudonym. And in the romance community in particular, there's a need for aliases and pseudonyms for writers and reviewers who might be fired by their employers over any public involvement with sexually explicit books. (That's a troubling issue on its own and speaks to some conflicted attitudes about sex in our culture.) But whenever there are attacks waged by large groups of people who use anonymous accounts stripped of anything that might suggest their biases or complicated relationship to the target, I get queasy.

A.R.: If I could change any one thing on Facebook, it would be more controls over the comments that appear on the page. I love posting and discussing matters with the People of the Page, as I call them, and we have some great discussions. But occasionally I would like to make an important post with commenting turned off. I'll tell you why.

When controversial topics are being discussed, apparently(?) FB shoots the controversial post to many who are not part of our page or our group, and some of them then come in for the attack. This happened during the presidential election. I'm not sure quite how it works. I can't turn off comments, which would be very helpful in some cases, and I can't keep up with these attackers fast enough as they abuse and insult my readers and me. We now know, of course, that some of these attacks were being done by Russian bots, and I'm glad that is being exposed and thoroughly discussed. But I'd love to hear more on how FB might be sending these political posts to people right here in America who don't follow our page...just to stir up controversy. I would like to know how this works and whether or not FB would change it. (I'm offering opinions here on what I've been told.)

Of course, the worst thing about social media when it comes to books and authors is anonymity or the use of pseudonyms for reviews and blogs. This has led to a lot of abuse, even organized internet lynch mobs, and I'd love to see something done, but I don't know how it can be changed. Truly there is so much



“At this very moment, we’re hard at work on developing *The Vampire Chronicles* TV series, which is going wonderfully. But I see many more books for us in the future.”

good about social media that I don’t think a whole lot about what is bad. I love communicating directly with my readers. I regard my FB page as the place where I can talk to them about a whole range of topics, and it has really enriched my life.

S. MAG.: If you had a choice to sit with a favorite writer of your own, who would that be and why? Is there a certain question you would love to ask them?

C.R.: *The questions I want to ask other writers almost always center around their work ethic and their ability to sustain it. I’m a big Nora Roberts fan. I’m in awe not only of her productivity but of how she charts relationships and lets her characters speak for themselves with flowing, natural and quick-witted dialogue. I’d love to have coffee—or in my case, tea—with her and pepper her with questions on those topics. But let’s face it. I’ve got a pretty great writer close to home who answers most of my important questions.*

A.R.: *Gosh, the first writer who came to my mind was Tolstoy! I’m reading his Confession, and it is one depressing document. To see him turn against his earlier “War and Peace” and “Anna Karenina” is heartbreaking. I would love to ask him humbly how he could do that. How he could turn away from the immense value of those huge and monumental works, even though, according to him, he didn’t know what he was teaching people when he wrote them.*

When it comes to living writers, I’m very much a recluse. I seldom, if ever, meet any or go out. I do love corresponding with some via email. I have to confess that the most invigorating experience I’ve had of late was with Christopher Rice. I’ve learned a lot from the way he makes a plot move, and from the solutions he finds to craft problems that have tormented me for years.

S. MAG.: Is there a character in the world of Ramses you understand on a level above the rest; one that you know you will remember long after they have stopped being written about?

C.R.: *I love them all equally, but giving life to Bektaten was a particular joy. She is my queen. I pledge loyalty to her forever.*

A.R.: *I, too, love them all...but I love Elliott in particular. I look forward to writing more from Elliott’s point of view when he and Ramses get an opportunity to really talk.*

S. MAG.: Can you tell us a bit about the future of the “Rice Writing Duo,” and what readers/fans should be excited about seeing in the future?

C.R.: *At this very moment, we’re hard at work on developing The Vampire Chronicles TV series, which is going wonderfully. But I see many more books for us in the future. I don’t know. Ask Mom. She might feel differently. Just kidding...I hope.*

A.R.: *This collaboration has worked out beautifully in my estimation. I’d love to work with Chris on a third book about our immortals. And perhaps another series as well. I’ve found all this inspiring and insightful. But at the moment, I think The Vampire Chronicles series is our principle collaboration. Of course Christopher is writing the scripts, but I’m there at all times to discuss the characters, the period in which my hero, Lestat, was born and Born to Darkness, and it is one of the most exciting creative ventures of my life. I’ve never been able to collaborate with anyone before. I am so delighted that this has all worked out.*

It is most definitely a fact that the fans are just as delighted! The collaboration between Anne Rice and her son Christopher has been a thrill to read. These immortals, both new and old, will be interesting to watch as the books proceed. And the idea of welcoming the great vampire Lestat (and friends) to the small screen in the near future is a wonderful Christmas present to behold. To learn more about their upcoming events and projects, check out www.christopherricebooks.com and www.annerice.com. ■

Koontz's Newest Series Continues with “THE WHISPERING ROOM”

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Thomas Engstrom



DEAN KOONTZ IS SYNONYMOUS

with books that engage, thrill, incite adventure and even, at times, incite the need to crawl under the bed and stay there because of the fear that some of his more evil entities instill in the depths of readers' minds.

