

Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

APRIL 2016

Breaking News!
On Writing

DENNIS PALUMBO

STAR TREK WARS

JEFF AYERS

Craft Corner With

BARRY LANCET &

KENDRA ELLIOT

Meet Debut Author

LESLIE KARST

An All-Star Issue

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For a long time I've looked around the entertainment industry—not just books, but movies, music, etc., and I've thought to myself: "When is enough really enough?" Well, with the announcement of a *fifth* "Indiana Jones" movie, I feel I need to talk about this topic.

Now, Jeff Ayers and I will be talking in-depth about this on our radio show "Beyond The Cover," on the Suspense Radio Network, which you can subscribe to via iTunes (*shameless plug*), because both of us feel that too many times things in the entertainment realm are taken too far.

I'm a huge "Indiana Jones" fan and think all the movies are very good, some better than others of course, but very good nevertheless. But when I heard that they were doing yet another one, I was very upset and my thoughts went to the fact that this is nothing more than a money grab. The story has been told over and over. There is nothing more to say and it will only hurt the product we have grown to love. With books, this happens a lot. In my opinion, for whatever that's worth, I think that eighty percent of the series written today have gone past their prime.

For decades, Hollywood has continued to remake movies that were classics and ended up destroying their legacy. The first movie that comes to mind because it recently re-released is *Point Break*. Keanu Reeves and Patrick Swayze made a great movie, but the remake was not only bad, it should have been eaten by a Great White roaming in one of those huge waves, never to return.

The creative process seems to be lost today. I see more and more books focusing on the same thing over and over again. Now this is again, just my opinion, but the military/political thrillers today are saturating the market with the exact same ideas. How many times can you kill a group of terrorists trying to blow up the world? Can we move past this onto something else? Something fresh and new?

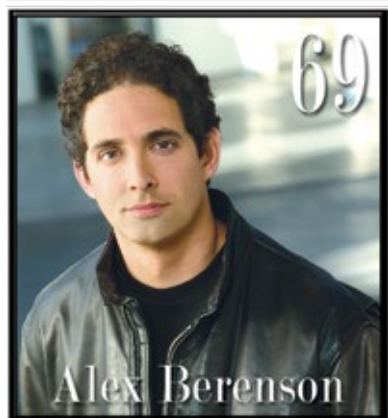
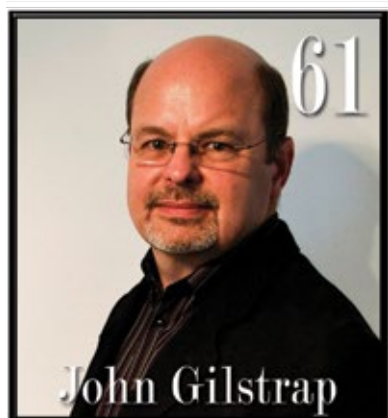
Two authors, who sadly passed on, left us with some wonderful books. Yet, they continue to write books within their "brand" (another word/idea I hate). These incredible minds were Vince Flynn and Tom Clancy. I'm a great fan of both Grant Blackwood and Mark Greaney who have written under the "Clancy" name after his death, but I feel that if the main author has died, his characters and stories should die with him/her. I don't blame Grant or Mark for getting that kind of exposure or collecting that check, I just think it's in bad taste that the estate of the dearly departed kept the "money train" rolling.

I could go on and on, and will be more vocal on the radio show with Jeff, but this is something I had to get off my chest. Again, this is simply my opinion. But I still think that we have come to a point where money and a "brand" have become far more important than the actual product being produced. I think that while we are getting *some* great products, they are being lost in the flood of mediocrity because money is too important. Art in its purest form was never about the almighty dollar; it was about the beauty of the final portrait. In other words, we are sorely missing the Michelangelo's of the written word.

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine ■



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CONTENT

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

April 2016 / Vol. 070

Forensic Files: Transfusion RX By D.P. Lyle, MD	3
<i>What Ifs</i> By Carter Wilson	5
Capturing the Exotic By Barry Lancet	10
The Experience By Kendra Elliot	12
<i>Wealth, Love, Power & Vietnam? Beatriz Williams Answers it All.</i>	14
7 Deadly Sins on Twitter By Lynne Constantine	16
<i>Inside the Pages: Suspense Magazine Book Reviews</i>	18
<i>Movies with Jeff Ayers</i>	40
<i>Featured Artist: Sara Abdel-Latif</i>	41
Excerpt: "Takedown" By Jeff Buck With Jon Land and Lindsay Preston	45
<i>Are You Hungry for More? Meet Leslie Karst</i>	50
<i>S.G. Redling Sings Her Anthem</i>	52
Breaking News: Writing is Hard! By Dennis Palumbo	55
Star Trek Wars By Jeff Ayers	64
<i>Congratulations to the Nominees: The Edgar Awards</i>	71
The Role of Fear By Adam Dunn	76
Excerpt: "Right-Hand Man" By Weldon Burge	78

Forensic Files

By D.P. Lyle, MD

Q&A: IS IT POSSIBLE FOR MY CHARACTER TO COMMIT A MURDER BY CAUSING A TRANSFUSION REACTION?



Q: In my story, an elderly and seriously ill man is murdered by a nurse who switches the blood he is to receive, causing a reaction which kills him. How does this reaction occur and what symptoms would the victim have?

A: Transfusion reactions come in many varieties. They may be as mild as a rash or perhaps chills and fever or may be so severe as to cause death. First let's look at why these reactions occur.

The red blood cells (RBCs) are the carriers of Oxygen (O₂) from the lungs to the tissues and of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) from the tissues to the lungs. This is accomplished by using the hemoglobin inside the RBCs. The RBCs also have Antigens on their surface. It is these antigens that cause the problem.

These antigens are designated either A or B. From these, our blood typing system (ABO System) has been derived. Type A blood has only A antigens, Type B only B antigens, Type AB both, and Type O neither.

Simple so far. But, the serum of the blood (the liquid part) also carries antibodies. It is the reaction of these antibodies with the antigens of the transfused blood that causes problems.

Type A serum (that is the serum of people with Type A blood) has Anti-B antibodies. Type B has Anti-A antibodies. Type AB has neither. Type O has both Anti-A and Anti-B antibodies.

TYPE	ANTIGENS ON RBCS	ANTIBODIES IN SERUM
A	A	ANTI-B
B	B	ANTI-A
AB	AB	NONE
O	NEITHER	ANTI-A AND ANTI-B

Reactions occur when blood with the right Antigen is given to a person with its corresponding antibody. For example, if a Type A person (who has Anti-B antibodies in the serum) receives Type B blood (which has the B antigen on its RBCs) or Type AB blood (which has both A and B antigens) an adverse reaction will occur because the Anti-B antibodies in the

recipient's serum will react with the B antigens on the transfused RBCs. This is a transfusion reaction. The result is agglutination, or "clumping," of the blood cells and the release of several harmful chemicals, which cause the symptoms and signs of this basically "allergic" reaction.

It gets more complicated than this because there are a multitude of other antigen-antibody problems with blood matching. Antigens like the well-known Rh Factor, which is either Positive or Negative, and many others, mostly named after the physicians that discovered them. Your "blood type" is typically expressed only in terms of the ABO and Rh systems. For example, a person who is A-Positive has Type A blood and the Rh Factor Antigen is present, while a person who is O-Negative has Type O blood and the Rh Factor is absent.

Because of the multitude of potentially problematic antigens, prior to the transfusion of blood is "Typed and Cross Matched." This is done to test the donor's blood directly against the recipient's blood for any antigens and antibodies that might cause the blood to be "incompatible," and thus, lead to reactions. In very emergent situations such as gun shots, stabbings or automobile accidents, where the victim is bleeding to death and there isn't time to do a complete Cross Match, "type specific" blood is given. A person's blood type can be determined in a few minutes but cross matching may take hours. In these cases, a Type A person receives Type A blood and everyone hopes for the best.

Another option in these situations is to give "Universal Donor" blood. This is Type O Negative. Since Type O RBCs have no surface antigens they are the least likely to cause a reaction regardless of the recipient's blood type. Reactions can still occur due to other antigens but in an emergent situation, as I said above, you give the best blood type available and hope for the best.

In your story, I would suggest that you have your victim be Type A and have the nurse switch the blood for Type B. This could definitely cause a reaction. The patient would develop fever, chills, and a diffuse, irregular red rash over his entire body. This could begin within minutes or might be delayed for a few hours. He might develop a full blown anaphylactic allergic reaction, which would bring about the above symptoms plus, shortness of breath, low blood pressure, severe shock with pallor, cold and clammy skin, and a bluish tinge to his lips, fingers and toes. Since this represents the severest form of allergic reaction, it would develop fairly quickly and could lead to cardiac arrest and death. If the victim survived all this, it is possible that his kidneys would be severely and irreparably damaged, even requiring dialysis. ■

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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WHAT IFS

By Carter Wilson

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This guy is heavy enough to have lived three lifetimes, Walker thought. He carried the arms of the corpse while Kyle took the legs. Kyle was the smaller and weaker of the two, which necessitated having to stop every thirty seconds and drop the body into the snow.

"Why can't we just bury him here?" Kyle finally asked. Steam rose in wisps from his forehead.

"Too close to the road," Walker said.

"No one's gonna find him. Shit, we probably don't even need to dig. Bears and coyotes will get rid of the evidence."

"C'mon," Walker said. "Pick him up. It's getting late." Walker didn't want to argue the logic surrounding the final resting place of Devon Jackson. Walker was in charge. Kyle's job was to shut the fuck up and do as he was told.

They lifted Jackson again, and, as with each previous lift, the body left a little bloody stain behind in the crusted snow. It was actually kind of pretty, Walker thought. Like a little piece of abstract art. He had never used a corpse as a paintbrush before.

Jackson's eyes had been open until Walker finally bothered to close them. It wasn't the fogged, eternal stare that bothered him as much as Jackson's gaze seemed to stay fixed on Walker as they carried his remains deeper into the Colorado mountains. As if Jackson was blaming Walker, specifically, for his current, lifeless circumstance.

You got no one to blame but yourself, Walker thought. Stupid people plus stupid decisions plus men with guns equals death. Each and every time. It was a basic equation, and Walker had seen it proven many times.

They had about a quarter mile to go, but that seemed forever distant. The trudge was all uphill, in six inches of snow, at eight-thousand feet, and their dead-weight load clocked in easily at two hundred and fifty pounds. Maybe two-seventy-five.

"Guy could've been a Broncos linebacker," Walker said.

Kyle responded only with labored breathing and grunts.

Each man wore a backpack with some basic supplies, one of which was a shovel threaded through a nylon loop. The handle of Walker's shovel kept *thwapping* against his legs as he moved through the snow, counting his steps with metronome-like precision.

Half an hour later they finally reached their destination, a small clearing between two copses of trees. It was a place Walker had been before, doing the same thing he was doing now. It was well-shielded from any road and far from any hiking trail, and it would be a long time, if ever, that Devon Jackson would resurface. As they dropped the corpse yet again into

the snow, Walker had a brief flash of hiking deep into nearby mountains as a kid with his family to cut down their annual Christmas tree. It was a lot more effort than going to the local tree lot, but his father always said one of the luxuries of growing up in Colorado was walking right in the *goddamn middle of the Rocky Mountains* and cutting down your own *goddamn Christmas tree*. Walker's dad collapsed and died from a heart attack the day after Christmas when Walker was fifteen, and the family never celebrated Christmas again.

"Here?" Kyle asked.

Walker turned and saw Kyle's frosty breath fuming the air. He reached into his jacket and pulled out his GPS device and checked the location.

"Yeah, here." Walker took off his backpack, removed the shovel, and pointed the spade at a small clearing between two Aspen trees. "We'll dig there."

Kyle reached into the front pocket of his dirty jeans and pulled out a small Ziploc bag, which he then proceeded to unroll.

"What are you doing?"

"Need a bump," Kyle said.

"Are you a fuckin' idiot?"

Kyle held his arms wide. "What?"

"We gotta bury this guy and you're going to snort heroin first?"

"Listen, man. I'm spent. I can barely fucking breathe. I'm half your size, and just helped lug this motherfucker to the top of Mount Everest here, and now we have to dig a hole in the goddamn frozen ground for him. Unless I do a bump, no way I can do that. Then it's all up to you to get the job done. Is that what you want?"

Walker looked at him and wished he'd been paired up with someone else for this task. Johnny, maybe. Hell, even Simms would've been okay. But Kyle was useless on so many levels. The only reason Kyle was here was because he was a family friend of the boss and was looking to get in with the operation, work his way up. The boss probably didn't know about Kyle's heroin hobby. Walker would make sure that changed once they got back to Denver. He wasn't going to go through this shit again.

"Don't fuck me on this," Walker said. "And be quick."

He didn't watch Kyle snort, because that would just piss him off more. Walker had no respect for anyone who was a slave to any substance. Heroin would probably be the thing that killed Kyle, either directly or indirectly. The kid was, what, maybe twenty-five? Walker had fifteen years and a world of knowledge over Kyle, and he marked Kyle as a weak, runt puppy clamoring for a nipple. Like many runts, Walker expected Kyle would likely shrivel up and die.

The scent of evergreen needles and wet bark filled Walker's head. He lowered his shovel into the snow and scraped out a small area, then pushed the edge of the spade into the frozen soil. Could've been concrete.

Kyle snorted. "Ah, *goddamn* it!"

Walker turned and saw Kyle shake out his body, as if flinging off attacking ghosts. Then his body stilled and his eyes rolled toward the treetops. "That's what I needed."

"Keep it down," Walker said. "Jesus, do want every creature on this mountain to hear you?"

"Sorry."

"Just start digging." Walker scored a line in the snow with his shovel, a perfect rectangle, just large enough to accommodate the dead man. "Here. You work that end."

Walker looked up to the top of the hill, about fifty feet away. A sandstone outcropping capped the rise, three or four slanted layers of red rock, smoothed by time and wind. In the distance behind the rocks, the sun slowly made its way down the sky. Walker figured they had about an hour before it started getting dark. This was not a place he wanted to be when that happened, because dark in the mountains was a special kind of dark. They each had headlamps, but Walker didn't like being out in a place like this at night. Too many noises attached to things you couldn't see.

"Gotta work fast," he told Kyle.

"I can barely break through the ground," Kyle said. "This isn't going to work."

"It'll work," Walker said. "This isn't the first time I've done this in the winter. Besides, aren't you Superman now with that shit in your system?"

Walker speared the ground and came up with an unsatisfying few brittle chunks of earth, then tossed them aside. Kyle followed suit, and soon they fell into a steady, silent rhythm. Walker worked faster but Kyle wasn't far behind. The sweat on his body warmed his skin against the cold, though he knew this sweat would turn against him when the job was done. On the way back to the truck, as his body cooled down, that sweat would turn to ice.

They each stopped twice for water. During the second break, Walker eyed Jackson, who was by far the most peaceful of

the three of them. Walker didn't feel jealous, but for the moment he didn't feel sorry for him, either.

"My skin is burning up, man," Kyle said. Walker looked over and saw sweat glistening on Kyle's stubbled, gaunt cheeks. Kyle wore a ski jacket a size too large, and was probably soaking wet inside of it.

"You shouldn't have taken that shit," Walker said. "But you did, so now you have to deal with it. The sun is going down and I don't want to be here after dark, and I'm sure as hell not carrying this body back down the mountain. So keep digging."

Kyle seemed on the verge of protest but Walker turned and resumed his work. The soil was a bit more tender a foot down, making the work marginally easier. Kyle gradually went back to digging, but Walker could see his pace slowing. Still, if they just kept at it, they could finish and get back to the truck with perhaps even a little bit of daylight to spare.

Fifteen minutes later, Kyle dropped his shovel and sat in the unfinished grave.

"I think I'm having a heart attack," he said.

"No, you're not."

"Seriously, man." Kyle clutched his chest.

"Kyle, listen to me. I'm not digging this grave any bigger to accommodate your skinny ass in addition to Jackson. So just catch your breath and get back to work."

"I'm telling you. *I can't*."

Maybe he *was* having a heart attack, Walker thought. Did heroin really crank you up that much? Or was this soft, Florida transplant just completely ill-prepared for hard work at altitude? Could be a combination, but it didn't really matter. Walker knew how to take bad news and move on, and in this moment the only certainty was that Kyle—dead or alive—would be of no further use for the task at hand.

"Take your water and go sit up on those rocks," Walker said, pointing to the sandstone outcropping. "They'll have a little warmth left on them. Stay dry. Drink some water and rest a bit. If you can come back and help, great. If not, we'll just have to deal with that shit later, won't we?"

Kyle looked up and nodded silently like a young schoolboy accepting his teacher's discipline. As he rose from the grave and walked toward the rocks, he no longer clutched his chest.

Walker resumed work, and now a fresh swell of anger powered his digging. He was forty goddamn years old, deep in the Rocky Mountains, digging a grave for a man *he had killed*. Jackson's death meant nothing to him personally, but the boss had wanted Jackson dead and Walker wanted the five grand the job paid, so now here he was.

His arms ached from the repetitive motion, and he could feel his lower back threatening to seize up on him. His cotton shirt was sweat-soaked, an unpleasant thing when that shirt is encased in two more layers of cold-weather gear. Walker glanced up and saw the silhouette of Kyle sitting on the angled sandstone, drinking from his water bottle. The sun was just behind Kyle, inching steadily lower, and the knowledge Walker would likely be digging in the dark spiked his anger.

He wanted to question what he was doing with his life, but that question had been left unanswered so many times it really wasn't worth asking any more. If Walker wanted change, he simply had to change. Endless rumination was a greater health risk than that shit caked inside Kyle's nostrils.

The spade hit a tree root, jarring the bones in his arms. He lifted the shovel and attacked the root, thrust after thrust, as sweat now drizzled in a steady rain off his nose.

Tonight, he thought. I'm making a change tonight. Get the money, tell the boss I'm done, and that's that. Get out, move on, force the change.

But what if...

Stop it.

Through the root, deep into the dirt. Fire burned through his body. His arms grew limp from exertion, and yet there was still so much more to go.

Don't think about the what ifs. Every moment of life could be a *what if*, and you're where you are right now because of *what ifs*. *What if* is a poison, and you've been ingesting it in small doses over a long time. Won't be much longer before it kills you. Take the five grand, drain the rest of your bank account, and get out of Denver. Leave behind everything else. Start new, legit this time. Cut your hair, shave your beard. Hell, change your name, even. You can make yourself into whatever or whoever you want, and fuck all the *what ifs* that try to stop you.

He was screaming now, screaming at the goddamned tree root, the dirt, at the shovel he forced deeper and deeper into the ground, at the searing pain now in his side and the cramping in his back. Walker screamed at Jackson's body, which offered nothing in return, and he screamed at his own stupid self for screaming when attention was the last thing they needed.

And when Walker stopped screaming, it took a moment to realize he'd been silent the whole time.

But there was screaming, wasn't there?

It was coming from the rocks.

Walker dropped the shovel and jumped from the grave. No doubt about it. Kyle was screaming his fucking head off, and probably all of western Colorado could hear him. *Bad trip*, was Walker's immediate thought. That shithead is having a bad trip, and we're in it deep if anyone hears him. Walker ran as fast as the crusty snow would allow. He wasn't sure how he was going to do it, but his only priority when he reached the rocks was to silence Kyle.

The sunset kissed the top of rocks and shone a dull, rusty orange directly into Walker's eyes. He could barely make out Kyle, who appeared as nothing more than a silhouette, his body shaking and bouncing on top of the flat rocks, a marionette sloppily controlled by an impatient child.

More screams. Short, sharp, deep.

"Shut the fuck up!" Walker shouted. He lunged toward Kyle. "Just shut up!"

"Help me, oh god hel—"

Kyle's voice was replaced with another piercing, agonized scream, but this one sounded different. There was a wetness at the end of it.

After five more strides, Kyle came into a clearer view. He was on his back, one knee bent, the other leg kicking in uncontrolled spasms. Walker could only see the lower half of Kyle's body; the upper half was hanging over the far edge of the rock.

"Walker—"

The second Walker heard his name, he knew whatever was happening to Kyle was a big problem. Kyle hadn't just said Walker's name. He'd *gurgled* it.

Choking on his vomit. Goddamnit, this kid is choking on his own vomit.

Walker finally reached the rock and climbed up. Kyle was thrashing around as Walker finally stood on the rock, just in front of Kyle's feet.

Then Walker saw the upper half of Kyle, and knew he wasn't having a bad heroin trip.

Kyle's problem was his neck. It was snugly buried inside the jaws of a mountain lion.

Walker froze, his knees bent, arms stretched out for balance, and the mountain lion looked up at him with wide, golden eyes, the pupils seeming to hold the last fiery seconds of the sunset within them.

"*Hee-yah!*" Walker screamed at the animal, waving his arms. "Get out of here!"

The cat didn't move except to gently fold back its pointy ears against its head. Kyle reached up with his arms and tried to swipe at his attacker, but his blows were feeble and ineffective. Then Kyle tried to pull his head forward and away from the teeth that held him, and that was the moment Walker realized how much blood there was. It spilled from Kyle's neck onto the rock, creating a thin, crimson river running down the sandstone.

"Don't move," Walker told him. "Don't fight it. Relax your body."

Kyle gurgled again, and if he was trying to say something, Walker didn't understand it.

Walker looked down for a rock he could throw at the cat, but there was none. He screamed again and waved his arms, but the cat crouched, frozen in place, fangs buried deep within Kyle's neck, wide eyes unblinking.

Walker's only choice was to charge the animal, hoping to scare it away. But the thing was big. In all his years in Colorado, all the time he spent in the foothills and deep in the mountains, he'd only seen a mountain lion once, and that was from a distance of at least a hundred feet. He didn't realize the true size of these things. Had to be at least a hundred and fifty pounds. Maybe more. Bigger than Kyle, who had a junkie's waify build. If Walker tried to attack the cat, would the cat attack back, or just run away?

Maybe there was another way.

"It's okay," Walker whispered. He wasn't sure if he was talking to Kyle or the cat. "It's okay." Walker crouched, making himself smaller to the animal.

He took one, slow step forward, and now he was close enough to reach down and grab Kyle's ankles. But that would do no good if the mountain lion didn't first release its grip. The cat countered Walker's movement with a half-step backwards of its own, pulling Kyle a few inches further off the rock.

Kyle moaned, and his eyes bulged like overfilled water balloons in their sockets. He shot a panicked gaze at Walker but then his focus seemed to go somewhere else, somewhere distant, deep into the mountain forest, beyond even this moment. Kyle was going somewhere else, a place Walker didn't want to go. Kyle was going into the darkness.

"Relax," Walker said. This time he was talking to the mountain lion. "Just let him go. Let him go."

That was when Walker noticed the back, left haunch of the cat. There was a gash, and the golden fur surrounding it was blackened with crusted blood. Whatever had happened to the animal, Walker immediately knew it was the reason Kyle was within its jaws. Wounded predators have limited hunting options, so they take chances, going after targets they might normally not pursue. Like a slow-moving junkie tripping out on top of a rock formation. The mountain lion had heard them and saw an easy target.

"Look," Walker told the cat. "There's a body just down there. It's not gonna fight you, and it's twice the size of this guy. Let go of him, and you can have a fucking Thanksgiving feast. You'd be doing all of us a favor. Hell, I wouldn't even have to finish digging the grave."

Kyle started breathing faster and the air in his throat bubbled around his blood, which sounded like a kid blowing through a straw into a glass of milk. Not good, Walker thought. The chances that any of this was going to work out were getting slim.

He froze in place and looked at the cat, and the cat looked at him. They were separated by only a few feet, and Walker very slowly began to reach his gloved hand out to the animal, as if to allow him to sniff it and confirm his intentions were benign. The glow in the cat's eyes darkened as the sun finally disappeared beyond the mountainous horizon, and the entire landscape softly dimmed.

"It's okay. I'm not gonna hurt you."

Walker reached out a little more, straightening his arm. He looked down at Kyle, who met his gaze. Walker nodded at him. *It's going to be okay. I got this.*

The cat's face softened, just a bit, but it softened. Walker could see it. The jaws relaxed a fraction of an inch, and there was even the slightest relief on Kyle's face. The cat's eyes even narrowed from their wide, threatened expression to one bordering on curiosity.

Walker reached closer. *This would work.*

The blood pumped behind his ears, and Walker could now smell the musk of the animal, tangy and raw. His hand was less than a foot away from its nose, and though he was tense, Walker wasn't scared. There was a connection here with this creature. In that moment, Walker realized this mountain lion had never experienced a *what if* in its life. The cat just chose to do something and did it, never looking back in regret, never wondering about what *would* have happened. The animal's life was linear. It was how Walker wanted to live.

Closer.

His hand now just inches away, Walker knew with absolute certainty today was his last day living like this. Everything would be linear after this, with no indecision. After today, he would live like the cat.

"It's okay," Walker whispered. "I understand you."

The cat didn't move for a moment. It sat frozen, considering Walker and his outstretched hand. Walker thought how he would gently, *so gently*, reach a little more and just lightly touch the top of the cat's head, and when that happened they would be in synch. They would have an understanding. And that's all any of them needed at the moment, wasn't it?

Then the cat narrowed its eyes and clamped with such force onto Kyle's neck that Walker actually heard the crunch of vertebrae. Kyle expelled a sickening last rattle of wet air. His body stiffened for a frozen moment as his eyes rolled upward, and then Kyle went limp, as if the marionette was finally dropped to the ground by the bored child.

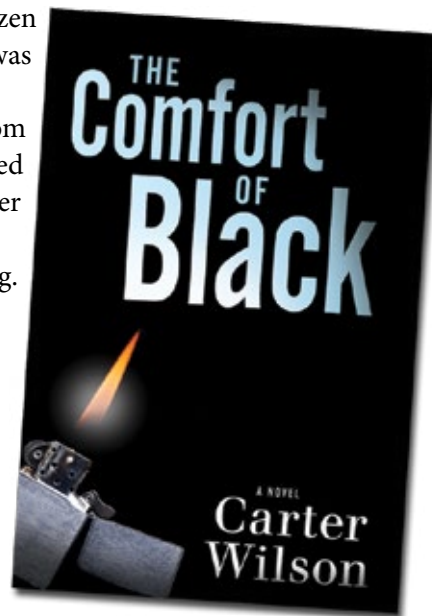
Walker pulled his arm back as the cat started to move, slowly backing up from Walker and dragging Kyle's body off the rock. Moments later, the mountain lion carried Kyle out of Walker's limited view, and then nothing was left of his partner but his water bottle and streaks of fresh blood along rock and snow. *Linear* streaks.

Walker finally stood upright and surveyed the world from the top of the outcropping.

"Fuck."

The darkness he was hoping to avoid had finally come. ■

USA Today bestselling author Carter Wilson was born in New Mexico and grew up in Los Angeles before attending Cornell University. His thriller novels have received critical acclaim, including starred reviews from Publishers Weekly and Library Journal. Carter's fourth novel, "Revelation," will be released in December 2016. Carter lives in a spooky Victorian house in Colorado with his two children.



CAPTURING THE EXOTIC: TAKING READERS FAR, FAR AWAY

By Barry Lancet

Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Taking us between the covers this month is Barry Lancet, an award-winning author of an international mystery-thriller series. We requested he take us behind the scenes of some of the alluring settings he explores in his novels. Specifically, we asked, “*How do you write about a culture that is different from that of the United States, and make it work in thriller writing?*”

I have an unfair advantage in writing about one of the main exotic locales in my Jim Brodie thrillers. Like my protagonist, Brodie—an American art dealer who lives in Japan and San Francisco—I’ve lived in two worlds, having grown up in California but spent most of my adult life as an expat in Tokyo.

To me, Japan, and the bigger canvas of Asia, is a living, breathing organism with unique cultures, customs, languages, and stories—millions and millions of stories. So with each book, my task is to choose from among them.

Selection is a big part of the process. This is the case for all writers. A novel is a compendium of hundreds, if not thousands, of personal choices. Choosing judiciously is the key. But you don’t have to live somewhere to incorporate the feel of a place into a story. A short visit, a vacation, or even just research and imagination can give you the tools to draw readers into a locale that is far, far away. The key is picking the right details.

Here are a few things I consider.

SELECT SOMETHING SYMBOLIC OF THE LARGER STORY

“Tokyo Kill,” the second book in the *Jim Brodie* series, opens with an ancient Japanese WWII vet coming to Jim Brodie for help. The old soldier believes Chinese Triads are killing off his war buddies in Tokyo, and disguising the attacks as home invasions. The police think the withered warrior is crazy or senile or both. Brodie listens, is charmed, and agrees to help, then soon finds the problem taking him places he never imagined.

Unlike the other books in the series, “Tokyo Kill” takes place mostly in Japan. But I wanted a Chinese flavor as well, so I set a lengthy sequence in Yokohama’s Chinatown. Yokohama has a fascinating history as the first place “those barbarian foreigners” were allowed into the country when samurai-ruled Japan was forced to open its doors in the mid-1800s. The Chinese were among those barbarians. In a neighboring district, they eventually created one of the world’s biggest Chinatowns, which has its own fascinating history. Among other things, it acted as a safe haven for many famous Chinese radicals of old. Along with the physical description of the place, the detail I focused on was the personal struggle of *people*, not politicians or military leaders, on both sides of the war, with a colorful yet connected backdrop.

FIND THE ESSENCE

Having lived in Japan for more than two decades, I learned how to penetrate the veneer of courtesy. Actually, I peer behind the façade, then drill down another layer.

In Japan, a strong sense of social order and propriety help keep the violent crime rate down. What goes unseen is the rampant white-collar crime and corruption. Not only does Japan have some of the most well-mannered people in the world, it has some of the most well-mannered criminals. The tells are different but they are there. Brodie encounters this phenomenon in one form or another in each book, in all its nuance and glory. In “Pacific Burn,” it is apparent in the actions of the “nuclear mafia”—the network of Japanese utility companies, government bureaucracies, and politicians who all benefit from the cash flow of the lucrative nuclear power industry. The consequences are a real-life nuclear meltdown of historic proportions. The key to catching the exotic, is to dig deep and look under the rock.

WEAVE IN THE FASCINATING STUFF

I find it invigorating to blend cultural nuggets into the plot of my mystery-thrillers. But they have to surface as a natural part of the story. In each of the three Brodie novels, I introduce some dozen sites, cultural tangents, and historical bits into the plot lines. From choosing just the right town or street to the perfect cuisine (*fugu*, or poison blowfish, in my latest novel), I try to include the most interesting things that capture the people and the scene. The trick is not overdoing it. Show restraint.

AVOID THE "THAT'S SO UNIQUE!" SYNDROME

The flip side of weaving in the fascinating is that you don't want to overdo it. Have you ever heard an author say, “That's so unique I had to include it in my book”? I don't subscribe to this school. “Unique for unique's sake” is a trap. Unless there is more heft behind its inclusion, it will simply read like a gimmick.

Often it is not the unique, but the everyday, that can draw a reader in. That's not to say the unique is off-limits. In my latest, I threw in some Japanese pop-culture in the form of cosplay, the popular Japanese practice of dressing up as a favorite fantasy character that is now practiced in the U.S. and elsewhere. But such examples must emerge naturally in the course of the story, as part of the color, culture, and character of the place.

THE GOLDEN RULE

The Japanese have a lot of pride in their country, culture, and way of life. Even those who know very little about tradition. And as I travel to other countries, I've found this to be true of most people, even the more cynical. As such, I feel a responsibility to present an accurate picture of the places I include in my books. And the same goes for the cultural artifacts, history, and the people.

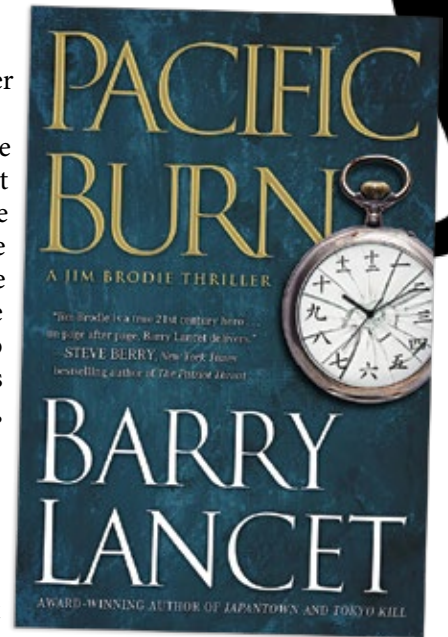
If, over and above that, my characters want to express contrary personal views, that's fine. But I make a distinction between the facts and opinion.

I work extremely hard to present an accurate portrait. That is the golden rule. The corollary is, “Never dumb things down.” I distill to the core for brevity and clarity, which I liken to polishing and re-polishing a beloved family heirloom: when its done, it shines.

For more information on the ITW please visit: www.thrillerwriters.org. To subscribe to *The Big Thrill* newsletter please visit: www.thebigthrill.org. ■

Award-winning author Barry Lancet's newest novel is “*Pacific Burn*.” Lancet moved to Japan more than twenty-five years ago with a plan to stay two years. He's still there. What he encountered fascinated him, and the desire to fully understand the inexplicably exotic aspects of Japan and Asia kept him there longer than he planned. He published his first novel “*Japantown*” after more than twenty years in Tokyo, by which time he had learned Japanese, absorbed the culture and the history of his host country, and understood the mindset of the people. “*Japantown*” was a *Suspense Magazine* “Best Debut of the Year,” took home the prestigious Barry Award for “Best First Novel,” and has been translated into 8 languages in 12 countries. Lancet followed up with another Jim

Brodie adventure in “*Tokyo Kill*,” which was a finalist for a Shamus Award for “Best Novel of the Year.” “*Pacific Burn*” continues Brodie's adventures. Lancet still makes his home in Japan but visits the United States frequently. But wherever he might be, you can always find him on *Twitter* (@BarryLancet) and *Facebook*, and [learn more about his books on his website](#).



THE EXPERIENCE: SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION



By Kendra Elliot

Photo Credit: Provided by Author

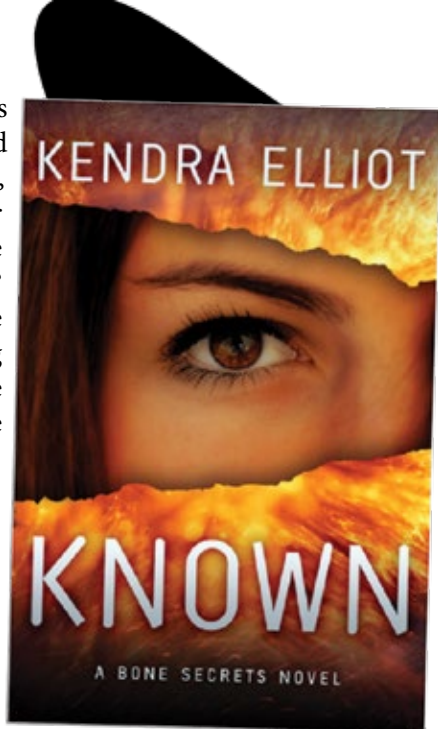
When I write, I ask myself through the entire manuscript, “What do I want my reader to experience?” I ask it every time I craft a scene, develop a character, or develop dialogue. I know what I like to experience in a book and I use my own enjoyment as a guide. I want to be glued to the chemistry between the characters, I want to be hooked by a line of mystery, I want to learn something. Not like in a science class, but as if in a fascinating TV program. I want to close the book and feel utterly satisfied with the characters at the end. When a reader finishes my book, I want their first question to be, “What else did she write?”

My books typically start with a striking opening scene that plunges the reader immediately into the action or raises the question of “what is *going on*?” because I love to be hooked from page one. Before I start each book, I spend a lot of time thinking and mulling over multiple openings, searching for that opening that will grab a reader. This process drives my husband crazy. He’ll ask what my next book is about and I’ll say, “I don’t know,” because I don’t want to explain that I’ve considered and rejected twenty different openings. I’m in a search for the best experience for my reader.

When I sketch out a character, my goal is to create someone my reader will root for. I need to know what my character values, what they hate more than anything, what would destroy their world, and what they love. They must work in a profession that my reader hopefully finds fascinating and be good at what they do. I want the reader to worry

**“WHEN A READER FINISHES MY BOOK, I WANT THEIR FIRST QUESTION TO
BE “WHAT ELSE DID SHE WRITE?” ”**

about the character's emotional state, and since I write suspense, worry for their physical health. Are the characters perfect? Heck no. They have quirks and strong opinions and make blunders. But I save the truly weird bits and oddball traits for the secondary characters. It's not comfortable to make my main character a narcissistic drug addict, but I have no problem writing her twin sister that way.



I want my readers to feel extremely satisfied and sated with the ending. In my own personal rulebook, this means a happy ending for the main characters, not "I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE KILLED MY FAVORITE CHARACTER IN THE LAST FIVE PAGES." Since I like to feel optimistic for the characters I read about, I always leave my main characters looking forward to the future. They might have a bullet hole or two in them, but they're content and I know my reader will be content.

I have my reader's emotions foremost in my mind with every scene I write. I ask, what will manipulating my heroine's happiness do to my reader right at this moment? What will my reader feel if my hero is forced to step over his ethical boundaries? What will my reader feel if my heroine keeps her mouth shut instead of telling the villain to pound sand? Or would it feel better if she does? I always search for the strongest emotional payoff in each scene.

For more information on the ITW please visit: www.thrillerwriters.org. To subscribe to *The Big Thrill* newsletter please visit: www.thebigthrill.org. ■

Kendra Elliot won the 2015 and 2014 Daphne du Maurier awards for Best Romantic Suspense. She was also an International Thriller Writers' finalist for "Best Paperback Original" and a Romantic Times finalist for Best Romantic Suspense. She grew up in the lush Pacific Northwest and still lives there with her husband, three daughters, two cats, and a Pomeranian. She's always been fascinated with forensics, refuses to eat anything green, and loves a strong Mai Tai on the beach on Kauai. Visit Kendra at kendraelliot.com.



"Robert Kidera is an absolute master of mystery! He grabs you with irresistible intrigue and fresh, seductive writing and refuses to let go while he pummels you with twist after delicious twist."

—*NY Times* Bestselling Author Darynda Jones

A GABE MCKENNA MYSTERY

GET LOST

ROBERT D. KIDERA

What do you do when the dead come back and your loved ones disappear?

All Gabe McKenna wanted was a new floor for his barn. What he got was seven corpses, all long dead.

"RED GOLD" RECEIVED THE 2015 TONY HILLERMAN AWARD FOR BEST FICTION, BEST MYSTERY OF 2015, & BEST EBOOK AT THE NEW MEXICO/ARIZONA BOOK AWARDS



WWW.ROBERTKIDERABOOKS.COM

SUSPENSE PUBLISHING

WEALTH, LOVE, POWER & VIETNAM?

Beatriz Williams Answers it all

Interview by Elise Cooper for *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Marilyn Roos



“Tiny Little Thing” is a fascinating look at wealth, love, power, ambition, and to what lengths family members will and won’t go to in order to protect each other. The historical events in the book are intertwined perfectly within the lives of the characters that make for a realistic and gripping story. Incorporated within this character driven mystery are the issues of the mid-1960s, including political intrigue, the controversy of the Vietnam veterans, and the treatment of women.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): Did you base your characters on the Kennedy family?

Beatriz Williams (B.W.): Yes, *I wanted to write a compelling story of a political dynasty with the patriarch pushing behind the scenes for this to happen. I always loved history from childhood. In college I majored in Anthropology that included the study of history and human nature. I was able to incorporate my studies into my writings, where history becomes the scenery, weaved into the plot. I think of myself as a historical novelist.*

E.C.: Did you want to explore the political wife?