In his latest endeavor that began with “The Silent Corner,” an FBI agent turned rogue by the name of Jane Hawk was introduced. On her own personal mission, she must protect her child, clear her husband's name, and stop a group of people who have a frightening agenda. With the second book, “The Whispering Room,” being released, Jane Hawk returns with a vengeance, and her creator has taken time to speak with *Suspense Magazine* about this new series that has engaged the world

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): There are so many authors with recurring characters. You had the mighty Odd Thomas who was most definitely a fan favorite. Can you tell us a bit about how it felt to close the proverbial book on a character you have been with so long?

Dean Koontz (D.K.): *I have to become deeply attached to a character in the first book and feel there are depths unplumbed before I'm motivated to write a second. Odd charmed me—he was unique and quirky and made me laugh—so that by the time I finished “Odd Thomas,” I couldn't resist writing more about him. But because I was so profoundly attached to him, because he seemed real to me, I felt that I had to deal with him with the respect and fairness with which I try to deal with people in my life. I understood that Odd was on a journey toward perfect humility, something I'd never seen in a book before, and I owed him that fulfillment. Therefore, the promise that was made to him in the first book, regarding Stormy Llewellyn—“you are destined to be together forever”—had to be kept. So I always knew it was a closed-end series. Eight books, as it turned out, and in the final one, “Saint Odd,” I was actually emotionally moved when the time came to reward him by keeping that promise, even if it meant killing him off!*

S. MAG.: When it comes to your new series, Jane Hawk was introduced in “The Silent Corner” and immediately became

another reader favorite. Where did Jane come from, exactly? And considering what happened to Odd Thomas, will Jane be around for a while?

D.K.: *I really have no idea where Jane came from. I had this image of a beautiful woman who is several times smarter than she is beautiful, who doesn't care about her looks, who is an FBI agent on leave, on a personal mission of justice, and I started writing, just to see where she would go. Literally within 3 short chapters, only five pages in the finished book, she electrified me. Her attitude, her competence, her hard-boiled kick-butt intensity combined with her tender heart. . . I swear, it was not so much as if I was creating her, but as if she created herself page by page.*

Of all the characters with which I've peopled my books, Jane is far and away the most interesting to me, the most complex. At the end of "The Silent Corner," I knew there were depths to her that would carry me for many books. And I couldn't wait to write them to see what the hell she'd do next! Within a week of finishing "Silent," I was into "The Whispering Room." And a week after finishing that, I was into "The Crooked Staircase." My editor and publisher have both said each book is better than the one before it, and if that's true, it's because Jane keeps revealing new layers to herself.

These are large novels with twisty story lines, touching on many subjects that require immense amounts of research, and yet even when I'm putting in 70-hour work weeks, I'm increasingly energized. I've told people that I've fallen in love with two women in my life, but no attorneys need to be involved, because Jane is a fictional character and no competition for Gerda.

S. MAG.: Please tell readers something about Jane's journey in "The Whispering Room." In addition, can you tell us what comes next for Jane?

D.K.: *Jane doesn't get a chance to breathe. "The Whispering Room" opens three days after the close of "The Silent Corner." In the first book, Jane went from being an FBI agent on leave to being an agent gone rogue. In book two, she is the most wanted fugitive in America, the top story in the news, and the forces arrayed against her are beyond daunting. Continuing to move about, use the Internet, and bore in at the antagonists becomes ever more difficult. I wish I were as quick-witted as Jane. She can get herself out of the tightest corner with a clever trick that comes to her in minutes—whereas I have to brood about it for days before I can write the scene!*