B.W.: *The 1960s presented the friction between the traditional and the modern, which included intense social, political, economic, and artistic change. There was the choice of being married to your job or your man, but not both. Political wives had a specific role. I call it the “maniquinization” of the American female. We expect our political wives to dress and act in a certain way. Just look at Kate Middleton who acts in a lady-like manner and is judged by what she is wearing. Of course, Jackie Kennedy became a symbol for the celebrity politician’s wife, starting that culture. John and Jackie Kennedy were the visual image of perfection. She was the Queen to his King.*

E.C.: You also discuss the Vietnam issue. Why?

B.W.: *I did a crash course in the Vietnam War. I want the readers who were against the war to recognize they were blaming the wrong people. I deliberately portrayed one character, Tom, as obnoxious toward the Major. He is someone who enjoys privilege without recognizing the sacrifice of those serving. He would certainly never make that sacrifice himself. My grandfather was a torpedo bomber in the Pacific during World War II. I understand the sacrifices made by soldiers. That is why I had Caspian lose a leg in the war. I wanted to emphasize people change in a fundamental way either physically or mentally.*

E.C.: Part of the mystery is the car found in the shed. How did you come up with the idea?

B.W.: *I read about a car found in a shed in Greenwich, and was sold for about \$12 million. I loved the idea that artifacts can*

“The 1960s presented the friction between the traditional and the modern, which included intense social, political, economic, and artistic change.”

connect the past and the present. In the next book, “Along the Infinite Sea,” I continue this car story: who buys it and why it was put in the Cape Cod shed.

E.C.: Another mystery surrounds a photograph. Do you have an interest in it?

B.W.: Not a personal interest. I wanted to show how, in the 1960s, photographs played such an important role. I used photography to enhance the plot. Tiny was expected to look good in all the photographs and there was that one sent to blackmail her.

E.C.: It seems a lot of female authors are writing about miscarriages. Why did you have Tiny experience one?

B.W.: As I wrote in the book, during the 1960s it was not an issue talked about much. Now it is given a lot more attention. I thought about Jackie Kennedy who also struggled with fertility and was expected to give birth to the perfect child. I am also very conscious that women of my generation have tended to have babies in their 30's. It seems that fertility problems are much more on the radar screen.

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

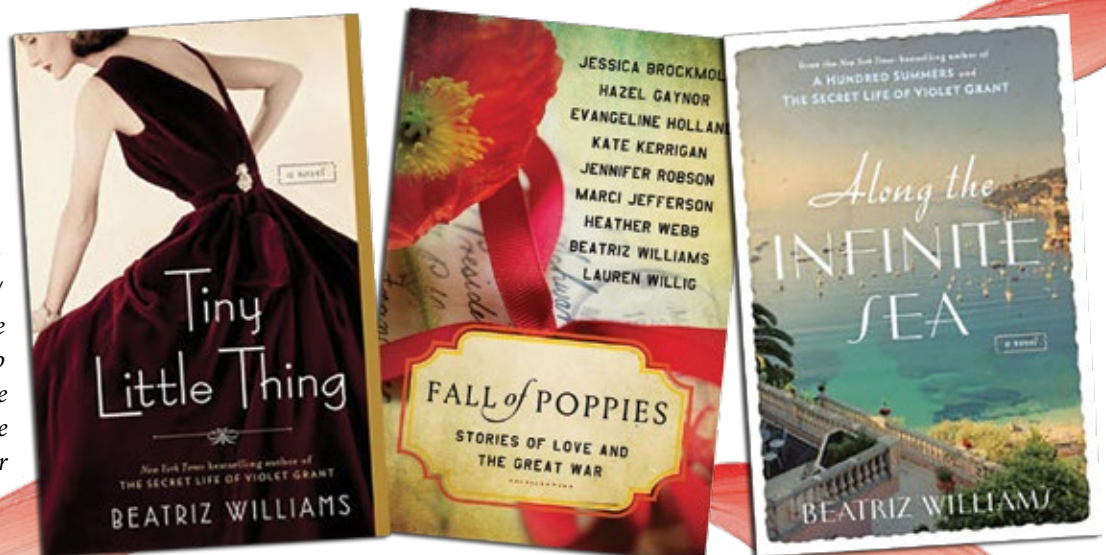
B.W.: An entertaining story about trust, integrity, and the personality of politics.

E.C.: Can you give a heads up about your next book?

B.W.: It takes place in Europe during the 1930s. Nick Greenwald is back. He is the friend of Stesan, a Jewish man who is fighting to stop Nazism, to affect change from within. Stesan is having an affair with a French American woman who is married to a German army officer. I delve into the treatment of Jews during Hitler's early years. There is a lot of discussion about the Nuremberg Laws and ends with Kristallnacht in 1938.

We'd like to thank Beatriz for taking the time to sit down with us. For more information on this very talented author, check out her website at www.beatrizwilliams.com. ■

Elise Cooper has interviewed a wide variety of bestselling authors for many years. Her book reviews and Q/A's focus on women, thrillers, crime mysteries, and national security issues. She considers books an important part of our lives and hopes these reviews/interviews will provide some insight. In addition, she has set up book tours for authors and was the Director of Author Relations for the 2014 Veteran's Benefit Book Fair held in San Diego.



7 Deadly Sins on Twitter

What NOT to do if you Want to Grow Your Following

By Lynne Constantine
Graphic Provided by Author



Protect Your Tweets: Twitter is an open platform based on people being able to connect with anyone. If I go to follow you and I get a “pending” message, I unfollow immediately. Unless you only plan to approve family and friends (that’s what a personal Facebook is for) why are you going through the motion to approve me? Chances are your approval will be based on nothing other than the profile info anyway, which you have no way of verifying is accurate.

Use True Twit Validation: Another action that makes me hit unfollow. Why make it hard for people to follow you? What are you validating? If a robot account does follow you—so what? It doesn’t have any real effect on you and all you are doing is annoying legitimate account holders and discouraging them from following you.

Send Automatic Direct Messages: No one reads these and they smack of spam.

Tweet: I just unfollowed XX of people not following me. Don’t advertise that you’re using an automated service to manage your account. It looks unprofessional and it’s unnecessary to announce such things.

Never Follow Back: See #4. Most knowledgeable Twitter users *are* using a service to check and see those who don’t follow back. If you want to keep those new followers, it’s polite to reciprocate and follow those with similar interests or in similar associations and groups as you.

Ignore Tweets: Twitter is about being social. If someone tweets to you—answer them. If you ignore others tweets to you, you will soon get a reputation as a robot.

Have a Temper Tantrum: Twitter is not the place for vitriol, complaints, and rants. Unless you want to be known for controversy, watch what you say. It stays there forever.

So what *should* you do?

Read 10 Tips to Increase Your Twitter Engagement.

Happy Tweeting! ■



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

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



Fairfield's Auction,
a new
Witherston Murder
Mystery
by Betty Jean
Craige,
author of
Downstream

Released by Black Opal Books on February 6, 2016

Paperback: \$11.99 ISBN 9781626944091 ~ eBook: \$3.99 ISBN 9781626944084

On a cold winter evening in the small mountain town of Witherston, Georgia, antique dealer Hempton Fairfield auctions off rare Cherokee artifacts, Appalachian antiques, and a young African Grey parrot. Late that night, a blizzard stops traffic for a three-mile stretch of the Witherston Highway, prohibiting anyone's arrival or departure and stranding an eighteen-wheel semi full of chickens. The next morning two bodies are discovered in the snow, the chickens are running free, and the parrot is missing, leaving a number of unanswered questions. What happened? Where's the parrot? How did the chickens escape the stranded truck? Who rightfully owns the remnants of the thousand-year-old Cherokee civilization? Who killed the two men? And, most importantly, how many more bodies will turn up before the killer is caught?

Auctioning off Cherokee antiquities does not promote longevity...

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

THE INFIDEL STAIN

By M.J. Carter

This new book is the much anticipated sequel to Carter's popular, "The Strangler Vine," featuring Jeremiah Blake and William Avery. History is back, suspense is back, and the vibrant color and description of the world is back, which is something Carter does extremely well.

This time around, the men are back in England where Captain Avery is living in Devon with his wife when Blake summons him to come to London. As much as he does not want to admit it, Avery is glad of the diversion that visiting London brings him. Nevertheless, he is concerned when he comes upon Blake because of the way the poor man looks; pale, Blake is not exactly in the best of health.

Blake tells him that they have been asked by Viscount Allington, after being recommended to him by the former head of the East India Company's Secret Department, to help Allington with a case. It seems that two printers have been viciously murdered in London, and Allington, a well-known humanitarian, is concerned that nothing has been done by the newly formed police department. He asks the two men to investigate and see whether they can solve these heinous crimes. As the police seem to be (oddly) unwilling to investigate the case, links begin to appear between the murdered men and a group who is protesting for the right to vote for everyone.

As the men go through the back alleys, the author brings in some familiar names, including that of Charles Dickens. As it was in the first installment, the writing is well-researched, and the characters of Blake and Avery balance each other out as well as Sherlock and Watson. Yet another great historical by a first rate writer.

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



BAD SIGNS

By R.J. Ellory

Two young boys, half-brothers who have been brought up by the same mother (Carole Kempner), are sometimes joined at the hip. At times they are pitted against each other, and sometimes they are apart in their own specific ways. In other words, Clarence "Clay" Luckman and Elliott Danziger are a strange duo with an extremely rough past.

Clarence's father, Jimmy Luckman, actually kills Carole one night while the two boys look on. Clarence is five and Elliott is just a little over a year old at the time. Jimmy disappeared from their lives only to be shot by an off-duty cop during a robbery. Taken away to live in a state institution, neither boy was out of danger when it came to the outside world.

A killer, Earl Sheridan, captures the boys and uses them as his hostages. Sheridan is an out of control nut who chooses not to kill the brothers after his escape from Death Row; instead, he proceeds to drag them across the country from California to Texas, killing all he encounters. As each horror happens it's difficult to find hope at all. But as the boys grow, some light does shine in the boys' lives that causes the reader to fight for them.

If any plot can be called "grim," this is it. There are small, brief, fleeting looks at good things in life, as the reader sees how one single meeting can change a person's entire existence for all time. A powerful story that certainly will have horrific pictures rising inside the reader's mind, Ellory has put together a highly unkind world wrapped around two innocents who must fight together, and against one another, to stay alive.

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

HANOVER HOUSE

By Brenda Novak

Just a taste of what's to come, "Hanover House," the prequel to the *Hanover House Chronicles*, is not nearly long enough for this lifetime fan of Brenda Novak. While a lover of her complete body of work—contemporary romance, and all—it's the nail-biting anxiety and teeth-gritting tension that she deftly layers into her tales of suspense that consistently has me clamoring for more.

Psychiatrist Evelyn Talbot is a driven woman with a past she's worked doggedly to overcome. Well known as being the woman who was kidnapped and tortured by her high school beau—a man who has yet to see the inside of a jail cell for his crimes—it's become her single focus to understand the mind of a psychopath.

Evelyn's gained the trust and respect of her peers and is on solid ground in Hilltop, Alaska, working toward building a new care facility to house and study the worst of the worst. It's clear that not everyone is a fan of her plans, especially the residents of Hilltop. But, oddly enough, she finds an unexpected ally in local state trooper, Sergeant Amarok, who is a fierce protector of his town and its residents—new and old.

It's in the arena of her personal life where Evelyn hasn't dealt with the past, choosing to avoid situations where intimacy and any chance of love could take hold, where she's having problems. And when the past comes charging back with deadly intent, Evelyn is going to need all the allies she can find to survive.

Emotionally charged and perfectly paced, with "Hanover House," Novak has set the tone for what looks to be an exciting return to what she does best: romantic suspense.

Reviewed by Shannon Raab ■



DOING HARM

By Kelly Parsons

"Doing Harm" is probably one of the best medical thrillers readers have seen in quite some time.

The story begins at University Hospital where chief resident Steve Mitchell, a surgeon, is hoping that once he finishes his residency he will be asked to stay on at the hospital as part of their team. This unfortunate guy meets a new medical student, Gigi Maxwell, who is a brilliant girl but has more than one bad habit. The biggest one just happens to be the fact that she's a psychopath and has decided to make Dr. Mitchell her prey, drawing the happily married man into her web.

All of a sudden Mitchell—the once 'golden' boy—is making mistakes, and after he has a couple of devastating surgeries that result in serious difficulties that leave the patients dead, Gigi lets Mitchell in on what's happening. Although it looked like Mitchell made some very critical errors, Gigi now tells him that he must figure out who *she* is going to kill next. If he doesn't, she will carry on. Steve confides in his junior resident Luis, a former Marine, and together they decide to stop her reign of terror.

There are lots and lots of very tense moments as the reader has clues galore and the actual culprit is found out early on. But even knowing the killer beforehand does not take away from the thrilling suspense of the story. The stress, strain and building anxiety happens as the hero strives to clear himself before Gigi takes another body out.

The author has written Dr. Mitchell extremely well; damaged but worthy, while the killer is perfectly malicious and insanely intelligent. This is definitely a medical thriller to remember and a realistic, edge-of-your-seat example of a perfectly honed suspense.

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

GOODBYE TO THE DEAD

By Brian Freeman

The main character in this great read is Lieutenant Jonathan Stride. Living in Duluth, Minnesota, this tale delves into Detective Stride's past, along with the present, as two plots come together to produce a high-octane pace.

Beginning with the present, Serena Dial, who also carries a badge, has a small problem. She is Lt. Stride's lover, but the picture of Stride's wife, Cindy, who died of cancer eight years ago, is always with Stride. His love for her has never diminished. When Serena recovers a gun used in a murder, she doesn't have any idea that she has come upon a case that goes back to the last year of Cindy Stride's life.

Back then Stride and his wife were on different sides in a murder investigation. Dr. Janine Snow, Cindy's best friend, was the prime suspect in the death of her husband. Cindy was determined to convince her husband that her friend was innocent, but Stride built a case that put Janine in prison. There was only one problem; the murder weapon was never found. Stride was sure he had the right culprit back then. But now, years later, when Serena finds a gun next to a woman's body outside a bar that turns out to be the gun that killed Janine Snow's husband, he has to look at the fact that he may have put an innocent woman in prison long ago.

This book has two very distinctive plots and timelines; from a murder trial long ago to an investigation of a murder that sees a killer walking the streets. Readers will not be confused, however, as this incredible author is perfect when giving clarity to both past and present. If there is a way to say 'higher' than 'highly recommended,' I wish I knew it. Because this is one of those thrillers that go above and beyond.

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



DOCTOR DEATH

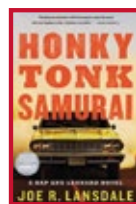
By Lene Kaaberbol

In this new novel by Lene Kaaberbol, Madeleine Karno wants to get away from the restrictions of her French upbringing and become a pathologist just like her dad. She's already his assistant, but this is 1894, and autopsies are inappropriate even when performed by a man—her father, "Doctor Death." Madeleine is told she should not be examining dead bodies, but she's determined to follow her dream despite society's reluctance to expose a woman to such work. And, seeing as how she has a wonderful father who supports her ambition and has her help out on his autopsies, she feels as if she has a chance. Help and support also come from an extremely pleasant commissioner who feels at home with Dr. Karno and Madeleine. Joining together, they make an investigative team that's the best there is.

When a young woman, Cecile Montaine, is killed, her family will not permit a full autopsy, so Dr. Karno and Madeleine decide to investigate on their own. What "Doctor Death" does find out about Cecile is that she might have had some type of disease. The belief of murder starts getting a little doubtful at this news, but soon Father Abigore, the Montaine family priest, is also murdered; his body is stolen during an attack on the hearse that was carrying it. Murder is now the number one belief for both corpses, and the team must dig much deeper and much faster to avoid a third killing.

This book manages to make the job of mortician seem appealing; intrigue is created out of these clues given by the dead, and within this historical crime fiction, the plot moves at a rapid pace. Madeleine is a very determined protagonist with lots of will power, not satisfied to settle for home and hearth. She's an excellent subject and readers will be looking for the next *Madeleine Karno* book as soon as they put this one down.

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



DEVONSHIRE SCREAM

By Laura Childs



Trouble is brewing for Theodosia Browning in "Devonshire Scream," the seventeenth in the *Tea Shop Mystery* series penned by Laura Childs. Theo is excited to be part of an exclusive guest list for a high-class gala trunk show at a Charleston, S.C. boutique, Heart's Desire Fine Jewelry, owned by her dear friend Brooke Carter Crockett. Who wouldn't want to spend an evening drooling over gorgeous gems designed by Tiffany & Co., Cartier, Bulgari, and Van Cleef & Arpels, all on loan from private collectors and museums, while sipping champagne and dining on scrumptious food? But the evening has hardly begun when it's interrupted by the shattering of the store's plate glass window, as a shiny black SUV crashes through it and sends shards of glass in all directions. In a daring smash-and-grab robbery, all the gems in the show are stolen. And Brooke's beloved twenty-year-old niece, Kaitlin, is cut by a piece of glass and dies at the scene. The thieves disappear as quickly as they arrived, leaving chaos in their wake.

The last thing Theo wants to do is get involved in solving the crime. But when Brooke begs for help in finding out who committed the brutal burglary, she has no choice but to say yes. Charleston police detective Burt Tidwell is heading up the official investigation. He and Theo have "collaborated" on previous cases, and he respects her instincts. The possibility of an international gang of jewelry thieves is suggested, but Theo is convinced that the culprits are local, and that at least one member of the gang is a woman.

With the Charleston Heritage Society set to host another glittering event featuring a genuine, and priceless, Faberge egg in just a few days, Theo knows there's no time to lose in figuring out whodunnit.

"Devonshire Scream" is another delightful read from a real pro. I loved it!

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

HONKY TONK SAMURAI

By Joe R. Lansdale

P.I.'s Hap and Leonard are back in this, the eleventh tale by Joe Lansdale. These so-called freelance detectives are made up of former 1960's protestor/rebel Hap; and Leonard, a tough, black, gay Vietnam vet. Working on a stakeout, they are watching a house in an East Texas town when they notice a man abusing a dog. Leonard leaps out of the car, punches the man out and takes the pup, leaving the abuser wanting to press charges.

One week later, a little eighty-year-old lady, Lilly Buckner, having captured the incident on video, tells them that she'll go to the police and report them for beating the dog abuser unless they help her find her missing granddaughter. This seems to be a simple missing person's case, but soon turns into an assault against a group of elite hired killers, as the P.I.'s discover that the used-car dealership where the granddaughter worked is a front for a prostitution scam. As usual, Hap and Leonard bring their own team on board, including, Jim Bob Luke, a mercenary called "Booger," and the lovely but deadly, Vanilla Ride. The investigation has the potential to turn out much worse than they originally think. But the well-intentioned Hap and Leonard, not to mention characters like Booger, Weasel, Hap's girlfriend (who owns the PI agency) and woman warrior, Vanilla Ride, who shows up to do battle in black leather pants and keeps sniper rifles in the back seat of her car—are ready for anything.

These two characters are the most fun you can possibly have while reading. And now... watching. Mr. Lansdale is one terrific author and these characters of his are now the basis for a brand new series on Sundance TV. In other words, we can have Hap, Leonard & Company play out right before our eyes.

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

JOURNEY TO DEATH

By Leigh Russell

George Hall was just a young man when he worked for the Garden of Eden Hotel. George and Veronique, a young woman who cleaned his office, became much more than employer/employee but there came a time when the locale went political. During the coup, George was invited by the military to go back to England. He wanted to take Veronique with him, but things simply didn't work out.

Years later, George, his wife Angela, and daughter, Lucy, have come on vacation to the islands so George can show his family his old haunts while Lucy can take some time to recuperate from a bad breakup. Lucy meets the hotel's accountant, Adrian. She also sees an old man who seems to take an interest in her and her family right away.

An odd moment occurs for Lucy when she goes swimming with Adrian. Pulled under the water by an unknown entity, she convinces herself that Adrian (the only person near her) is innocent of any crime. She not only keeps this from her parents, but she also fails to mention nearly getting killed by a falling boulder while she was out for a walk.

Soon, it is Angela who disappears causing the family to finally realize that someone has them within their sights. As the days pass with no trace of Angela's whereabouts, George confesses that he was once in love with a woman; enter, Veronique. Torn by pity for her father and anger at his lies, Lucy decides to look for her mother in an attempt to stop this dark angel from getting what she obviously wants most: her father.

This is an interesting mystery, with the truth of George's time on the island being a plot in itself, but readers will find there are a few somewhat dull moments until the main characters come to life. With a solid ending, this is a good start to a new series.

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

IN BITTER CHILL

By Sarah Ward

This debut novel is absolutely meticulous, showing author Sarah Ward to be an excellent wordsmith who puts a different spin on a missing child case.

It is the year 1978, in a little town in the English countryside called, Bampton. Two eight-year-old girls, Rachel Jones and Sophie Jenkins, are kidnapped on their way to school. Rachel manages to escape, but Sophie goes missing and is soon presumed to be dead.

Now, thirty odd years later, Rachel is in her forties and has moved on from the past nightmare. She works as a genealogist. Her memories still hold pictures of her kidnapping, but she's managed to bury them.

When it comes to Sophie, her mother commits suicide many years after her daughter's kidnapping, but she's not the only one to see death. A former teacher in the school that the girls attended back then is killed, bringing the media running back to Bampton and setting Rachel on a journey to collect answers about the abduction from long ago.

Detective Inspector Sadler, and policewoman Connie Childs, are asked to investigate Sophie's disappearance, and her mother's suicide. They must go back in time and try to find out why the girls were taken in the first place and who in the small town would be scared if the truth of the matter was unveiled.

This story is a very troubling read, but absolutely intoxicating. This is a small community with many buried secrets that will be dug up no matter how hard the citizens try to erase them. The fact is that Rachel and her love of genealogy is very much the "in" thing today, as the public loves to discover their own personal family histories. Anyone can obtain birth certificates, death certificates, etc., which makes for an even more clever, more intelligent plot line. Extremely well-written: genealogy, family secrets, missing kids, and a killer... who could ask for anything more? Hopefully Sarah Ward is almost done with her next book.

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



FOGGED INN

By Barbara Ross



There's nothing like finding a dead body in a walk-in sub-zero refrigerator to really put a crimp in your day. Just ask Julia Snowden, the likeable protagonist in Barbara Ross's *Maine Clambake Mystery* series, and she'll tell you I'm not exaggerating. For Julia, it's been one thing (dead body) after another since she arrived back in Busman's Harbor, Maine, the previous summer to turn her family's struggling business into a profitable enterprise again. But on the bright side, she's managed to find true love in the hunky personage of Chris Durand, and as "Fogged Inn" opens, we learn that the pair are living in a snug apartment on the second floor of Gus's Restaurant, which is known (to only the locals) to serve the best breakfasts and lunches in town. Now that the offseason has arrived, Julia and Chris, with Gus's blessing, have added dinner service at the restaurant. And they all share that walk-in refrigerator. The one with the dead guy in it.

The police struggle to identify the victim, who arrived in town on the very day he died with no identification, and who paid for his dinner at Gus's in cash. And how the heck did he get inside the freezer, anyway?

Julia suspects that the other diners at the restaurant that night might know more than they are saying. And she's even more suspicious that something's up when she finds out that each of the couples came to Gus's because of an about-to-expire gift certificate which supposedly came from her.

"Fogged Inn" is the fourth in Ross's series. It's deftly plotted with an intriguing cast of characters and a clever writing device—at no time in the book does the reader ever meet the actual killer in person. Imagine a complete reversal of Agatha Christie's "Murder of Roger Ackroyd," where the narrator turns out to be the murderer, and you'll understand what I mean. "Fogged Inn" is a Down East winnah, for sure!

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

LAMENTATION

By C.J. Sansom

This, the sixth tale in the *Matthew Shardlake* series, begins upon a pyre during the time of King Henry VIII, as a woman and three men are about to be burned at the stake having been branded heretics for having religious opinions that do not agree with the king's.

The king broke ties with Rome, and began his own religion. Matthew Shardlake, a lawyer who's also a mystery solver for the Crown, watches as both Protestants and Catholics try to influence the future of Britain's religious freedoms. And at the center of this group is King Henry's final queen, Catherine Parr; a Protestant. At a time before the king grew sicker and turned a bit mad, she writes a book called, "Lamentation of a Sinner" about the people wanting reform. However, this book has gone missing and Catherine is a little on edge, especially since the king is talking about restoring ties with Rome. He has had two of his former wives beheaded for disagreeing with him. So, if the book turns up, it might just be her turn at the guillotine. Shardlake's duty is to recover the book without the king knowing, which turns into a suspenseful tale that readers will love.

As the king waffles back and forth, his health fails even more each day. Shardlake sees that the king is very near death, and readers may wonder if Henry VIII's demise will end Shardlake's career. Perhaps he will retire. But (and there's always a 'but') the story stops with a command to be there for thirteen-year-old Princess Elizabeth. Therefore, looks like lovers of Shardlake will see him again.

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





DELIVERING THE TRUTH

By Edith Maxwell

Rose Carroll is a Quaker midwife. Rose lives with her recently deceased sister's spouse and children while working at her profession. The setting for the story is the year 1888, in the town of Amesbury, Massachusetts, and most definitely brings intrigue to the Quaker way of life.

One night, in town, an arsonist sets a carriage manufacturing business on fire, killing numerous workers, as the conflagration then spreads out to other buildings. But that's not all.

While the search is going on for the arsonist, a carriage factory owner's adult son is found stabbed to death with Rose's own knitting needle, and Rose is being looked at for the crime. She agrees to become an unofficial part of the investigation, seeing as that Rose hears secrets and gains confidences of the Quaker community due to her job attending births of the rich and poor. The pace of the hunt for the killer slows down dramatically while Rose tries her best to get "hidden" information for the cops, with possible culprits being added to the list on a daily basis.

There are a great many characters to choose from in this one, as well as a growing romance that supplies even more depth to the story. The location is told in specific detail, such as the Friends Meetinghouse where Rose worships. Being the first in a series, author Edith Maxwell is very good at sharing her knowledge of the Quaker world. She tells readers of the Quaker faith and customs, and brings to life what it was like to live in Massachusetts more than a century ago. So the details turn the tale full-color in readers' imaginations. First of hopefully many more to come, I believe that everyone will definitely enjoy this stand-out book.

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

BURNING

By Danielle Rollins

"Monsters are more interesting than heroes," was the parting message of Angela's father before he took off. And with his departure, any illusion of a normal family life vanished. Her world then took another turn; a dark direction that placed her firmly in the depths of the Brunesfield Correctional Facility for a three-year stint.

Three months before release, Angela is ready to go. She's trying to fly under the radar and has been relatively successful at keeping her big mouth shut with the hope of returning to her younger brother, Charlie. All is as routine as juvie gets until the cold, slushy day when a bus pulls up to the gates delivering one small, shackled, ten-year-old girl named Jessica. Jessica is placed in segregation—for everyone's protection. Soon the girls are talking about this new kid, and strange things begin to occur.

When Dr. Rose Gruen arrives—ousting the warden—with the promise of better days, new programs, and spots in an elite SciGirls group, Angela isn't impressed. She's got a handful of months left and Charlie on the brain. She's going home. *Or not.* A chance encounter with young Jessica is enough to place Dr. Gruen's laser-beam focus directly on Angela, and she's got little choice but to do as she's told. She's going to be spending a lot of time with the new kid and has been given a single task to take something Jessica holds precious.

Nothing is as simple as it should be. Jessica is dangerous, but she's just a child after all and Angela's got a soft spot for the kid. The clock is ticking, lives are at stake, and those final fatherly words of wisdom will soon ring with deadly truth.

As the secrets are shed, you'll be drawn in by the turn of events, the sharp-tongued heroine, open ending and enticing possibilities. A perfect mix for a leave-me-wanting-more one-day read.

Reviewed by Shannon Raab ▪



NIGHT WORK

By David C. Taylor

This series is one that all readers will want to begin at the very beginning; you won't want to miss one moment in this crime fiction world.

The first novel, "Night Life," brought readers to 1954. The Cold War was on its way and Senator Joe McCarthy was just about to start getting rid of Communists "lurking" in America. The CIA was new and fighting a battle with the FBI to see who would win the medal of being America's best intelligence agency. And the fun has not ended ...

Bodies of murdered young men are being found in New York City, and Michael Cassidy is the cop at the core of this turbulent world. His father, a refugee from Eastern Europe, is now a successful Broadway producer. His godfather just happens to be Mafia Boss Frank Costello.

This time out, Cassidy is asked to escort an accused murderer to Havana during a time of fear and tension—right before the breakout of Castro's revolution against Batista. After he does his duty, he undertakes the rescue of Dylan McCue, a Russian KGB agent who is also Cassidy's former love. When all goes well, it's back to New York and the seedy side of life, as he tries to uncover what or who is behind the murders in Central Park.

His own drinking and his own assignment is interrupted when Castro, himself, comes to the Big Apple and Cassidy ends up being a part of the man's security detail. And security is definitely what Castro needs. He has enemies around every corner, from mobsters to secret police, and Cassidy is caught in the middle.

Michael Cassidy is a gritty cop who brings out emotions, both bad and good, in the reader. At times wanting to help him, at times wanting him to melt into the world of the alcohol he loves so much, Cassidy is one character that is hard to love and impossible to hate. It'll be interesting to see what happens next.

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

LONDON RAIN

By Nicole Upson

This book is what historical crime is all about. The story leads up to the coronation of England's King George VI, when the talk of the day was jealousy, adultery, lies and murders that shadow the corridors of Britain's most honorable institution... the BBC. I can hear laughter, but we have to believe that the setting of this book is the abdication of King Edward VIII so he could marry a commoner, an American to boot, and the coronation of a new King, his brother.

It looks like London is thrilled to welcome King George. One of the festivities is a BBC radio adaption of "Queen of Scots," with the author of the play being Josephine Tey. Tey comes to oversee the production and is drawn into events at the BBC, such as sitting in on rehearsals.

Soon, however, she finds that the lead actress has been having an affair with Britain's most honored newsman, Anthony Beresford, and his wife happens to work in the same building. Beresford is shot to death in his broadcasting booth at the very noisy height of the coronation ceremony. DCI Archie Penrose investigates the murder of one of the BBC's best known broadcasters, and soon there is a second victim who just happens to be his mistress: lead actress, Millicent Gray. It seems to the BBC's management that Scotland Yard should close the affair quickly and tastefully as the murderer just has to be Beresford's wife, Vivienne.

There seems to be no doubt within the group that Vivienne killed Beresford and might have also killed Millicent Gray just to end the affair with her 'stamp' on it. The big shots at the BBC and Scotland Yard are eager to see Vivienne hang for both killings. But, both Tey and Penrose have doubts.

As things move forward, Tey finds links between the two deaths, and a whole can of worms is opened for readers to have a really great time enjoying!

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



A DREAM OF ICE

By Gillian Anderson and Jeff Rovin

This is Book 2 of *The Earthend Saga* and is definitely a home run for science fiction/thriller readers out there. From authors Gillian Anderson of *X-Files* fame, and Jeff Rovin, a *New York Times* bestselling author, this sequel is truly outstanding.

Readers met child psychologist Caitlin O'Hara in the first novel, as she uncovered a magical connection to an ancient civilization. She was left with strange powers that let her heal her patients with her mind and see things that shouldn't be there.

Now, Caitlin is trying to live her life along with the rest of the normal people, juggling her job, her son, and not much of a dating life. But suddenly Maanik, the daughter of India's ambassador to the United Nations, begins to speak in odd languages and have violent visions. Caitlin is sure that her attacks have something to do with the recent assassination attempt made on the girl's father. And these attacks have started up nuclear war talk between India and Pakistan.

To top it all off, teens around the globe are having the same language problems and powerful visions. In Haiti a student claws at her throat, drowning while nowhere near water. In the country of Iran a boy suddenly sets himself on fire for no reason. Along with these odd tragedies are animals acting irrationally, from rats in New York City to birds in South America.

With Asia now on the brink of nuclear war, Caitlin is racing across the world to uncover the unusual links among the "unconnected" incidents in order to try and save her patient. But... no matter what she tries to do, the one thing she will discover is that a much more menacing power is at work, and it's getting closer.

Bring on Book 3! This is one series that keeps you moving, invigorated and thinking at all times.

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

A MUDDIED MURDER

By Wendy Tyson

Megan Sawyer used to be an attorney in Chicago but left the Windy City to go back home to help her grandmother Bibi run the farm and nursery, Washington Acres. This is also a place where the one-and-only George Washington stayed during the Revolutionary War.

Megan is all ready to open her family's organic nursery/café in town but can't get a "pass" rating on her inspection. It seems that Simon Duvall, a local historian, wants the land zoned for historical preservation and is hounding her grandmother to sell. However, he's not the only one who is salivating over the property, there are others who have a keen interest in the land.

When Simon's dead body is discovered in the farm's barn, Brian Porter, an ex-soldier who has anger management issues is accused of the crime. Brian works odd jobs when he isn't being drunk or mean, but Dr. Denver Finn, a veterinarian that Megan hires for all the farm animals, believes that Brian is innocent. As Megan is the first suspect, with her grandmother coming in a close second, the peace Megan thought she'd receive in Winsome, Pennsylvania, is broken. So she must join with others to clear her name and uncover the truth of Simon's death. As Megan was a lawyer, she has the skills to uncover a murderer, but digging up this small town's secrets may be more than she bargained for.

This is a good story with well-developed, fun characters. And anyone who grew up in a small town will remember 'roots' like these quite well. This is the book to enjoy on a nice spring day—sitting back, relaxing, and discovering Washington Acres.

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



LIE IN PLAIN SIGHT

By Maggie Barbieri



This series has been one of the more interesting I've discovered in a long while, mainly because the first book, where we were introduced to Maeve, a baker turned amateur detective, is pretty much a standard mystery. I sincerely liked Maeve, but was thrown off balance by her sudden descent into the dark side in book two.

As "Lie in Plain Sight" opens, we find Maeve still dealing with the events that took place in the previous installment, and we catch her in the act of making a disappointing mistake.

However, when a local teen goes missing, Maeve inserts herself into the investigation, while trying to run her busy bakery, jostle her complicated love life, and deal with her hostile teenage daughter, Heather.

Maeve's focus on the missing persons case, while a little obsessive, has given her a renewed sense of purpose, has sharpened her focus in regards to Heather, and her relationships with her ex-husband and boyfriend.

Small town secrets and lies always make for an interesting read, and with Maeve involved, it's even more delicious, with just a pinch of dark humor on the side.

The author has put a darker spin on the amateur detective trope, and it has grown on me, with this installment being the strongest in the series. For Maeve, justice is justice, and her brand of it is controversial, but it does get the job done. However, I was thankful Maeve's disturbing thoughts tapered off; plus, she seems to have found a balance in her life, at long last.

These books should be read in order to fully enjoy all the nuances. I think those who have been following along will agree that if this is indeed the end of the series, it ended on a very high note. 4 stars.

Reviewed by Julie Whiteley ■

QUIET NEIGHBORS

By Catriona McPherson

"Quiet Neighbors" is a real find. Before even opening the pages, the cover art sends shivers through the soul. Focusing on an old bookshop, the locale is one of those cool, spine-tingling places with miles and miles of books piled on top of each other; a place where only a person with a "nose" for true treasures could find what was buried there.

When Jude visited one summer, finding a treasure in the shop was the only high point of the most miserable vacation she'd ever had. Now, come winter, Jude must run away from home for a reason and decides that the bookshop in the backwater burg would be a safe place to hide. In need of a haven, and Lowell, the owner of the shop needing an assistant, Jude is given a break on a cottage rental. But her new abode is a grave-digger's cottage and, of course, her neighbors are really, really quiet.

Quiet...but not silent. The long dead and the books they left behind both have tales to tell. Soon, Jude is sorting out the mess inside the shop and comes upon several volumes of diary notes belonging to a man who used to live in the cottage where she now dwells. Shortly after, a young, pregnant woman comes to the shop claiming to be Lowell's daughter, turning an odd story into a complicated, unexpected world. As Lowell's past and Jude's present intermingle to become a dangerous mix, a certain someone gets ready to wipe out everything and everyone.

This is one of those ideal stories that you cannot put down and actually feel sad when it's over. And that is only because there is not another Catriona McPherson book at the ready. Take this reader's advice: Go to the library and have all of this author's titles on hand so you never have to spend a moment of time without a truly incredible read.

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





LOST AMONG THE LIVING

By Simone St. James

Readers who enjoyed the classic "Rebecca" or even witnessed the Alfred Hitchcock film version, will absolutely love this story.

No, not the same tale, of course. But there are character names and stunning locations in this book that will be very suggestive. From one character named after actor George Sanders from the film version, to a very heady scene where the heroine looks over a long cliff and decides that she has "nothing left to live for," to a huge haunted estate surrounded by woods and overlooking an ocean, the 'feel' of this story is amazing. Add in a mysterious husband and a not very nice employer, and you have a book that could very well one day become its own classic.

In 1921, England, Jo Manders is working as a companion to her husband Alex's aunt, Dottie Forsyth. Alex is gone, unfortunately, shot down over Germany three years ago. Jo travels to the Forsyth estate in the beautiful countryside and finds out that her husband had spent some time there when he was on leave. The estate is called Wych Elm House, and there Jo meets not only Dottie but also Dottie's husband, who is extremely distant and not home often, and the Forsyth's son Mark, who has been injured in the war and is now suffering from shell shock.

Things are strange inside the estate. Sometimes Jo can hear footsteps when she goes down empty hallways, and things in her bedroom seem to be rearranging themselves. Locals in the village say that the family is cursed with a ghost, and Jo begins to discover some of her husband's secrets, determined to find out what's true and what's not.

This is the perfect blend of history and mystery, with a little paranormal activity and romance thrown in for the ride. Readers should definitely turn to this one for a really terrific afternoon read.

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

DOWN THE DARKEST STREET

By Alex Segura

The torrid Miami atmosphere adds to the gritty beginning of this noir tale, the second *Pete Fernandez* mystery, as he moves from one darkness to the next.

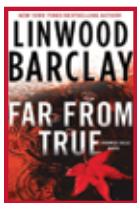
Pete is trying to be a recovering alcoholic. He lives in a quiet Miami suburb with, unfortunately, his ex-wife. That's supposed to be temporary. He attends AA, but not regularly and not seriously, after the initial events. As the story opens, he's getting beat up in an alley after consuming prodigious amounts of Jim Beam and beer. When his hand inadvertently strayed to the wrong soft thigh, it led to his take down. As he's stumbling out of the alley, post-whipping, a van drives by. Pete gets a good look at the driver and the teenage girl curled up beside him. That leads to trouble.

Having lost his job as a sports reporter, he helped a fellow journalist, Kathy Bentley, with a sensational story that brought about the exposure of a mob hitman. The monetary reward was enough to enable him to spend a lot of time thinking about drinking and to work a part-time job in a used bookstore. He doesn't have many friends. One is Dave, the guy who runs the Book Bin. Another is his potential AA sponsor, Jack.

He needs both of them as he gets caught up in the search for a missing teen girl and draws close to a dangerous, demented killer, like a moth drawn to a flame.

This hardboiled story is written for a quick read, with a nice, taut style, which is good because once you get started, you'll want to tear through it. I enjoyed it without reading the first one, "Silent City," but it might be good to read these in order.

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Eine Kleine Murder" ■



FAR FROM TRUE

By Linwood Barclay

In this new thriller by Linwood Barclay, there is something going on in Promise Falls, located in upstate New York. The town with the lovely name seems peaceful and calm, yet people are dying there, and certainly not of natural causes.

The mayhem starts with a car full of boys on their way to the drive-in theatre. This is the last night to enjoy a show, seeing as that the place has been sold. But before the film commences, the giant screen blows up and crushes cars.

Detective Barry Duckworth is on the case, assisted by a new detective being that the town is going a little crazy. Besides the horror at the drive-in, someone is also pulling pranks that revolve around the number 23; some deadly, some not. And to top it all off, there is a shootout at the laundromat and an attempted kidnapping.