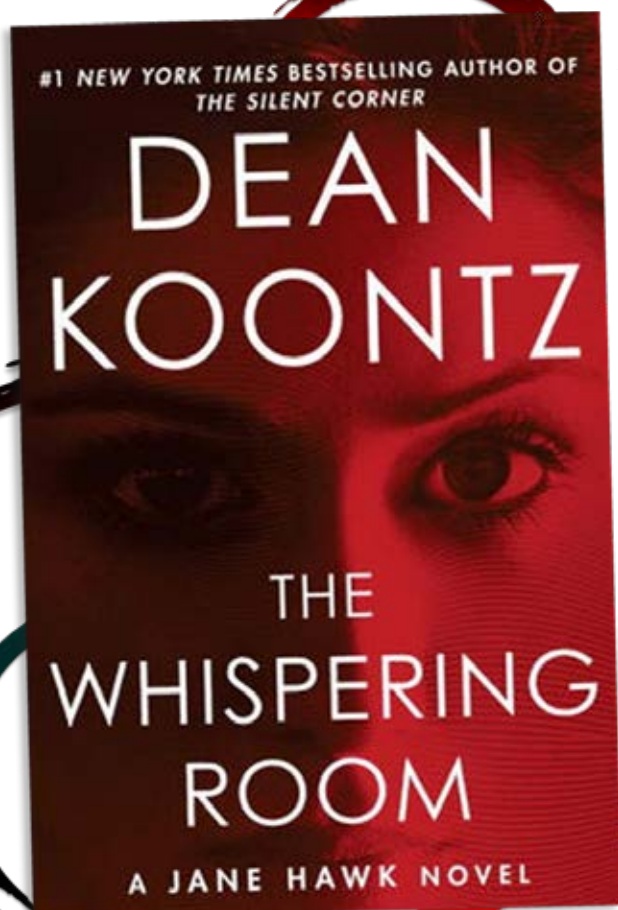
The future? Each of the books functions as a stand-alone, but there is also an overriding issue that ties the first seven together. I'm just about finished with number four, "The Forbidden Door." After the seventh, I'm not sure where Jane goes, but I'm sure it will be interesting enough to keep me happier at the keyboard than I would be almost anywhere else.

S. MAG.: Do you find it more difficult or easier nowadays in this world of digital technology? Is there a certain positive that digital publishing gives to an author? What is a negative that you believe was brought into the writer's world from the Internet?

D.K.: *Jane's life is enormously complicated by all the technology that can be brought to bear to find a fugitive, and when the bad guys almost get their claws in her, I sometimes feel that in part I'm writing about my own dislike of the intrusiveness of the latest technological advances, which promise more freedom but have a really dire potential to crush freedom in the long run. I take advantage of our tech-heavy culture but remain a curmudgeon about it as well, especially as all the Tweeting and social media seem to be squeezing too many people's attention span ever smaller, which is not good for novelists.*

S. MAG.: Can you give us a rundown of a Dean Koontz writing day? (Do dogs need to be there? Do you still use the first computer you ever had? Does it need to be a quiet room or an outdoor patio?)

D.K.: *Up at 5:00. Showered and shaved and walking the dog by 5:45. Breakfast at my desk by 6:30, reading the Wall Street Journal*



and whatever magazine I'm not finished with. To work by 7:00. I rarely have lunch and nearly always work through until 5:00. Six days a week during the first half of a book, often seven days during the last half. I can only write in the quiet of my office. The dog is always welcome—first Trixie, then Anna, and now Elsa—as long as she doesn't too often insist on climbing into the office chair with me, because a 70-pound golden retriever in your lap really inhibits typing. The office décor is Art Deco with Japanese antiques—bronzes, screens, lacquered boxes—and a collection of beautiful Bakelite radios from the 1920s and 30s. Sometimes music, sometimes not. Recently, Paul Simon and more Paul Simon. After using the same computer (not my first) and software for 18 years, I updated about a year and a half ago. But I still will only use Microsoft Word if the Windows feature is first stripped out of it for me.

S. MAG.: You have a deep love for your canine friends. Can you catch us up on the canine Koontz family? Do they help with your writing?

D.K.: Our first golden, Trixie, has been gone almost eleven years, and our Anna passed a year and a half ago. It tears your heart out when you lose one of them. I'm not embarrassed to say I cry like a child when they pass. Elsa is with us now. She's a real beauty and, like every dog, has her own distinct personality. None of the three ever barked—except once in an emergency when Trixie tried to warn us of a fire getting underway in the kitchen—but Elsa has the most amazing series of sounds with which she tries—and mostly succeeds—to convey her moods and desires. If you really pay attention to dogs, you find they're more intelligent than they're given credit for. I find them mysterious and in that sense they help my writing by firing my imagination.

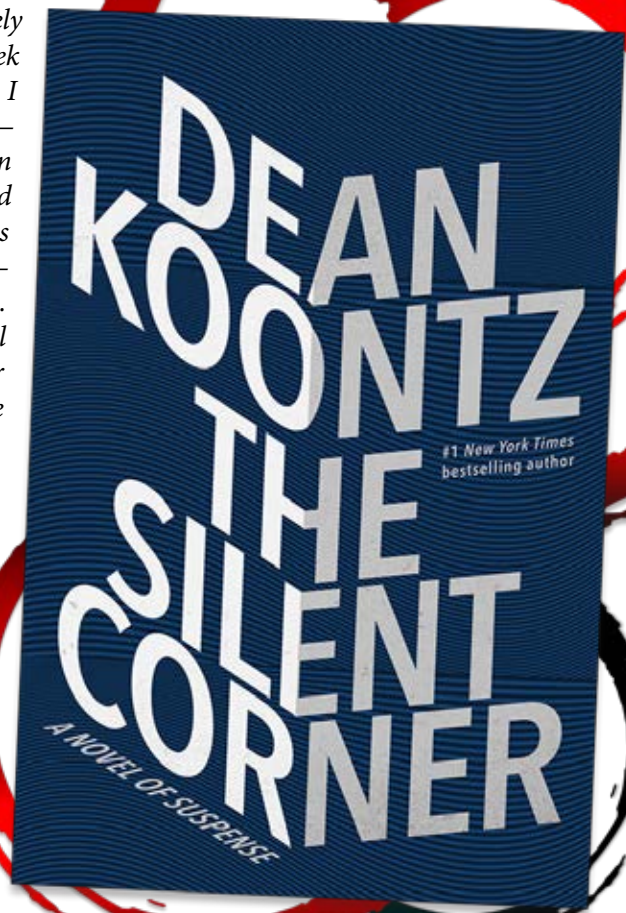
S. MAG.: Especially considering the plots of some of your books, I have to ask, can you share with our readers a particular (perhaps odd) fan moment that will always be etched in your memory?

D.K.: I was doing a signing for "One Door Away from Heaven," which is a long novel with many characters, and at the center of it is this 11-year-old girl, Leilani Klonk, who has a deformed hand and a bum leg that requires a steel brace. She is a funny, tough, very bright, and highly endangered girl, and I loved her. Anyway, it was a long signing, seven or eight hours, with over a thousand folks in line, and halfway through, this couple got to the signing table with their 12-year-old, scarily bright daughter who read at a college level. They had bought the book for the girl a few days earlier, she had read it, and they had come back to the store to have it signed. Maybe you can imagine my surprise and concern when I saw this girl had a deformed hand and wore a brace on one leg! I tried to think if there might be any moment in the novel that would have offended her, but she was quick to say how much she loved it. I inscribed the copy to her, and we posed with each other for a few photos.

At the end of the signing, the mother returned, alone, to tell me that the girl had always been so self-conscious about her deformed hand that she kept it drawn up in a sweater sleeve or held it behind her back, and was embarrassed when anyone mentioned it or stared. But halfway through Leilani Klonk's adventure, she had for the first time stopped hiding the hand and in fact had stood in line with the book tucked under her arm and the hand where everyone could see it. If I ever doubted that it's important for us to think carefully about what we write and consider how we want the reader to be affected, this experience put an end to that doubt.

S. MAG.: Will there be a Dean Koontz title coming to the small or large screen in the future? I would think Jane Hawk would make a fantastic heroine.

D.K.: Paramount and Anonymous Content have optioned all the Jane novels for TV, and I understand a writer/possibly showrunner is hard at work. We've got a couple other things in development, but if I could have one thing work right, I'd most like to see Jane done with the intensity that TV now allows.



"I sometimes feel that in part I'm writing about my own dislike of the intrusiveness of the latest technological advances, which promise more freedom but have a really dire potential to crush freedom in the long run."

S. MAG.: Instead of the age-old question of what you would tell new authors to do to get better at their craft, what loopholes would you advise a new author to avoid?