The author has written six books that feature the town of Promise Falls, not all with the same characters, of course, but this is one amazing plot that calls up some characters from the past that are known to readers. (For a 'who's who,' you may want to read other Promise Falls novels to see what background they have in order to better understand the read). There are two investigations going on, one by Barry Duckworth and the other by P.I. Cal Weaver, and the back and forth between the two makes for a scintillating read.

A real highlight comes in the form of sleazy ex-mayor, Randall Finley, and the cool action never slows down. What remains true is that author Linwood Barclay and his troop from Promise Falls still remain one of the most memorable crews in the world of suspense.

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

THE CUBAN CONNECTION

By M.L. Malcolm

In 1960, reporter Katherine O'Connor persuades her editor to send her off to Cuba. Katherine wants to write articles about the population, especially in Havana, and how they are getting along during Castro's rule. She also wants to get as close to the leader as she can to learn his plans for the outside world.

Working undercover, she meets some very interesting people that she feels will help her. One is Raul, who could become a love interest if she had the time, and Emilio, a ten-year-old con man whose mother and grandfather are waiting impatiently for his father to return from Castro's prison; held there for no good reason, except for the fact that his captors think he's dangerous to the Castro plan.

This novel is based on facts during the beginning of Castro's reign over the island of Cuba, and Katherine's fierce determination to tell the story of the Cuban people and what really went on after Castro was elected...when he went on to break all his promises to his people and then team up with communist Russia.

This very well written book is set in New York City and Havana. Katherine is most definitely an ace reporter who has a tendency to go into some very dangerous places to get her stories. She faces people in all areas: from brutal hangers-on of Castro to a priest who just might be working for the CIA to a man who most likely is a Soviet spy.

During her time in Cuba, Katherine learns about the terror of families that were fighting for their own rights in their own country, and some who were never seen or will be heard from again. As this story does follow actual historical facts, this page-turner is a great read.

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

RIPE FOR MURDER

By Carlene O'Neil

In this new 'chapter' of the *Cypress Cove Mysteries*, readers will note that Penny Lively, who has inherited the Joyeux Winery from her aunt, is settling down very well into her daily routine. She has come into an opportunity that will bring a train line—full of paying guests—right to her doorstep, so she and winery manager, Connor, are off to a resort to hear the sales pitch. Antonia Martinelli, owner of a neighboring winery goes too. Sadly, Antonia brings her daughter, Chantal, along. Penny doesn't particularly like Chantal as she has her antenna firmly set on Connor.

As winery owners listen to this company's sales pitch, everything goes fine until one of the investor's wives, Tara, is found dead on the train tracks. Question is: was it an accident or was she pushed? Certain things make Chantal suspect number one, but as much as Penny dislikes her, she knows Chantal is no murderer.

The group at the resort are stuck there until the local police release them, so Penny investigates the crime herself to try and find the real killer. She must be asking the right questions because soon she's directly in the sights of the killer. When another investor dies, it's clear that Penny was the intended victim.

This is a terrific installment of a terrific series set in the beautiful California Wine Country. There are many first-rate descriptions of the area and the mystery is a real page-turner. Penny is a very good main character; she gets the job done and is extremely nosy, to the point where she resembles a bloodhound. The story offers up a bit of romance, and the answer to the question of 'whodunit' is a big surprise.

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

NOBLE CHASE

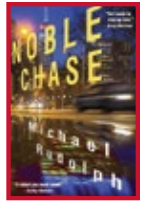
By Michael Rudolph

In this very interesting legal thriller, an SOS is issued by the passengers on a sailing boat called *The Satin Lady*. The Coast Guard listens and locates the wrecked boat near Puerto Rico, but finds no one left on board. The missing people, Len Sloane and Erica Crossland are presumed dead.

In the meantime, Beth Swahn, an attorney working in her retired stepfather's law firm, is having dinner with C.K. Leung, a very wealthy client from Taiwan. While they're celebrating a big case, Beth realizes that C.K. thinks his firm won \$35 million and is unaware that they also received \$70 million in damages. Being the honest woman she is, Beth sets him straight. C.K. takes the news as a simple error made in bookkeeping, at first, but Beth has her own suspicions. Len Sloane is C.K.'s business associate, and Beth believes that Len might have stolen the extra dough for himself. Nothing can be done now, of course, because Mr. Sloane has been reported as missing/presumed dead. Beth tells her boss that she might just be up for a malpractice suit because of all this, and she's soon proven right. A once nice C.K. does a three-sixty over the news and gives Beth's firm two months to find the missing money or he'll sue. Beth doesn't trust anyone anymore, so she decides to conduct her own investigation, beginning with a track down of Len Sloane who may just have put together a great escape by turning himself into a corpse.

This story is a really fun read right from the get-go! Characters get run off the road by an eighteen-wheeler, clients race to achieve an out of court settlement, and Beth and her family take off to the Caribbean to stop a dead man who might be alive and well. The author has done a brilliant job when it comes to engaging the reader and holding them tight until the magnificent end. This is a "5-star" winner.

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



NO ONE KNOWS

By J.T. Ellison

Five years ago, Josh Hamilton vanished into thin air, leaving his wife behind as the number one suspect in his disappearance. Managing to skirt a murder conviction, Aubrey is now dealing with her evil mother-in-law, Daisy, who has had Josh declared legally dead, and is hell bent on challenging the life insurance policy, which is worth a whopping five million dollars.

But when a man walks into Aubrey's life who bears a striking resemblance to Josh, her fragile world begins to unravel even more. Is someone playing tricks on her? Is she in danger? Could Josh really be alive?

First of all, I have to confess something a little embarrassing... This is my first book by J.T. Ellison. I know, right? Well, it might be the first, but not the last. This book was right up my alley and I can't wait to read more by this author!

It's hard to review a book like this because I don't want to give anything away. So, let me just warn you, this is a very well written, cleverly plotted story. It's also a little bit of a twisted, cautionary tale that will keep you turning pages long past your bedtime. You will never see the twist coming, and the darkly outrageous conclusion almost had me laughing out loud at the irony.

If you like traveling on roads with sharp inclines at night without guardrails, with hairpin turns and sudden drop offs, then fasten your seat belt and climb aboard, because this is your kind of ride. This book was absorbing, emotional, moody, with shady characters, shadowy figures, secrets, lies, betrayals, double crosses and a few gut punches thrown in for good measure, with just a little dark humor to put the cherry on the cake. It's a long, strange trip, but if you are anything like me, it's worth it once you reach your destination. 4.5 stars.

Reviewed by Julie Whiteley ■

A THOUSAND FALLING CROWS

By Larry D. Sweazy

This is a terrific novel of the American West! It is the year 1933, and Texas Ranger Sonny Burton has run afoul of Bonnie and Clyde, losing an arm in a shootout with the notorious gangsters. Worse yet, an infection set in and he lost use of his arm altogether.

Sonny's not anxious to go back to working as a Ranger and he also doesn't want to have to strap on his "new arm" that he has been issued every day. But when Aldo Hernandez, a janitor at the hospital where Sonny was treated, asks for his help in finding his missing daughter, Carmen, Sonny must point out the facts. He no longer has a badge, or an arm.

Almost everyone in town is pretty sure that Carmen wasn't kidnapped; instead, they believe she hooked up with the Renaldo boys by her own choice. The two boys, Edberto and Renaldo, are identical twins—one of them is an accomplished thief, the other has a hard time writing his own name. Sonny agrees to help find Carmen, but he's also looking for a very different brand of criminal that has been killing young women and leaving them in fields for the crows to feast upon. He worries that he'll never find a way to keep these women safe and, when it comes to Carmen and her friends, he's not sure he'll ever understand why the trio even likes each other, let alone why they are on a crime spree that's taking attention away from the mystery of the dead women.

This novel had settings that were so genuine you could almost feel the hot, dry air of the Texas Panhandle during the Depression years, back in the days of real and quite frightening outlaws. The mystery was cleverly written and the characters will stay in your mind long after the tale has been read.

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





DUST UP

By Jon McGoran

Detective Doyle Carrick of the Philadelphia PD has a rough night. He is actually woken up by an annoying banging on his door that ends with a horrific gunshot. Opening the door, he finds Ron Hartwell, a Biotech company employee, has been shot to death on his doorstep. Of course, he doesn't know Hartwell's name at the time, because cop and victim never actually met.

A calm, tame, "ho-hum" investigation takes place into the killing, with some law enforcement coming to the quick conclusion that the murder was brought about by a domestic dispute that occurred between Hartwell and his wife, Miriam; writing Miriam off as the culprit. Detective Carrick, however, has doubts about the case, so he goes one step further and interviews the dead man's boss. The boss, Spencer Vinson, tells him that Ron was engaged in industrial spying.

In the meantime, Miriam informs Detective Carrick that Soyagene—a new genetically modified organism that her corporation is testing in Haiti—has caused many extreme allergic reactions. It seems that in Haiti, Miriam and Ron had found out about a conspiracy that encompassed Haitian politics and contaminated food shipments, and she claims that this is what her husband was trying to tell Carrick when he was blown away by a mysterious shooter.

Believing the wife, Detective Carrick follows her back to Haiti and finds that Biotech Corporation is trying to bring down the island's government, putting many of the island's population at risk. Carrick ends up delving into a true mess: very powerful organizations that are investing in the island, a possible revolution, crooked police forces, and even a possible Ebola outbreak about to occur.

This book has a whole lot going on all the time. Readers will need to concentrate and pay attention... and may just walk away with the feeling that they should think twice before putting food in their mouths ever again.

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

I'LL SEE YOU IN PARIS

By Michelle Gable

Beautifully written, "I'll See You in Paris," is the compelling story of three women, generations apart, and the ties that bind them.

Engaged and ready to begin her adult life, Annie Haley is torn by the secrecy surrounding her father. Who was he? What happened to him? And why is her mother hiding information? These are the questions that rise to the surface when she is faced with the prospect of building her own family. Her mother, Laurel, simply won't offer up the truth, and Annie has hit the point in her own life where partial responses just won't suffice.

With her fiancé off serving the country, Annie and Laurel take the opportunity to visit a small town in England where Laurel has business to attend to and promises her daughter some European fun. What seems to be an act of fate comes when Annie discovers a curious book about the infamous Duchess of Marlborough before they set off on their journey.

A distracted Laurel ends up being the perfect recipe for a snooping daughter. An overabundance of time on her hands leads the lonesome Annie into a local pub, where a chance meeting with a stranger sends her deep down the rabbit hole in the search to learn more about this elusive duchess. Soon, Annie finds small connections; then larger threads that lead her to wonder if she can, in fact, finally discover the answers to the burning questions that drive her.

An alluring tale of love and loss, Gable has peppered fascinating historic morsels in with richly textured characters and seamlessly interweaved the present and past to keep the pages turning. I'll certainly be waiting to see where Gable will take fans next.

Reviewed by Shannon Raab ■



MORTAL DILEMMA

By H. Terrell Griffin

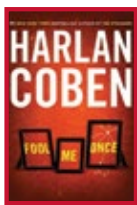
In this new *Matt Royal Mystery*, Jock Algren, a friend of Matt's, arrives in Longboat Key, Florida. Algren is about as down in the dumps as one can get; his most recent mission turned out to be a disaster. Jock works for a very secret U.S. Government Intelligence Agency and has come to hang out at Matt's hoping that Matt and his lady friend, police detective J.D. Duncan, can pull him out of his doldrums. Of course, that's when the bad guys choose to appear and the likelihood of murder and mayhem appears on the horizon.

At the moment, J.D. is investigating a cold case when the brother of the victim shows up in town and complicates her investigation. Then, a so-called sailor, described by Matt as being, "The meanest man I'd ever known," also shows up, taking a berth at the local marina. Oddly enough, that's when the bodies start to appear.

Jock has run off, and Matt and J.D. are on his trail. It seems that a Middle Eastern jihadist is out to kill Jock because he had been the person who'd mistakenly murdered his father, and he is out for revenge. Everyone eventually lands on Key West, the last gasp of the continual U.S., and readers are in for many unpleasant clashes before the book comes to a close.

It is an absolute treat to read a *Matt Royal Mystery*. Author, Griffin, is a lawyer and was a medic in the Army, which has allowed him to write extremely realistic characters and believable plots that hold a reader's attention.

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



FOOL ME ONCE

By Harlan Coben

"Fool Me Once" is the story of former special-ops pilot Maya Burkett. Returning home from the war in only a few short months, it seems that Maya was under suspicion when she was sent back to the States, accused by a website that charged her with targeting a car of civilians when she was on a rescue mission.

Born under an unlucky star, to say the least, Maya's sister Claire was killed, and then her husband, Joe Burkett, was shot right in front of her. It is only her two-year-old daughter, Lily, that is making her determined to stay strong.

One day a friend of Maya's gives her a picture frame that doubles as a nanny-cam. And when she views some footage a few days later, Maya almost dies in shock to see her husband playing with their daughter...two weeks after he died.

With this new creepy scene, Maya's life goes from bad to worse. A single parent who takes very good care of her daughter, she can't disregard her deceased sister's children. Suspicion, lies, and a really mean police officer enters her life who is sure that Maya killed her own husband. But when Joe appears on tape, the things that don't add up drive her crazy. Since the law won't help or even believe her tale, she must get to the bottom of it all by herself.

For readers who are looking for an easy and entertaining read, this book will be perfect for you. The mystery/thriller part of the narrative is a very good story by a very good author, and the character of Maya is outstanding. As a longtime fan, I must say this was one of Coben's greatest unexpected endings!

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



THE GIRL FROM HOME

By Adam Mitzner

This incredible, made for this day-and-age story will educate readers on just how to run a Ponzi scheme... something that is still going on in 2016, even after the plethora of investigations and arrests that took over the headlines in the last two decades. Just think of the famous saying when you read Mr. Mitzner's story: "Don't try this at home!"

We are introduced to Jonathan Caine, a hedge fund manager in Manhattan who has everything. He is a wizard at his job and lives the life of the rich and famous. He has the token trophy wife on his arm, a penthouse with a view of the Statue of Liberty, and a summer rental in the Hamptons. He also thinks he truly deserves it all... and more. Unfortunately, one day he makes the wrong decision that causes the axe to fall and his world come crashing down around his ears, sending him back to his hometown to take care of his ailing father, and right in time to attend his 25th high school reunion.

While there, he becomes involved with Jacqueline Williams, the homecoming queen of his high school years who wouldn't give him the time of day when they were kids. Her own fairy tale life didn't turn out well either; this time, they hit it off. Jackie is now very interested in Jonathan, but their new connection has problems, including a very jealous and abusive man.

Strong-willed, Jonathan is determined to change his life and make a future with Jackie. It's somewhat difficult, of course, as he has been cheating the public for years and a little dose of "that guy" is still in him. Another straw in the ointment is the fact that Jackie's husband has been killed in a hit and run, which the police don't believe for one minute.

Readers will thoroughly enjoy this story of the Wall Street wealthy and just what happens when everything falls apart. A definite "5-star" read!

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

THE CAKES OF MONTE CRISTO

By Jacklyn Brady

It's always party time in The Big Easy. That'd be New Orleans, for you Northern types. That's a good thing for Rita Lucero, co-owner of Zydeco Cakes shop, now that she's expanding her already successful bakery into an off-premise, full-service catering operation. When Rita's company wins the contract for the Belle Lune Ball, an annual benefit sponsored by the Vintage Clothing Society, it's a Very Big Deal. Not only will Rita and her talented staff have to deliver five first-class cakes that are works of art, but this is also the first time the company will show off its new catering prowess. All preparations seem to be going smoothly, until Rita gets a panicky phone call from the Monte Cristo Hotel, site of the upcoming gala, that a pipe has burst. The Papillion Ballroom is completely flooded and cannot be repaired in time for the event. Rita and her staff have to come up with a Plan B, and fast.

As if that's not stressful enough, Rita's temporary receptionist has managed to create havoc at Zydeco in a very short time, including tripping over some boxes and inflicting major damage to the office wall and staircase. When Rita examines the damage closely, she discovers an exquisite ruby necklace hidden under the staircase. Locals believe that the necklace is cursed, and that anyone who owns it dies under suspicious circumstances.

When the appraiser Rita asks to authenticate the necklace suddenly drops dead, and Rita herself is targeted by a menacing stranger, she begins to believe that the necklace really is a dangerous piece of jewelry to have around. And that the next victim of the curse could be Rita herself.

"The Cakes of Monte Cristo" is the sixth in Jacklyn Brady's mouth-watering series. And it made me hungry for number seven!

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



THE SEARCHER

By Simon Toyne

A plane crashes on the outer edges of a town called Redemption in the Arizona desert. Fire threatens the town and all the emergency trucks, ambulances, and workers are fighting the blaze.

All of a sudden, out of the smoke, walks a stranger.

The man is an albino with no memory whatsoever. Stranger still, is the fact that he's carrying a journal from the founder of Redemption, Reverend Jack "King" Cassidy, which was written back in the days of the Wild West. Apparently there is a name of a man in that journal that the stranger needs to save.

Solomon Creed, the mystery man, may be the sole survivor of the plane crash. He also possesses many odd skills and knowledge that place him in a very different time and kind of life. Not only that, but it turns out there is a local drug king that has lost something very important in the plane crash, bringing a large number of folks straight to Redemption; for what reason remains to be seen.

Add in ex-cop, Mulcahy, a man who has come to Redemption at the behest of a cruel Mexican drug pusher named, Papa Tio. Tio is holding Mulcahy's father hostage and Mulcahy is trying to save his father's life by cooperating with the scum.

The plot lines are many; the story is mystifying and causes the hair to rise on the skin; and, when it comes to Solomon Creed, he may just be one of the most memorable characters to be seen on paper in a very long time.

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

THE CURSE OF JACOB TRACY

By Holly Messinger

Messinger has fashioned a unique world inhabited with complicated characters. Even better, it is a whole lot of fun.

Here lies the fun part: Jacob 'Trace' Tracy almost died fighting at Antietam during the Civil War. At that time, he became connected to the spirit world and is now able to see the dead, even though he tries to hide this ability. He is currently staying out of ghost-populated cities as much as possible, working as a hired hand with his partner, Boz, guiding wagon trains to and through the Wild West.

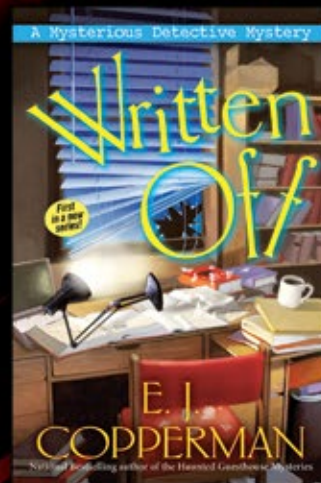
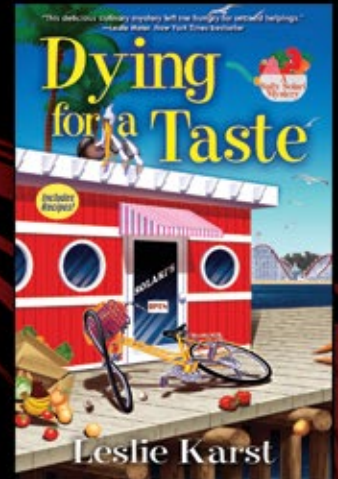
While waiting for some jobs to come in, he receives a letter from Sabine Fairweather, a wealthy lady who is a bit on the sickly side; not to mention, a little pushy and too clever for her own good. She needs an honest man or men to bring her a dead friend's inheritance from a nearby town. Trace takes on the job, as it's not very far away and will not take up too much of his time, but it turns out to be a little creepy as Miss Fairweather just happens to know all about Trace's gift. She is well aware that he can talk to ghosts and a barter occurs. She needs his help, and promises to get rid of his ties with the spirit world in exchange for him doing just a few "odd" jobs.