D.K.: *Loopholes? Like IRS tax loopholes? Don't avoid them! Plunge into them if they're legal! If we're talking loopholes as "a means of escape or evasion," then I'd say never choose your next story because it's a kind of book that's hot at the moment or just because the concept seems cool, or because it strikes you as an easy write. Always push yourself to the limits of your talent, time after time. Walk a creative tightrope, risk making a fool of yourself. We're all fools, anyway, and none of us can escape being one from time to time. You only get better by going where you don't believe you can go.*

Until recently, it was thought that we have only so many brain cells and that the number declines with age. But all the latest research has shown that this is false, that by reading difficult material and challenging ourselves intellectually, we can add neurons and seriously increase cognitive ability even into old, old age.

S. MAG.: As your biggest fan (and I'm sure you've heard that many times before), I have always wanted to ask you this: If you could sit across from one writer, past or present, who would it be and why? Is there a question you would love to ask them?

D.K.: *I can't pick one. But I'll narrow it down to three:*

John D. MacDonald because reading his books over and over—especially the non-McGee stand-alones—taught me the value of deeply drawn characters. A suspense novel is more suspenseful if the people in it seem real and therefore fascinate the reader.

Flannery O'Connor because I'd love to hear her process in writing that scariest piece of short fiction ever published—"A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The final pages of that story never fail to chill me, no matter how often I read it. She seems to me to be the first to absolutely nail the kind of sociopathic character—The Misfit, he's called—that led to Hannibal Lecter and others, but also to convey so perfectly the inability of so many people to admit to the existence of Evil even when it is face to face with them.

Third, T.S. Eliot. I have read "Four Quartets" so often that I should be able to recite it from memory, and I'm fascinated by the vivid imagery of it, how certain lines can be at the same time crystal clear in one way and illusive in another. I'd want to ask, "How did you create something that gorgeous?" It's a stupid question, of course, but sincere. I'd want to know which lines just came unbidden and which required the greatest struggle. The writing process is far more interesting to me than having written.

I hope this all made some sense.

After reading the answer to this final question, it seems that all of the readers who have picked Dean Koontz as their 'person to sit down with,' would ask him the exact same things. Not only has he, with Jane Hawk, created yet another fascinating character, but he has also cornered the market on being 'crystal clear, yet illusive' to the point where readers need to be a part of whatever realm Dean Koontz thinks of next. Learn more at www.deankoontz.com. ■

THE WHISPERING ROOM

By Dean Koontz

What began in "The Silent Corner" continues in this fantastic book that focuses on Jane Hawk, FBI agent turned rogue, whose personal mission has taken over her life.

At the beginning of this tale, readers meet an older woman named Cora Gundersun. Cora loves her cute little dachshund named Dixie, but has had to take a "time out" from work as a schoolteacher because of the horrible headaches she suffers. Unfortunately, she also hears a voice in her head that leads her into doing something truly horrific. And Cora is only one of many.

Jane Hawk needs someone on her side. Men are dead, a group needs to be exposed, and she's the one with the proof that will blow an evil organization out of the water. Making her way into an empty house, Jane stakes out the residence across the street. Inside lives a newspaper reporter/journalist by the name of Lawrence Hannafin. When she gets into his house (an action which is truly a 'sight' to behold), Jane sits across from Hannafin and tells some of her tale. She wants to see if he's trustworthy and can help her in her quest to bring these bad guys to light. What their meeting proves to her is that nothing can be believed.

Her face on WANTED posters, Jane enlists some seedy characters she met while being a professional FBI agent in order to stay alive, out of custody, and keep her child's whereabouts secret while she goes for the jugular of a man who has figured out technology that can turn free-thinkers into robotic agents of war.

From exciting to overdrive, there's something dangerous around every corner that will have readers loving the thrills and chills created in a way only Koontz can create. Hawk is one of those rare characters that quickly became a favorite with readers and, thankfully, will continue for a long time to come. Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine ■

A Burden of Truth

By Tim Ruth

JAMES ROBERT WHITMORE STARED UP AT THE CLOCK AFFIXED TO THE GRAY STONE WALL IN THE TINY ROOM. Eleven-thirty, only thirty minutes left and then they would come to get him. He prayed the priest would get there soon.

Whitmore rose up and began to pace from one of the drab stone walls to the other. His stomach started to gurgle, and he suddenly wished he hadn't eaten the meal they had brought for him.

A knock on the door caused him to freeze. He glanced again at the clock. *It can't be time. Please let it be the priest.* He nervously called out, "Come in."

The heavy wooden door swung open, and Father Thomas McCarthy walked in.

Whitmore rushed to meet him, grasping the old man's hand tightly. He said, "Thank God you're here, Father. I don't think I can go through with this."

The priest slowly freed his hand from Whitmore's death grip. Wrapping his arm around Whitmore's shoulder, he said, "Well, my son, I'm afraid at this point you don't have much choice. Come now, why don't we use this time wisely. You asked me to hear your confession, and that is what I'm here to do."

The old priest guided Whitmore to a rough wooden bench that sat against one of the bleak walls of the room, and helped him sit down. "Now James, I'm ready to listen."

With wild eyes, Whitmore looked at the priest and said: "It shouldn't be me, Father. I don't deserve this."

"Well lad, the truth is that many people feel as you do. We don't have much time, though. Why don't you share your confession with me? Free your soul, James. Now is the time."

Whitmore had wrapped his arms around himself and was staring at the stone floor. "I'm sorry, Father. I haven't been to confession in over twenty-five years. I don't even know how to start."

"All you have to do is tell the truth, son. It's the truth that will set you free."

He lifted his eyes from the floor. Looking at the priest, he began to speak, "The problem with Emily was that she couldn't keep a secret, and that's why she had to die."

A look of shock registered on the priest's face, but he didn't speak.

Whitmore continued: "Besides, the whole damned thing was her fault, anyway. If Emily would have just thrown the invitation away like I had done to all the others, she'd still be alive today. But, oh no, she couldn't leave it alone. She wrote a reply accepting the invitation on my behalf. Can you believe that, Father? The bitch didn't even tell me what she'd done."

Whitmore looked into the priest's eyes, expecting to see empathy, but instead, the old man looked like he had just drunk a glass of curdled milk.

Ignoring the sour expression on the priest's face, he went on. "I found out what she'd done one night when I was sitting in my study reading *The New York Times*. I came across this article titled 'Whitmore to Speak Publicly: The First Time in Twenty Years.' Naturally, this headline grabs my attention, so I start reading. It stated: 'James Whitmore, author of the exceptional

"The latest Tallent & Lowery book from celebrated novelist Amy Lignor is the best yet, an exciting and colorful suspense story with every element we love."

—Night Owl Reviews

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

TALLEN & LOWERY
BOOK FIVE

AMY
LIGNOR

SUSPENSE
PUBLISHING

short story, *The Winter's Harvest*, and several lesser-known works, will be this year's keynote speaker at Bishop Walsh High School in Rochester, NY. The article went on, but I didn't need to read anymore. I knew what happened; my alma mater had sent their favorite son another request to speak at the school. Emily knew I would never accept, no matter how much she badgered me, so she accepted *for me*.

"Well, I grabbed that paper and marched my ass right out into the kitchen where she was doing dishes, and I introduced the back of my hand to the side of her face. She drops like I hit her with an ax handle and starts blubbing, 'I did it for you. I did it for you.' I'm about to cram that article down her throat when my cell phone rings. I compose myself a little and answer the call. It turns out to be my old agent, who I had not spoken with in years. He tells me that he saw I was going to speak at Bishop Walsh and says there is renewed interest in the story. He said he was even getting feelers from Hollywood about a remake of the original film. Well, Father...I start to think maybe it's time to get back out there. Money was getting tight, and I didn't have a lot going on. I hung up the phone and realized that what Emily had done was a good thing. I went over and tried to apologize to her, but she didn't want to hear it. Just stormed off and locked herself in the bedroom. I knew it would take some time, but she'd come around. She always did."

The more Whitmore talked, the more he relaxed. The priest was right; *confession is good for the soul*. He checked the time again and saw that it was eleven-forty-five. Only fifteen minutes left.

The priest saw Whitmore look at the clock, and tried to interject, but Whitmore stopped him. "I'm sorry, Father, but I only have fifteen minutes left, and I want to finish with the confession."

The priest nodded his head. "Go on."

"Well, the next morning I amble out into the kitchen, and see that Emily had placed the invitation to speak at Bishop Walsh on the kitchen table. At first, it was an ego rush to see it there. After all these years I was going back, and I was going back because they wanted me. Just like the coaches wanted me when I was their star quarterback." A smirk came to his face. "Just like all the girls wanted me when they were in the backseat of my car."

Whitmore stood up from the bench and started to pace the room again. "The problem was she left that goddamn invitation on the table. Sorry about the profanity, Father. I know that's wrong, especially at a time like this."

The priest waved his hand to continue.