Trace is really not interested in being her pet psychic, but the appeal is too tempting to disregard as he has been trying to get rid of his curse for many years. As she sends him into one state of affairs after another, his powers grow strong and he starts to recognize that this curse of his might be doing some good after all. But, of course, Miss Fairweather has her own agenda—sending Trace into something much worse than he realizes.

This book is a great historical mystery and a very cool read.

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

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COMETH THE HOUR

By Jeffrey Archer

As a suspense lover, when you see the name “Jeffrey Archer” you know it’s going to be good.

This is the sixth installment in *The Clifton Chronicles* series, and will take readers through the colorful 1970’s. Beginning right where the fifth book left off, Archer opens with the results of the slander trial that was brought to court by Lady Fenwick against Emma Clifton.

As the characters move from one hazard to another, from monetary issues to political intrigue, things consistently and constantly heat up between these two powerful families. Harry Clifton, WWII hero and bestselling author, and Emma Barrington Clifton, his wife, chief of the family-owned Barrington Shipping Company, are still the strong-willed independent heads of the Clifton clan that also include their son and big time London banker, Sebastian.

On the Barrington side, Sir Giles Barrington, Emma’s brother and Labor politician, is a large part of the story. Offering up a summary of the Clifton-Barrington clans, readers then go on a whirlwind ride into new dangerous territory that includes Harry’s efforts to free Russian, Anatoly Babakova, from the Soviet political prison camp. Emma meets and admires Margaret Thatcher, and Sir Giles rescues his East German lover, which reads like the old, classic spy stories. And, of course, the villain that will not go away: Lady Virginia Fenwick is still the shady plotter who was once married to Sir Giles, and now meets up with a rich heir to a Louisiana fortune.

Every page provides heroes and enemies who plot to bring the families down along with their empires, and if they can’t find a weak spot, their enemies are not above making one up.

Readers can definitely count on Archer’s awesome cliffhanger sending everyone directly into withdrawal...just waiting for Book Seven to appear.

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

COPY CAP MURDER

By Jenn McKinlay

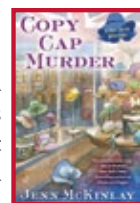
I love it when a mystery author surprises me, and that’s exactly what Jenn McKinlay did at the end of “Copy Cap Murder,” the fourth in her *Hat Shop Mystery* series featuring cousins Scarlett Parker and Vivian Tremont. The cousins have inherited Mim’s Whims, a London hat shop, from their grandmother. Viv designs all the fabulous hats, and Scarlett, recently arrived from the States after a disastrous love affair, charms the customers into buying Viv’s creations.

When the cousins’ good friend Harrison Wentworth invites the pair to a posh party at his boss’s palatial estate, they eagerly accept. Always looking for a chance to show off their hats, this seems like a golden opportunity to drum up even more business for the shop. The party is a celebration of Guy Fawkes Day, a time-honored British tradition which includes tossing a straw-stuffed effigy of Fawkes onto the bonfire. But instead of a straw man, the effigy-to-be turns out to be an actual human being, very recently murdered, who was Harrison’s long-time rival. To make matters worse, minutes before the man is found dead, he and Harrison had a nasty and very public fight. So, guess who jumps to the very top of the Metropolitan Police’s suspect list?

Scarlett and Viv immediately come to Harrison’s defense, determined to prove his innocence. In a lapse of judgment, Scarlett (who harbors a not-so-secret yen for Harrison) lies to the police about being with him during the crucial minutes when the murder was committed.

“Copy Cap Murder” is an entertaining yarn spun by a real pro. And then, of course, there’s that surprise! Highly recommended.

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



MOST WANTED

By Lisa Scottoline

As this domestic thriller opens, Christine Nilsson is leaving her job as a reading specialist at Nutmeg Hill grade school and her fellow teachers and faculty members are throwing her a shower. She’s leaving because she is finally pregnant, and rejoices in the fact. Only her best friend and her parents know the truth about the baby, that she and her husband Marcus used a sperm donor because of his low count. This was a difficult decision, but they’re both happy with the way it’s turning out.

They’ve seen pictures of their donor, known only by a number: Donor 3319. He’s a handsome, intelligent-looking blond guy; a medical student who resembles Marcus. As Christine is helping to clean up after the party, she spots a report on TV of a serial killer, a man who has brutally slain several nurses. The man has been caught and he’s shown being put into a police car. He looks straight into the camera. His name is Zachary Jeffcoat, aka “the Nurse Murderer,” but Christine realizes he’s also Donor 3319.

Marcus isn’t as convinced as his wife is, at first, and the best friend refuses to believe it. But Christine has to know for sure. She can no longer tell if the cause of her nausea is morning sickness or from knowing that the child she carries, that she loves, is most probably fathered by a murderer. Eventually, this innocent unborn child wreaks havoc between her and Marcus and causes her to defy the orders of her husband and their lawyer, putting herself into a dangerous situation trying to discover the truth and save her marriage—and her child.

What would you do if you were carrying the baby of a serial killer? This is a gut-wrenching, heart-pounding story.

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of “Death in the Time of Ice” ■

THE MYSTERY OF THE VENUS ISLAND FETISH

By Tim Flannery

This story takes place in the year 1932, when Archibald Meek, the assistant curator of the anthropology department at the Sydney Museum, has just returned from a field trip to Venus Island. He is extremely enthusiastic about the collection he has brought back with him, including; plants, worms, fish, insects, and art made by the islanders. Gone for a while now, he’s especially optimistic that his girlfriend, Beatrice, will now accept his proposal of marriage.

However, Archie notices that the ceremonial mask in the museum called, the Venus Island Fetish, an inanimate object worshiped for its supposed magical powers, appears altered somewhat. Some of the skulls that are a part of the artifact are no longer the right color. Also, when Archie finds out about the disappearance of several museum curators, he thinks that there is a connection, and begins to worry for the other curators who are still around.

The author brings many peculiar characters into the tale, gives them silly names and fills the story with a lot of humor. The plot is original, with brand new subjects to explore. Everything from a government inquiry to the Japanese Navy to some very rare minerals are brought together to produce a fantastic mystery, lots of action, and laugh-out-loud humor.

This is the first book by “Curator of Worms, Dido Butterworth,” introduced and edited by Australian author, Tim Flannery. Professor Flannery is a scientist and author of nonfiction, as well as an international bestseller. And this particular book is a real find for readers who love misadventure and fantastical tales.

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





THE EVERYTHING BOX

By Richard Kadrey

You will not only love the subtitle of this one: “Starting the Apocalypse is not easy,” but you’ll also love the extreme talent that went into creating this story.

Here we have the ultimate “In the Beginning.” The time is four thousand or more years ago and an angel stands on a mountain looking at the world and the few people left there. Smiling, the angel knows that soon everyone who survived the great flood in that famous “Ark” will also be gone. Now, this angel normally doesn’t do “field work” but he’s excited. If he does this correctly, he will be given a huge promotion. Reaching into his pocket for the piece of equipment that will bring about humanity’s extinction, he realizes that it’s missing and, God forbid, he’s lost it. Mission over.

Jump to the year 2015. A man named Coop, a thief who steals magic objects, delivers a little box to a strange client who hired him. Coop isn’t aware that his latest job could be the end of him. All Coop does stumble upon is a gun being held on him. The gun comes from The Department of Peculiar Science, a division that polices the odd and strange. Seems that the box Coop gave to his client isn’t just another otherworldly thingamabob; it is a box with extreme power that could cancel out the world and everyone in it. Coop has taken this job on and now he has to take on another to stop the mess that will occur if someone uses the box. On his journey, he comes in contact with a group of real whackos, including ghosts, ghouls, and other odd folk that keep this plot going strong.

Not wanting to give too much away, because this is one of those tales you *must* read, just know that the story is fast paced, very funny, and exceptionally clever. Kudos to this author!

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

THE 14TH COLONY

By Steve Berry

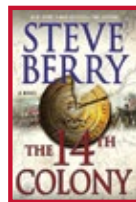
In the early 80’s President Reagan effectively ended the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Through hardline tactics and diplomacy he accomplished what no one thought possible. At that time, there was a lot of resentment among hardline Soviets, especially those in the KGB. What if they still harbored that resentment today? And what if they figured out a way to get revenge against the United States?

In “The 14th Colony,” Stephanie Nelle, in her last act as the head of the Magellan Billet has asked Cotton Malone to do the Russians a favor. He is to perform some simple reconnaissance. He is to fly over an island in Siberia, take photos of a compound and the people who live there. The island is well known to be one of the last vestiges of those who remain steadfast to the old USSR and the Communist Party. But they’ve been content to live in isolation—until now. During his flight, he is shot down by an unidentified source causing both the Russian and the US governments to scramble. Stephanie has no choice but to call on Cotton’s old flame, Cassiopeia Vitt for help.

What follows is a gripping thriller filled with espionage, political intrigue and the possibility of the implosion of the United States government and economy. The research and truths behind this novel are enough to blow your mind. Add that to Steve Berry’s incredible writing and the perfect cast of characters, and you end up with the recipe for a nail-biting political time bomb.

In a series that continually ups the ante, Steve Berry has outdone himself. “The 14th Colony” is the best political thriller to come along in a long time. Savor the experience!

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



THINNING THE HERD

By Adrian Phoenix



This book is a very funny fantasy tale that features one, Hal Rupert Animal Control Officer as the hero, with the help of his friends: Galahad Jones, a tabby cat, and Nick, a wolf. The three of them maintain peace in Eugene, Oregon, patrolling the town while a bromance is built between the two furry forms and the two-legged man.

Lately, someone has been picking off fortune tellers and hippies. They are being snatched out of their shoes in mid-step. When the legend, Hal Rupert Animal Control Officer, gets a sniff of the mystery, he knows that he is the only man who can solve it. So, in between his power struggle with out-of-control cats and dogs, he becomes aware of another kind of animal: werewolves.

Readers will realize that, to look at Hal is to see a very ordinary man, but by day or night things get a little odd. Hal is a dog catcher, yes, but he is also something else when he’s not at work looking after the normal folks of Eugene. Hal can talk to shape shifters who are sometimes ruled by the moon; others, by the power of the sun. During his travels he sees all manner of things, and with this new crime spree he decides to secretly check out the local Fair. He wishes to investigate the disappearance of the hippies and is determined to save everyone from any strange killer who could be lurking about.

This is an extremely quirky book with a very good hero and awesome supporting characters. Adrian Phoenix has gone outside the lines and created a real gem full of very entertaining ideas.

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

THE HUMBUG MURDERS

By L.J. Oliver

At the beginning of this bestselling author’s tale, it’s the week before Christmas in the year 1833. Ebenezer Scrooge is in his counting house tallying up all his wealth when his old friend, Fezziwig, pays him a call. With this one visit, Scrooge’s entire world changes overnight.

The first words out of Fezziwig’s mouth are, “I am dead.” He also tells Scrooge that many more will die, “and then you, Ebenezer Scrooge.”

Still just a young man at the age of thirty, Scrooge is more than a little upset by this news. Just as Fezziwig vanishes, the police show up at his door to take Scrooge to a crime scene where, sure enough, Fezziwig has been found killed. His body was discovered by four people who had been called by Fezziwig to show up at the scene. No one seems to know why anyone would want to kill the man, but Scrooge must figure out what’s happening before the warning that was delivered comes true.

Obviously, being that Scrooge is still just thirty years old, readers will know that the story is set long before “A Christmas Carol” was written, but there are many references that can be found to the classic story within the plot of this fantastic read. Readers will be able to identify some well-known characters, such as, Oliver Twist’s Fagin, the Artful Dodger, as well as a young reporter named Charles Dickens. Readers will also find that the young Scrooge is not as cold-hearted as he becomes later in life.

This book is very good and definitely a little on the dark side. Violence is certainly a part of it as the story develops, so if you’re expecting a sweet Christmas tale, this isn’t it. It is said that this will become the first book in a brand new series with Scrooge taking on the role of detective, and it is such good writing that the rest of the series is bound to be thrilling.

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

DEATH COMES TO KURLAND HALL

By Catherine Lloyd

This book is number three in the *Kurland St. Mary Mystery* series and, it's amazing to say, but these books just keep getting better and better.

Set in Kurland St. Mary, England, in the year 1817, Sophia Giffin and her fiancé, Andrew Stanford, are about to be married. Lucy Hamilton is helping with the wedding plans for her best friend, Sophia, and Major Robert Kurland is preparing to stand up with the groom. There may be a tad bit of awkwardness considering Lucy has just turned down a marriage proposal from the Major because she didn't believe that he really meant it.

After the reception is over and the newly married couple leave, Lucy finds the dead body of Mrs. Maria Chingsford at the bottom of the stairs. Mrs. Chingsford had set her cap for the local rector, Lucy's father, and their engagement had actually been announced at the wedding reception. But it seems that Chingsford was more than what people knew. She was, in fact, a blackmailer selling secrets to the London newspapers, making enemies everywhere she went; even her own daughters didn't like her very much.

When one of the suspects, Emily Fairfax, also comes up dead near a letter confessing that she killed Mrs. Chingsford, Robert and Lucy have to work to find the real story before there are more victims.

As this is the third in the series, readers should begin with number one. The characters are easy to fall in love with, and although each mystery can stand alone, there will always be references to things that happened in the previous books. For any and all fans of Regency romance or mysteries, this story and its characters are perfect. Not to mention, the setting of Kurland Hall is beautiful.

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

GONE AGAIN

By James Grippando

This is an extremely awesome, fast-paced story featuring criminal defense lawyer, Jack Swyteck.

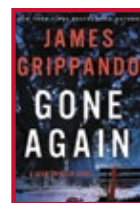
To begin ... Three years ago, a seventeen-year-old girl, Sashi Burgette, vanished on her way to school. Right after she disappeared, an article of clothing belonging to Sashi was found in the truck of an ex-convict, Dylan Reeves, who eventually ends up on Death Row. He was convicted of her murder despite the fact that her body was never discovered.

A few days before Reeves's execution, Sashi's mother tells Jack Swyteck that Sashi called her, and begs him to please find her before Reeves is executed for a crime that he obviously didn't commit. The police have refused to investigate, calling the message from Sashi a hoax. The state attorney refuses to consider the new evidence, insisting that the case is closed, and the governor has already signed the death warrant.

Jack starts to investigate the missing girl and tries to save an innocent man from execution, but the more he finds out, the more complicated the case becomes. Jack is starting to discover that *nothing* is what it first appeared to be. Definitely not the victim, not the killer, and certainly not Sashi's parents who have come to a parting of the ways—each one blaming the other for Sashi's disappearance. He finds stories that differ immensely and testimony that changes, sending the case into utter chaos.

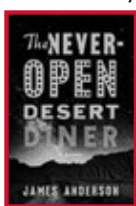
This is a superbly written web with very twisted plot lines and characters that keep the reader on the edge of their chair until the final twist ... that they will *never* see coming. As the extremely inconsistent trial (and errors) develop, the truth is something amazingly riveting to find.

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



THE NEVER-OPEN DESERT DINER

By James Anderson



When thinking about the life of a long haul trucker, it seems to most that this particular job would be dull. For others, it could also mean traveling to new places to explore and uncover all kinds of things that the open road may be hiding. In this book, we are to meet once such trucker.

Getting into the cab with Ben Jones, a trucker that works a section of the highway in Utah, readers become immersed. Finding himself getting deeper in debt, Utah Highway 117 is slowly becoming even bleaker than Ben can deal with. He's been delivering to the same customers again and again, every single day, but is anxious about what will happen if he loses the truck because of money and basic bad luck.

All of a sudden, Ben's life changes when he's pushed into a situation where violence and mystery rules. Ben finds an area that he has never seen before; he spots a young woman playing a cello in an old, abandoned housing development and is very interested as to why she's there. Returning to the spot time and time again, Ben draws the interest of some odd folk who want the instrument, perhaps even the girl, and have a plan to hatch.

This book is indeed a strange tale, filled with an odd group of characters. Ben, and the people he trusts, stay ahead of those who mean him harm. Claire, the girl with the cello, becomes more than a friend to Ben, and the desert road brings back a time when a tragedy occurred at a roadside diner—a past tragedy that will threaten Ben and Claire's love.

This is a wonderfully written novel using the perfect backdrop to make it feel absolutely frightening. The lone, dark desert where people go to escape their lives brings forth a fantastic mystery where love and loneliness are the keys to life and death. Readers will not want to miss this one.

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

DOWNWARD FACING DEATH

By Michelle Kelly

This fun book is the first in a new series by British author, Michelle Kelly.

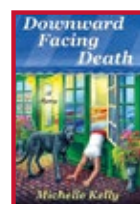
Here, readers first meet Keeley Carpenter, a teacher of yoga from Belfrey, England. She has been away from Belfrey for ten years and has only come back after her father's death. He had run a butcher shop in the village and when Keeley and her mother moved away, some others took over his shop. The shop has been vacant for a while now, and Keeley's mother wants to sell. However, Keeley doesn't want that to happen and decides she wants to keep the shop in honor of her father.

The problem that Keeley has is that she is a vegetarian, not something that exactly fits with a butcher shop, so she decides to open her café/yoga studio instead. However, she soon finds that the townspeople are not as welcoming as she expected them to be, with many unhappy that she's bringing changes to their town. Things then go from bad to worse. Someone tries to burn down the shop, and a man is found murdered inside.

When the investigator comes to question her, Keeley sees that he is an old crush from school—Detective Constable Ben Taylor. He doesn't seem to like her at the start, but when she begins to receive threatening letters his concern grows. The police are not finding the killer, the letters are getting worse, so Keeley finally decides to find the killer herself. If she can't, she will leave Belfrey for good.

This is a good start to a new series. Ms. Kelly is doing a nice job setting the stage in the village of Belfrey, with memorable characters galore. A bit of a romance adds interest to this cozy, with recipes also given to the reader from "Yoga Café" as well as some Yoga exercises to stay calm and happy.

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





THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

By Philip Kerr

This book is number eleven in the *Bernie Gunther* series written by Philip Kerr. In this installment it is 1956, and Bernie is working as a man of all trades—spending most of his time as a hotel caretaker in the South of France. In the past, he was a private investigator in Berlin during his World War II adventures, acting as an aide to some Nazi war criminals.

Now, Bernie spends each day at the Grand Hotel as an anonymous fellow. Unfortunately, his veil of mystery won't last long. He is asked to play bridge with famous author, Somerset Maugham. But this card game is a bit of a sham. Maugham doesn't really need a bridge partner; what he needs is Bernie's help.

Maugham is being blackmailed, perhaps because of his lifestyle or perhaps because of something in his past, seeing as how he used to work as a spy for the British Secret Service. Maugham is not just any pen pusher now; in fact, he is the richest living writer in the world, dwelling in a very lavish villa on the coast.

The author asks Bernie to help him deal with the blackmailer who goes by the name of Heinz Hebel. As Bernie watches a stylish gentleman check into the hotel, he realizes that he has seen him before: Herr Hebel used to go by the name of Henning, a particularly vile person that Bernie had dealings with in '45 Konigsberg, Germany, while dealing with the Russian Army as they advanced in the winter of 1945. As Gunther says, all roads lead back to the Third Reich and the illness that was Hitler's Germany, and this case is yet another road.

This is a terrific tale that will make the secrets, spies and controversies of World War II come back to life. The plots and characters are fantastic, and readers will *not* be able to put it down. Kerr has written another masterpiece.

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

KETTLE OF VULTURES

By Mark P. Sadler

"Kettle of Vultures" is a no-holds-barred ride through polar opposite worlds in Tucson, Arizona. Delve into the drug laden sex trade, the mind of a psychopath mass murderer and the cops that do the hard, but necessary work of policing sick, maladjusted people.

Sadler builds a powerful protagonist and I found myself rooting for this character's success. The bad guys are truly horrific, which makes the story seem all-too-real.

The story walks us through Detective Nate Duarte's rescue from Mexico as a child, his obsession to avenge his mother and his commitment to justice. He's a powerful character and is poised to be a fantastic hero in future novels. He is such a great guy, he takes care of a street walker that might be his lost sister and develops a touching connection to a nun who saved his life in more ways than one. She seems to be the only one that can truly listen to him and know his heart.