"Well, day after day I see that invitation sitting there, mocking me. That's when it dawned on me. I don't know how she found out, but somehow she knows the story that made me famous wasn't mine. Every morning the smug bitch sits across from me drinking her morning coffee, pretending to read the paper, but I know what she's doing. She's trying to break me. She wants me to admit that I took that story from Timmy Wills, and then killed him to cover it up. That wasn't going to happen, though, Father McCarthy, and I'll tell you why. Unlike Emily, I can keep a secret. Twenty-five years have gone by, Father, and I never breathed a word about what I did to Timmy. Not a *word* until this very moment."

He smiled an ingratiating smile, and said, "I know you can keep a secret too, but I guess that comes with your line of work, doesn't it, Father?"

The priest's eyes were wide, and locked on Whitmore. The old man's face was ashen.

"Anyway, no one should feel sorry for Timmy. The little dweeb was lucky to have me as a friend. God knows he didn't have anyone else. Seriously, the only thing the kid had going for him was that he could write. I saw the way the whole damned English class would hang on his every word when that five-foot-nothing twerp stood in front of them and read one of his stories. Instinctively, I knew that he had something I needed. And I was right. When he read me his story, 'The Winter's Harvest,' I knew that was it. I asked him if he had shared the story with anyone else yet; he said no, that I was his best friend and he wanted me to hear it first.

"Well, that was all I needed to hear. I asked Timmy if he wanted to go fishing on my dad's boat that night. I still can't believe how excited the moron got when I asked him that. He accepted on the spot, and I knew that I was going to get what I needed. I told him that I would get in trouble if my dad knew I took anyone on the boat, so he shouldn't tell anyone he was meeting me. Just before he left, I told him to bring the story with him because I wanted to hear it again that night. You should have seen the look on his face; you would have thought the prom queen had just asked him on a date."

The priest's cell phone buzzed. He said "excuse me" and answered the call. "Yes, I understand. I'll wait for you here."

Ending the call the priest looked to Whitmore, and said, "They're on their way."

The panic that had been in Whitmore's eyes when the priest first entered the room was now gone. He was ready.

Whitmore looked to the priest. "I'm almost finished, and I need to get this out before I walk out that door." Without waiting for a reply from the priest, he continued, "You probably can imagine what happened to Timmy when we got out on that boat, but I still feel I need to say it. We had a few beers as we headed out onto Ontario. I even let Tim drive the boat for a while. When we got about twelve miles out, I killed the motor, and we just sat there and watched the moonlight sparkle on top of the water. For a minute I thought about not doing it, but that's exactly what a loser like Timmy would do. I came up behind him and cracked his skull with a propeller wrench. He crumpled to the deck. Out cold.

"Then I wrapped an old anchor chain around his legs and tossed him over the side. He came to when he hit the water, and for a moment he floated there at the surface and stared at me. He never said a word; it was as if he knew this was what life had in store for him. The image of that pale white face in the middle of that cold black water was hard to look at, but it didn't last long. The weight of the anchor chain pulled him under, and he was gone."

Whitmore analyzed the priest's face for a reaction. The old man was shaken and pale. "Now you know what became of Timmy Wills. A lot of people thought the little freak ran off and joined the circus or something just to get away from life on his father's farm, but I knew better...and now you do too.

"Some people would have been dumb and tried to do something with Timmy's story right away, but not me. I waited two years before I took it to a publisher. The rest, as they say, is history."

Whitmore heard them coming down the hall, and he looked up to check the clock one last time. Twelve on the dot. Time was up. He turned back to the priest. "Emily put me in this position, and now she's at the bottom of Ontario with Tim. Now I have to deal with what she got me into. Thank you for listening to my confession, Father. It has made all the difference in the world."

Just then the door opened, and Monsignor Carl Rickman walked in with three members of his staff. He looked at Whitmore, and said, "I hope our prayer room here at the monastery wasn't too spartan for you, sir."

James Whitmore smiled, "Not at all. It was just what I needed. I have to tell you, Father McCarthy was a godsend. As you're well aware, I haven't spoken in public in over twenty years. I had a terrible bout of stage fright before Father McCarthy arrived, but he helped me get through it. I don't think I could give today's commencement speech without the steadying hand the Father provided."

The monsignor nodded and smiled at the priest, then said, "Thomas, perhaps you should sit the commencement out. You don't look well."

The old man raised his eyes up to the monsignor, and feebly nodded his agreement.

Whitmore drew in a deep breath, "You know, I told Father McCarthy that I didn't think I deserved this, but through the power of prayer and confession I see now that indeed I am the person that should be speaking to these young people today."