I enjoyed following his detective work and how he stumbled upon the killer just as he was...oops, I can't post spoilers in here.

If you like gritty, raw, explicit thrillers you'll love this book.

Reviewed by Anderson Atlas, author of "Surviving the Improbable Quest" ■



THE GIRL ON THE RUN

By Gregg Olsen

In the opening pages, Rylee, a fifteen-year-old girl, arrives home from school to find her father dead; he has a knife in his heart and a key in his hand. Her mother is gone, and there is a message written on the floor in blood: RUN.

Rylee scoops up her brother, Hayden, and they flee. It seems that these two kids have been trained to do just that, but no one has ever told them the reason why. Determined to find her mother, readers are brought through the tale that opens the door to Rylee's lot in life as the girl uncovers facts about her past that she never knew. Not to mention, learning who or what is behind the horrific fear that has harassed her parents for years.

Rylee and her brother will begin their voyage, revealing terrible and disturbing crimes that will lead them both to uncover some extremely shocking things about the people they love the most. And when this comes to an end, their voyage is not over.

This is an exceptional book for a YA thriller. This author who has a huge resume when it comes to both writing and acting, has produced a tale that readers of all ages will not be able to put down. It will be interesting to see how Rylee's twisted path through life works out.

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

THE STEEL KISS

By Jeffery Deaver

One thing is for sure when you pick up a Jeffery Deaver book, you will be entertained.

"The Steel Kiss" is the next installment in the popular *Lincoln Rhyme* series and, yet again, Deaver doesn't disappoint.

With an unmatched ability to create the perfect characters to fit the plot line, Deaver takes fans to the edge in this one and dangles them over the cliff. "The Steel Kiss" places Amelia Sachs in the forefront. From the first page, she's chasing down a suspect only to see disaster strike in a mall. The prey then turns into the predator as he sets his eyes on Sachs and begins the dangerous game of cat-and-mouse. A game that he is determined to win.

Deaver is a master at keeping not only the characters fresh in his series, but also keeping his plot lines original and never boring. In a world of series authors, many of whom struggle to keep their series interesting, Deaver shows why he is on the top of a very short list of writers who raise the bar with each and every installment they create. Fans of the *Rhyme* series will devour this book in one sitting. Readers new to the series will have no choice but to order all the *Lincoln Rhyme* books and lose themselves for weeks. I can say that, already, "The Steel Kiss" will be listed on several "Best of" lists and should already be considered one of the best books of 2016.

Reviewed by John Raab ■



OFF THE GRID

By C.J. Box

Nate Romanowski doesn't like being called a homicidal libertarian folk hero, even though the old adage, "if the shoe fits," just happens to fit Nate like a glove. Nate has been minding his own business when a phone call from his lover, Olivia Brannan, reveals his location to a pair of very alert guys; Brian Tyrell and Keith Volk. These two tell him that, unless he wants to go to trial for the many felonies he's accumulated over time, he'd better sign up with the Wolverines. This is a group of government freelancers who are sick of federal rules and regulations. They tell him he must speak to a terrorist who has landed in the Red Desert. They hope that Muhammad Ibraaheem (or, Ibby, their target), will open up to Nate because they share a love for falconry.

No sooner has Nate taken off to track down Ibby then Wyoming Governor Spencer Rulon, who has found out about Nate's disappearance, calls in Nate's old friend, game warden Joe Pickett, to go after him. Obstacles in the way of Joe and Nate involve a very irritated Grizzly, as well as Joe's daughter, Sheridan, a college senior who decides to go camping in the worst possible place.

Nate locates Ibby and makes friends with him; Joe, in the end, finds Nate. But nothing goes according to plan. This is a terrific read, yet again, from C.J. Box, whose Red Desert of Wyoming has become a very unwelcome place for all who tread there.

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

A PRISONER IN MALTA

By Phillip DePoy

London, 1583: someone is plotting to kill Queen Elizabeth I. The details as to 'who' and 'why' are a little vague, but the Queen has ample enemies to make the list of wannabe killers extremely lengthy.

What the people do know is that there is a prisoner in a jail cell in Malta who has information that could stop the plot in its tracks. The Queen's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham, has employed the services of a Cambridge student, Christopher Marlowe, to rescue this prisoner from the most secure and heavily-guarded prison in the world. He must release the prisoner and find out the identities of those who wish to murder the Queen in order to change the course of British history.

Marlowe is removed from his studies by a friend, Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, on the orders of Walsingham to help save England. The Catholics are conspiring, so Marlowe and Lopez take the assignment, transforming Marlowe from a brawler and a womanizer into a special agent for the Crown.

Marlowe travels to Malta and, along with investigating a killing, goes his own way to solving and preventing an assassination with the help of a sixteen-year-old girl. Lots and lots of intrigue, swordplay, treachery and more, bring about a true journey of pure suspense.

For bibliophiles who like to read English history, this will be right up your alley. The book is definitely not a drag, as some are, and there is constant action. Even more good news? The author is planning to write more mysteries starring Christopher Marlowe, who readers will absolutely love to follow.

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

THE STOPPED HEART

By Julie Myerson

Get ready for a great ghost story that is told over two separate timelines.

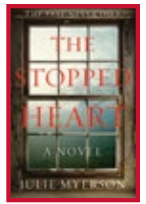
In the present, Mary and Graham Coles have escaped to the country to make a fresh start following a family tragedy. They, of course, don't know about the long dead family that haunts their new home and the daughter of that family, Eliza, who is about to disclose the events that happened at the tumbledown cottage 150 years ago. Despite the seemingly dark, perhaps ghostly presences in the place, Mary is drawn in by the house. The cottage, nothing like their home in London, has offered her sanctuary from the constant reminders of the heartbreak that sent them fleeing to the home in the first place.

Graham has hopes that the move from the city will help Mary out of her depression. But calm is not to be found, as ghostly steps creak in the night, doors slam and a strange, red-headed young man appears outside one minute only to disappear the next.

It was after a violent storm that the family living in the house long ago found a red-haired young man under a huge tree uprooted in the yard. Eliza, thirteen years old and daughter of the house, doesn't like him, but her young siblings soon are crazy about the mysterious James Dix who pushes his way into Eliza's heart. Over a century later, Mary finds herself the object of Eddie's attention, her very married neighbor, and falls for the mysterious man.

This two-fisted read is extremely frightening at times. The cast of characters is totally creepy in both timelines, and is easy to follow because the historic parts are told in first person while the modern world is told in third. This is definitely a book that never stops delivering the thrills and chills.

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



THE SEMESTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

By Cynthia Kuhn

Gotta love this title! This book is set at a very prominent university, a university where the school's reputation and intellectual rivalries quickly set the tone for an extremely competitive world. It will be a hard place to be the 'new kid in town,' as English professor Lila Maclean is soon to find out.



The politics are intense within the university's walls, and Lila soon finds herself in the line of fire. The faculty relationships are so competitive that they sometimes turn quite lethal, making the academic world even more threatening than if everyone was really threatened with physical violence.

When Lila shows up at Stonedale University she doesn't know anyone, student or colleague. Like any newcomer at any institution she tries to find out about her colleagues, their personalities, and the inner-workings of their departments. Lila is thrilled to be part of the impressive university, and is honored to be chosen for such a prestigious school until... and you know there always has to be an "until," she finds one of her colleagues very much dead.

Pretty soon Lila knows things about everyone, from the Chancellor to the detective working the case who believes that Lila, or someone she knows, may be responsible for the killing. Fearing the focus being placed on the new girl, she decides to act and find the killer herself. But when there are more attacks on the professors, a peculiar symbol appears at each crime scene. When this happens, Lila is told of a secret society that might have something to do with the murders, and receives her very own threat; the same symbol that clearly states she's been chosen as the next victim.

A very intricate, cool story featuring the depth of an institution where everyone is dying to climb the ladder of success.

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

THE FATHER

By Anton Svensson

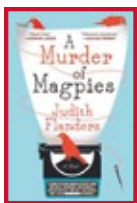
In this fascinating book (Part I of a two-novel series), we meet a family that centers around three brothers and their childhood friend who become bank robbers. The fourth brother, who was not involved in the real robberies, tells the story of three boys who went from being innocent kids to public enemy number one material, and of the man who made them go wrong. Based on a true story of domestic violence, a father who casts a shadow over the lives of three of his sons, and a detective who is no stranger to growing up in a shattered home, it is automatically clear upon beginning the story that this is no ordinary crime.

The author gives a glimpse of the past before shooting the story forward to present day. Even though Leo, Felix and Vincent had no contact with their father after getting free of his hatred, his larger than life figure is always in the back of Leo's mind. The brothers' tale unfolds as they commit a string of bank robberies in Sweden that upset the nation back in the 1990's. The planning that went into the robberies is powerful, and more than a little bit frightening. Leo must create the escape routes, set up getaway cars, and various other things, letting the public know that he was extremely intelligent.

This is an exciting, yet tear-jerking thriller told by this, the fourth brother, who was not mixed up in the world of crime. But as the reader watches these young lads turn into the "Most Wanted" the action races, along with the crushing emotions of lives turned bad by a hideous parent.

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





A MURDER OF MAGPIES

By Judith Flanders

Main character, Samantha Clair, has a regular schedule: she gets up early, heads to her office, and is at her desk with her second cup of coffee in hand before anyone else arrives at work. She's an editor and has a corral of wonderful authors who turn out bestsellers every year.

One of these authors, Kit Lovell, is an energetic undercover writer looking into the fashion world, and has just turned in a manuscript revealing the inner workings of fashion giant, Vernet. While hunting for data, Kit also found evidence that the death of the company's head honcho, Rodrigo Aleman, *wasn't* an accident. Considering the cut-throat fashion industry, there are many folks that believe Kit's new book would damage them, and would do anything to make sure it's never published. Soon, a messenger delivering the manuscript is found dead. After this horror, Kit has a break-in at her apartment; Samantha experiences one, too. It's quite clear that the manuscript's future is not good, and then ... Kit goes missing.

Samantha has some meetings with some pretty creepy lawyers, as well as Rodrigo's brother, who all hint at criminal activities being connected to Aleman's fashion house. So, after Kit disappears, Samantha joins forces with her solicitor, her mother and Inspector Jacob Field to open an investigation that will hopefully bring Kit back alive.

The parade of extremely amusing characters will leave all readers looking forward to the next installment. This tale is a great read, with smart and skillful writing that definitely earns Judith Flanders another "5-stars." Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

THE MURDER OF MARY RUSSELL

By Laurie R. King

Fans of this series will be shocked by this title! Is King going to kill off Mary Russell, just like Doyle killed off Holmes? To find out, get the book and read on. If you're new to the Mary Russell books and you're a Sherlock Holmes fan, get busy—there are a lot of novels in this series.

Although the title leads one to believe that the story will be solely about Mary Russell, readers are taken deep into the life of Mrs. Hudson, where her startling background is laid bare to them. This is after the initial shock, when a man purporting to be Mrs. Hudson's long-lost son shows up at the house in Sussex.

As the novel opens, Mary Russell is visited by this unpleasant man saying he is the son of their housekeeper. Mary has no reason to disbelieve him, but is unprepared for what a vulgar and violent person he is. At first she thinks he must be a salesman, but soon discovers he wants to kill her.

Very soon after the first scene, Mrs. Hudson walks into the last room Mary was in to find a large puddle of blood and a bit of mayhem. Mary is gone and it looks like she has been murdered. Bit by bit, we learn that Mrs. Hudson is not at all the person we've always assumed her to be. In fact, she's had a bit of a rough life. No, more than a bit. She's had to face heart-wrenching happenings and has been forced to make unbearable decisions.

Another fine addition to the series. Is it the last?

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Eine Kleine Murder" ■



THE TAXIDERMIST'S DAUGHTER

By Kate Mosse

We open on the Eve of St. Mark in the year 1912. In a churchyard located in a small Sussex village, according to superstition, the spirits of those who will die the following year will walk. Connie, the taxidermist's daughter, has followed her father to the churchyard and hides as she watches a group of men, some local and some strangers, come together as the church bells ring.

Connie and her father lead lonesome lives in their home referred to as Blackthorn House. Her father is an odd man and very difficult to live with. Connie has mastered the art of taxidermy and does the work of stuffing birds and animals while battling with half-memories she refers to as her "lost time." Connie was the victim of an accident when she was twelve years old and her father ran the successful museum of taxidermy called, "Gifford's World Famous House of Avian Curiosities." Connie can't remember anything about her life before the accident and her father will not speak of it. But now the museum no longer exists, except for the few things they brought with them when they moved to the small town.

Consequently, the body of a woman is discovered in the river; Connie is convinced she was murdered. However, when the death certificate is signed, the woman's demise is called a suicide. Slowly, Connie's memory returns to the events leading up to her accident and she becomes determined to find out all she can about her late Governess, Cassie ...

This book has a lot of heart and a wonderful narrative—a real "can't put it down" quality right up until the final page. All readers, even those who aren't crazy about creepy stories, will like this one as the pace goes faster and faster while the final pieces of the puzzle are set in place. Brilliantly written, I highly recommend this tale.

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

THE WINTER GARDEN MYSTERY

By Carola Dunn

It is England, the year is 1923, and the Honourable Daisy Dalrymple is about to go on an assignment for *Town and Country* magazine. The assignment deals with a country estate, yet the most interesting thing happens to be found in the estate's flower beds; right among the daffodil bulbs is the body of a dead, pregnant parlor maid.

The place is called Occles Hall in Cheshire, a Tudor home owned by Sir Reginald Parslow. Housed inside is he, his battle-axe wife, Lady Valeria, their children, Sebastian and Roberta, and Sir Reginald's secretary, WWI veteran Ben Goodman.

Daisy is excited to go off to Occles Hall, but it is truly a gloomy place. She wishes to do a colorful, lively story and try to bring a breath of fresh air to all the gloom and doom of the Hall. There is a former school friend at Occles, Roberta 'Bobbie' Parslow who is the person that got Daisy the job of photographing Occles Hall. Also, the Mistress of the Manor, Lady Valeria, is just a bit bad-tempered, but Daisy will make do.

Daisy, guided around the grounds by Welsh gardener Owen Morgan, hasn't been working very long into her stay when Owen spots a dying bush that leads to the discovery of the body of Grace Moss. Grace was once a sweetheart of Owens but was said to have run away with a salesman. It is quite a surprise to see her in the flower bed of the Winter Garden.

As secrets come out, one being Grace's pregnancy, it becomes clear that suspicion is sitting on everyone's shoulders. And when Scotland Yard's investigator Inspector Dunnett shows up, not even Lady Valeria is above questioning.

This book is a very interesting cozy, full of charming and equally non-charming characters. Second in a series featuring Daisy Dalrymple, this is the perfect choice for readers who want a very memorable afternoon of mystery.

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

WHAT REMAINS OF ME

By Alison Gaylin

June 28, 1980: Kelly Lund (a seventeen-year-old student) shoots and kills John McFadden (a movie director) at his home in Hollywood. The crime is the top news of the day—maybe even the decade. During her arrest and trial, many considered all different possibilities when it came to motive; information that Kelly refused to share. Going to prison for twenty-five years, she kept the truth about the killing to herself.

Fast-forward twenty years: Kelly has served her time and married the brother of her former friend, Bellamy. She and hubby Shane are living outside of Los Angeles, but their marriage is on the rocks. Shane is addicted to pills and Kelly is having an affair with a neighbor—a sculptor named “Rocky Three.”

Now that Kelly’s life is going so-so, her father-in-law, movie legend Sterling Marshall, is killed in the same manner that McFadden was, making Kelly suspect number one.

At this point, the story fluctuates between the two timelines, focusing on Kelly’s previous life and wrongdoing, as well as her present life dealing with Shane’s issues, and a detective that has been placed on the case to solve Marshall’s death. What did Kelly do in the past? And what, if anything, does the truth of the past have to do with the present murder?

It’s an interesting format, as there are magazine and news articles in the book that add to the interest and clues of both cases. Kelly is intricate, intelligent, and secretive. And when it comes to the Hollywood scene, she plays a very large part in it all. From word one, this is definitely a “5-star” thriller.

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

WAR HAWK

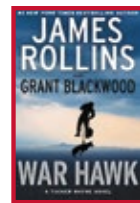
By James Rollins and Grant Blackwood

In this amazing read, former Army Ranger Tucker Wayne and his very brilliant war dog, Kane (a Belgian Shepherd) are propelled into a conspiracy that will threaten to stir up the American democracy in the next *Sigma Force* sequel from these two fine authors.

To begin: Tucker gets a visit from a former Army colleague who comes to him for help. She is trying to run from assassins who are hunting for her and her son. Tucker must find out who killed a brilliant idealist, a task which will lead him to the most powerful figures within the government of the United States. This trek will go from the haunted ruins of a plantation in the Deep South to the beachheads of a vicious civil war in Trinidad. Tucker and Kane have to discover the truth behind a mystery that goes all the way back to World War II; the truth of an event that is still changing the world we live in today. The two soldiers will be forced to break laws, tell of national secrets and risk life and limb to stop a nut case who is determined to control the future of modern warfare.

“War Hawk” has two of the facets most wanted by readers of action/suspense. First, some of it takes place in World War II and, second, one of the main characters is a wonderful canine and partner that all have come to love. James Rollins wasted no time at all to release this, his latest novel. His collaboration with thriller author Grant Blackwood to write the incredible Tucker Wayne series of military thrillers is a perfect combination.

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



AND THEN THERE WERE NUNS

By Kylie Logan

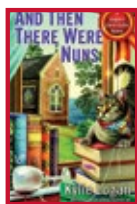
South Bass Island, three miles from the northern shore of Ohio, is only four miles long and a mile and a half wide. But don’t let its small size fool you. There’s a lot happening on this picturesque island, and B&B owner Bea Cartwright once again finds herself right in the middle of it.

In this fourth installment of Kylie Logan’s *League of Literary Ladies* mystery series, ten nuns have arrived on the island for a week-long stay at Water’s Edge Retreat Center. Bea has been hired to provide all the meals for the nuns and the other members of her book club—the Literary Ladies—pitch in to help her. Even though it’s off-season for tourists, the B&B also has two paying guests, so Bea is glad of the extra hands in the kitchen.

The nuns’ retreat is about to start when they receive the upsetting news that the world-famous facilitator they are expecting to lead the program is not coming, and they are on their own. But that’s just the beginning. One of the nuns goes missing, and Bea stumbles across her dead body the next morning. Then, another nun dies under mysterious circumstances. Bea and the other members of the Literary Ladies start to wonder about eerie parallels between what’s happening on South Bass Island and Agatha Christie’s mystery classic, “And Then There Were None.” Since Bea has the trust of the remaining sisters, the local police chief asks her to interview each of them and help figure out who’s behind the mysterious deaths.

“And Then There Were Nuns” is a fresh take on a classic mystery puzzle that will keep readers guessing until the very end. Lots of fun.

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



THE ADVOCATE’S DAUGHTER

By Anthony Franze

A young woman is killed in the middle of a world of manipulators who are vying for more power in the Supreme Court. A great legal thriller, the story of a prominent family is at its core, as is a tale involving a thirty-year-old murder in Japan, starring three school-age boys living on an American base with their families.

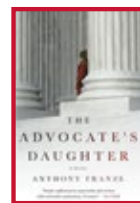
The boys were at the age of ‘boys will be boys’ stuff, with one stealing from a liquor store. Sadly, the owner of the store chased them down and, during a scuffle, the owner was stabbed by one of the youth. The boys immediately ran for the base, and for the rest of their time in Japan had nothing to do with each other. These were the days of no Internet, Facebook, or Twitter. It was a different world, and for thirty years Sean Serrat didn’t know what had become of the others; he believed that the awful secret they shared would never again see the light of day.

The powerhouses of Washington D.C. are very much in business, and Attorney Sean Serrat is now a lawyer at the Supreme Court. Sean turned over many new leaves over time and has become a very good lawyer, respected by all. When he finds out that he’s on the list to be nominated to the Court, his own daughter, Abby, turns up missing. And when her dead body is found in the Supreme Court Library, her boyfriend is accused of the crime.