Clapping his hands together, Whitmore said, "All right then. Let's go inspire the newest graduates of Bishop Walsh." Smiling one last time at the old priest, he turned and headed out to greet the adoring assembly. ■

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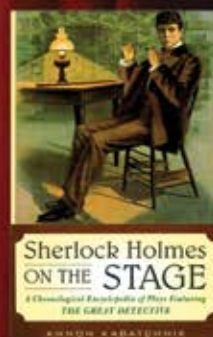
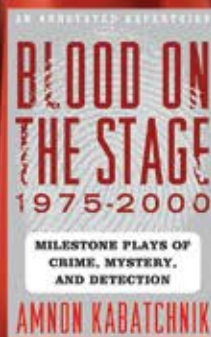
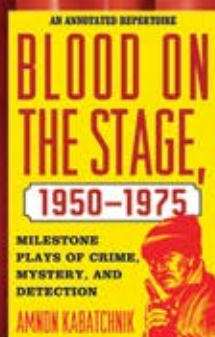
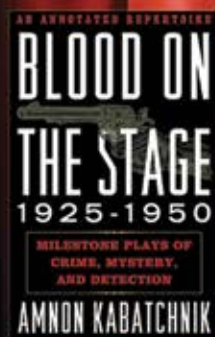
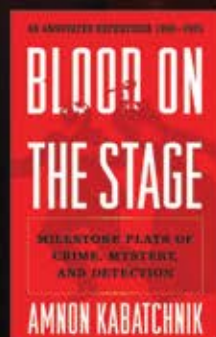
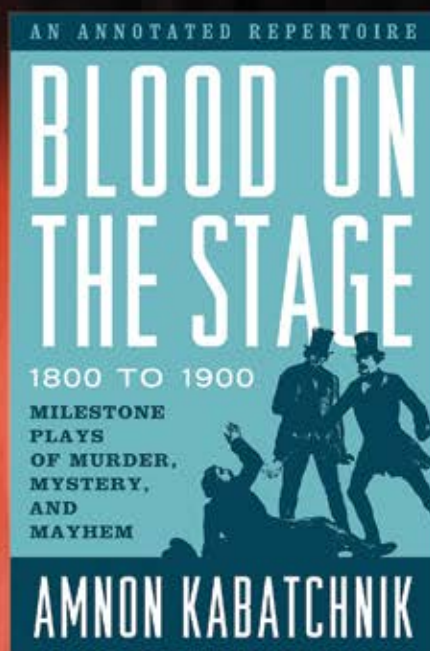
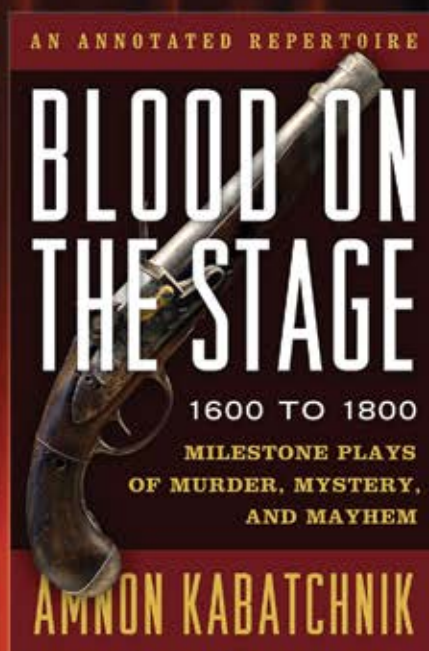
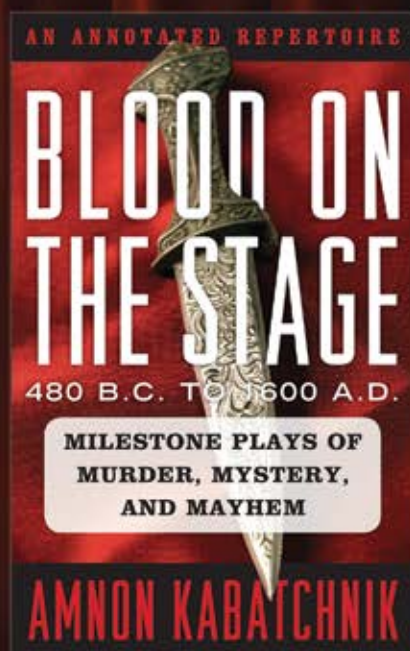
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