Sean is sure that the police have arrested the wrong person and decides to do his own investigation. Secrets and lies come out of the woodwork, and many of the most powerful people in the country come together to shut him up.

The sins of the past meet up with secrets in the present in this fast-paced, unforgettable thriller. This is the book for all readers who absolutely love the “best of the best” when it comes to suspense!

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





COME DARK

By Steven F. Havill

This is the most recent in a very long series, *Posadas County Mysteries*. It's the twenty-first if I counted right. This fictional county, located in southeast New Mexico, is home to a varied cast of characters. The series started out focusing on aging Undersheriff Bill Gastner, but this book features the current Undersheriff, Estelle Reyes-Guzman. Both are terrific characters, along with others in the department.

As the book opens, vandalism is discovered at the strange resort being built by local billionaire, Miles Waddell. Waddell has situated *NightZone*, his theme park, on a mountain top that will be accessible by narrow gauge train and a subsequent tram, wanting tourists to really want to go there. There will be the usual theme park attractions, but also a gigantic radio telescope dish that is already attracting the notice of scientists from all over the world.

Three weeks after Labor Day, on the same day that the public, including press, is invited to tour the facility, a couple of curious cases pop up in the town below. An alert patrolman, Tom Pasquale, notices an old, battered Illinois license plate on a new car outside the megastore, The Spree. At almost the same time, Stacie Stewart walks into The Spree and never comes out. She has left her baby and her dog in the overheated car. The two are rescued quickly, but the hunt is on for Stacie. The two in the Illinois car are questioned about the substance found in their vehicle after removing their disguises, but it turns out to be ... alfalfa.

One more meanwhile, the popular high school coach has been gunned down in the girls' shower right after a wildly successful volleyball match.

It was fun to follow all of these threads, guessing (wrong) the whole time about what was going on.

This is a very nice police procedural with touches of wry humor—full of quirky characters.

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

TOWN IN A CINNAMON TOAST

By B.B. Haywood

In the village of Cape Willington, Maine, the wedding bells are about to ring for Maggie Tremont and baker, Herr Georg Wolfsburger at the Holliday blueberry farm. And if that's not enough to keep Candy Holliday, Maggie's maid of honor busy, she also has to discover where the best man, Julius, has disappeared to.

Unfortunately, she does not find him alive and well. Instead, she discovers his body in the archive rooms located at the English Point Lighthouse and Museum. Apparently, he was in the midst of researching something. Julius was a historian who was in the process of looking into the history of the founding families of Cape Willington when he was hit over the head with a bottle of champagne, knocking his lights out for good. The same exclusive brand of champagne that was ordered for the wedding dinner.

Candy is notorious for solving crimes in Cape Willington and, once again, she finds herself in the center of a murder plot that just doesn't make sense. So before the wedding plans fall completely flat, Candy rushes to solve the murder and bring a killer to justice, unearthing a plot that could harm the small, quaint town in ways Candy never envisioned.

Herr Georg Wolfsburger is, needless to say, a fascinating character in this mystery. A fun tale with each character well-developed and written perfectly, this being number seven, fans already know and love the *Candy Holliday Murder Mystery* series. With a long sub-plot that keeps readers spellbound, they will be searching for the next book.

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



ED, NOT EDDIE

By Max Everhart

This is the third in Max Everhart's *Eli Sharpe Mystery* series.

Eli has been asked to look into a group of threatening letters received by Ed Leviner (never call her Eddie), who is a female college baseball pitcher being considered by the major leagues. While Ed isn't really concerned by the letters, her father is, and Eli is working for him.

The small town in Cook County, South Carolina, is much different from Eli's Ashville, North Carolina—his adopted hometown. The more Eli discovers about this place and the relationships between the possible suspects he comes across, he becomes convinced that this small town is harboring a very dangerous person. This person seems intent on interfering in Ed's career plans, and will not stop at killing her to destroy her path to being the first woman to pitch in the majors. Eli, remembering his own love for the game, is determined to make sure that Ed gets her chance.

Eli knows that he doesn't have a lot of time to find the unknown stalker. He also discovers that Ed has a great deal of fans, but not a whole lot of friends. Ed's divorced parents are always yelling at each other, and the local sheriff in town has a son who just happens to be one of Ed's many discarded boyfriends. In other words, Eli has a lot on his plate as local law enforcement remains completely unhelpful.

This is an excellent read and the author's characters are very real; in particular, Eli Sharpe and his friend Ernest Carpenter. Readers will enjoy the plot and root for Eli to discover the criminal before a more serious crime occurs.

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

THE WINTER GIRL

By Matt Marinovich

This suspense / thriller doesn't "take off" like some do from word one, but the slow, relaxed pace is perfect for building this almost ghostly, frightening tale.

Scott and Elise are going through a bad patch in their marriage when they are called to Elise's father's home to help him through his last months of life. Victor, her father, lives in the Hamptons, which is white with snow and as solitary as a room in a sanitarium.

Scott and Elise reside in Brooklyn, a far busier place, and both have to leave their jobs to aid Victor. Elise, a speech therapist and Scott, a photographer, become a bit perturbed after the months get longer and Victor still hangs in there. During this confinement, Elise experiences family woes from the past and Scott starts snooping near the abandoned house next door. Each night at 11PM exactly the lights go on in the empty bedroom in that house, but being that it's the dead of winter and no one else is around, Scott delves into this odd mystery.

And then...things start to go 'Hitchcockian.' Even though this is a narrative, it seems like a drone is following everyone from room to room, as Scott starts to slog through the snow, hauling his camera and spy glasses with him, trying to get a look inside the empty house. Elise begins to join him on his little forays, and their trespassing leads to both a gruesome discovery and a mass of scandals that involve Elise's father, her brother, and the 'Winter Girl.'

As if stringed instruments are playing in the background, readers will feel dizzy with alarm at the feeling of foreboding that builds the thrills and chills perfectly. For those who believe the Hamptons in winter is a posh place to visit, this story will definitely have you all running for the biggest, busiest, brightest city imaginable.

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

A BED OF SCORPIONS

By Judith Flanders

Samantha ‘Sam’ Clair has a lunch date with her friend Aidan Merriam in London. When she arrives, she finds him very upset over the suicide of his partner, Frank Compton. Frank and Aidan are owners of the Merriam-Compton Art Gallery. Aidan can’t think of a reason that Frank would kill himself, yet the CID investigating the death are specifically looking into the gallery’s finances.

Sam’s boyfriend, Jake Field, is in charge of the case, and has doubts concerning the suicide, especially since Frank was killed with a Soviet-era handgun which would be very hard to come by in England.

While the investigation proceeds, Sam begins doing research for an Arts Council project when she meets Celia Stein, daughter of the late pop artist Edward Stevenson. Stevenson hadn’t been seen for a few years until his skeleton recently “popped up.” The Tate Gallery is about to host a Stevenson show and Frank’s niece, Lucy, who works at Merriam-Compton, is also planning an exhibition of the Stevenson works that the gallery owns.

Stevenson’s uncovered corpse has CSI ruling his death a suicide as well. But when you add on yet another dead body, the “accidental” death of a restorer for the gallery, the coincidences become too much for Jake to handle. Digging deeper into the business affairs of the gallery and the upcoming exhibition, Jake also believes that someone is threatening his own true love’s life.

This book is very cleverly written and humorous. The bodies pile up and the plot is one that will have readers chomping at the bit for the next Judith Flanders story.

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



DARK MATTERS

By Michael Dow

New CEO, Rudy Dersch, takes over the world’s largest corporation, but the job comes with an unforeseen hiccup, an invitation to join the Consortium—a small group of large-scale elite who quietly rule the world.

The deeper Rudy gets into his new job, the more difficult it becomes to know right from wrong. Taking over at General Resources and joining the group, Rudy finds himself with a wealth of responsibilities and decisions that will not only affect his own company, but will play havoc on global matters. In other words, Rudy is not quite as prepared as he thought.

In the meantime, Jonas Hanssen works as CEO of Hanssen Scientific, a subsidiary of General Resources. They are using computers to find a mineral rich asteroid. If they can locate the object, they might be able to stock up the Earth’s supplies that are rapidly declining. Jonas is also spending time researching dark matter through a link to a probe that is heading out of the solar system. Jonas is really excited about this project, but GRI is not happy and wants him to forget about it and go back to searching for the one thing they need.

Readers will find themselves hating some of these characters...a good hate. A hate that makes you see these rich individuals pushing their own policies and influencing the “right” folks to alter the wealth of nations as exactly what they are—true villains.

This story is extreme cloak-and-dagger. Although at times a bit busy and difficult to understand the science, readers will love the plot.

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

FOREIGN ECLAIRS

By Julie Hyzy

Executive Chef Olivia (Ollie) Paras has even more to deal with than usual in “Foreign Eclairs,” the ninth in Julie Hyzy’s *White House Chef Mystery* series. An invaluable member of her kitchen staff has resigned to pursue other career options, and Ollie has to sandwich (sorry—couldn’t resist!) personnel interviews into her already too-tight schedule. Her Secret Service husband, Leonard Gavin, known to everyone as Gav, is usually a source of support when Ollie is feeling the pressure, but not this time. Unfortunately, he’s out of town on an assignment that’s so top-secret he can’t even share details with his wife.

When an explosion rips through Cenga Prison in Wisconsin and three people are killed, Ollie’s real nightmare begins. Three years ago, Armustan terrorists failed in an attempt to force the president to free another notorious terrorist, Farbod Ansari, from that very prison, and Ansari is still incarcerated there. The terrorists blamed Ollie for their failure and vowed revenge. Even though the regime that was in power during the aborted escape attempt has been overthrown, Ollie is still fearful, and with good reason.

On her way home the night of the prison explosion, she is viciously mugged near the White House. The Secret Service agents assigned to the case believe this is not a random mugging, and that the terrorists have targeted Ollie once again. The violence escalates, and an innocent member of the White House staff is horrifically tortured and murdered. Ollie and Gav discover that their entire apartment has been bugged, so until the terrorists are finally captured, they will have no peace of mind anywhere.

“Foreign Eclairs” takes readers on a breathtaking roller coaster ride until the very last page. It’s another well-spun tale from a real pro, and sadly, the last in the series. I’ll certainly miss those sneak peeks at life behind the scenes at the White House, and I’m sure thousands of other Julie Hyzy fans will, too.

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



SCENE OF THE BRINE

By Mary Ellen Hughes

This cozy takes place in Cloverdale, New York, where everyone is gossiping about the Porter family who has recently moved into town. Jeremy Porter is a realtor and has just bought an old mansion on the edge of town, bringing his mother and sister along to live with him. Unfortunately, Dirk Unger, who just happens to be Jeremy’s accountant, has moved there too. It seems that Unger is a mean jerk who’s using all the dirt he can dig up on the Porters in order to destroy them.

The owner of Piper’s Picklings, Piper Lamb, has seen first-hand just how rotten Dirk can be back when her friend, Sugar Heywood, came up against Dirk and he ruined her reputation over something that happened many years ago.

One night, Dirk winds up dead and suspicion lands on Sugar’s son, Zach, making him suspect number one. When another person becomes ill by poisoning, things get a bit personal for Piper. Why is that? Because they were poisoned with the same plant found in Piper’s very own brandied cherries. Given some clues she did not actually witness for herself, the plucky Piper uses her wits to bring down the murderer.

This book is number three in the author’s *Pickled Preserved Mystery* series and is a very good one. Readers will be able to easily follow the story even if it’s the first book out of the series that they read. Piper is still that strong-willed ‘star,’ and other characters both old and new are enjoyable to spend time with. To make it even better, there are some brand new recipes to try out!

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



WRAITH

By Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens

In the year 1995, the CIA had been working on, and finally found, a way to change everything they thought they knew about modern science. Of course, they hid it all away from the government and hoped their secrets would remain clothed in subterfuge....

A new force has learned how to make a ghostly soldier with a mind capable of using deadly force, and now a Russian general has secretly entered enemy territory with a group of these new supernatural fighters; an army that can't be killed because they are already dead.

Two days after Arlington, Virginia Police Detective Matt Caidin was comforting Laura Hart (a federal agent who was seriously injured in an automobile accident), he gets a visit from a strange man named Caparelli, who tells the detective that he is an FBI special agent. Matt tells Caparelli that he ran into Laura at a café earlier in the evening. Oddly enough, the man states that he spoke to her ghost. Seems this man is the director of something called "Project Crosswind," and he orders Matt to find out from Laura's ghost the plans of Russian General Borodine who, with his undead assassins, is using the immense power of an unknown object.

Laura is the only one who knew what the general's plans actually were and the only one that can talk to her is Matt. Now it's fallen on him to stop a force that could really mess up the world and end life for one and all.

This is a gem that will certainly keep readers up at night. It is a science fiction/thriller that offers a little bit of everything. Most especially...an awesome surprise ending!

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

THAT DARKNESS

By Lisa Black

Every once in a great while I'll pick up a book and by the time I get through the first few pages, I'm asking myself, "Why haven't I read this author before?" That's what happened with "That Darkness" by Lisa Black.

"That Darkness" is a crime thriller with a sharp psychological edge running through it. In it, we meet forensic investigator Maggie Gardiner, and Detective Jack Renner, both with the Cleveland Police Department. They're working the same case, yet dissecting it with a totally different perspective. As the bodies of unidentified victims start to pile up, the professional and personal lives of our two main characters are getting closer to a volatile collision.

Without giving away plotlines, let me say "That Darkness" left me thinking for days. I was left thinking about the intricacies of the plot, the beauty of Lisa Black's writing, and the profound relationship between law and justice. Lisa Black, through her incredible characters and narration, shows the delicate balance between the two and how hard it is to know which side is the right one.

With "That Darkness," Lisa Black has written a book that everyone should read. But if you are a lover of mystery and suspense, this is an absolute must read.

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



CHAOS THEORY

By M. Evonne Dobson

Following in the footsteps of other junior gumshoes from Nancy Drew or Encyclopedia Brown to Enid Blyton's *Famous Five*, Dobson has rekindled the formula to introduce us to high school juniors Kami, Sandy, and Sam—three kids who just happen to stumble over a mystery taking place right under their noses. Just don't ever refer to them as The Beanie Boppers.

Kami's school locker is a science experiment in chaos theory that she hopes will win her an MIT scholarship, and her life has evolved chaotically since the recent death of her grandmother. Taking everything in stride, she takes meeting the new boy, Daniel, as no big deal until his dark past emerges and he appears to be stalking her.

Enlisting the assistance of her stealthy friends, she discovers Daniel is investigating who is really responsible for the fatal overdose of drugs his sister Julia took, especially since all the adults are convinced she was just another teen suicide. Combining forces, the team takes on the bad guys, as well as their over-burdened teen hormones and angst, as Kami ends up putting her own life on the line to get to the truth.

Although this is marketed as Young Adult, it is a very appropriate read for adults too. I read the build up to the finale at a gallop—not surprising since the characters were on horseback at the time!

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

THE BIG BRUSH OFF

By Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy has carved out a nice historical mystery series featuring former Pinkerton detective, turned hard-boiled crime novelist, Jake Donovan, and his wife, Laura, a famous actress.

Set during the Depression era, Jake is reaping the rewards of his success with the *Blackie Doyle* series, and Laura has achieved stardom, working with Joan Crawford, and possibly even with Clark Gable!

However, fame and money have taken the edge off Jake's hard-boiled crime series, and his publishers are none too happy with his latest effort. Threatened with the termination of his contract, Jake will have to find a way to channel the *Blackie Doyle* of old.

In the meantime, a cold case Jake worked years ago as a Pinkerton detective comes back to haunt him, as the murder victim's mother is dying and wants Jake to find her daughter's killer so she can see justice served before she dies. Jake and Laura travel to the Midwest town of Hanover, so Jake can focus on his novel and poke around in the old murder case. His snooping is making someone a little nervous, but also has Jake feverishly writing as his inspiration returns with relish on top.

Since the setting is in the Midwest, as opposed to New York or Hollywood, the pacing in this one is a little slower, meanders at times, and the hard-boiled tone is not as prominent. However, the witty and humorous dialogue is as sharp and zany as ever.

The cold case is personal for Jake, adding an emotional element to the story, giving it a greater depth than in previous installments. I love the banter between Jake and Laura which makes them a delightful detective team, *ala* Nick and Nora.

This is a solid, entertaining addition to the series, and I am really enjoying it so far. Compared to the work of Christopher Fowler and Dorothy Cannell, this series is a must read for historical mystery fans. 4 stars.

Reviewed by Julie Whiteley ■

WHITE GHOST

By Steven Gore

"White Ghost" is number four in the *Graham Gage* series by Steven Gore. In the past thirty or so years, Graham Gage has battled enemies near and far and is now facing the biggest enemy of all time. He is suffering from an aggressive form of cancer.

As it has been quite a while since he was a homicide detective working the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown, Gage is now helping out a woman who saved his life many years ago. Her young son has been killed in a microchip robbery put on by the United Bamboo Triad that unfortunately returns Gage to the brutality found in the realm of Asian organized crime.

With his body trying to fight a disease, he heads to Hong Kong, on to Thailand and then China to find the people behind the brilliant conspirators who were responsible for the crime. Seems they wish to trade the treasure they stole for a billion dollars of China White heroin.

Putting together a plan to tie the conspiracy directly to the person behind the death of the boy, Gage has recruited some odd collaborators to help him out. From a People's Liberation Army general who is as corrupt as they come to a retired Taiwanese intelligence agent, Gage also adds in a gangster and a drug trafficker as he heads into overdrive. He wants nothing more than to return to the United States and hand the case off to the FBI so he can begin treatment for his illness, but the road to justice is not well-paved.

This is a highly readable thriller. As always Gage 'engages' readers both mind and soul until the very end.

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



THE CAPITALIST

By Peter Steiner

This is a tale of jaded, cynical characters pitted against two corrupt international industries, clothing and banking.

The main bad guy, St. John (pronounced SIN-jun) Larrimer, is a man who fancies himself the logical product of present-day world economics, free from moral and political constraints. He bilks anyone he can for his own personal profit and sees nothing wrong in what he's doing. St. John sneers at Bernard Madoff because he got caught. The story also concerns the many whose lives he ruins when he absconds to the Caribbean with the stolen money after the 2008 market crash.

A horribly maintained sweat shop in Pakistan makes high-end silk pocket squares, ones that St. John loves to wear. When a fire breaks out many are killed and one, Abinaash Chandha, an intelligent sixteen-year-old seamstress, is left burnt and disfigured. Her story of recovery runs in the background as we follow St. John, his cronies, his former-now-ruined secretary, and Louis Morgon, a disgraced ex-CIA agent who is also a talented painter and determined to get justice when several people close to him are tragically affected by the thief. Morgon is an interesting character, another one who disdains conventional morals. His world view is easier to swallow, though, and he functions quite well as the nimble good guy here, though in his seventies.

Some tricky, fascinating spy/detective work goes on and pulls the reader through to the exciting ending. I won't call it a conclusion because I have the distinct feeling that this war of wits is to be continued.

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Eine Kleine Murder" ■

THE DROWNING GIRLS

By Paula Treick DeBoard

This is a story filled with secrets, lies and extremely dangerous people living in quite a swanky neighborhood. The main characters are the McGinnis family: Phil, who has landed a posh job taking care of a grand residential gated community called The Palms; his wife Liz, who is a high school counselor; and, their daughter Danielle, who will be starting high school in the fall.

Liz never imagined that she would live in such a luxurious place, but ever since she and her family moved in she has felt like an outsider among the various 'Stepford Wives' and their spoiled brats. However, Liz and Phil are determined to make this work; if not for themselves, then for their daughter.

But...surprise, surprise, things are not what they seem under the very sleek surface of The Palms, where life is far from being pleasant and restful. This is a place where social standing is something that is all-too-important to the residents, and Liz soon finds out that even the friendliest of neighbors can't be trusted. Within The Palms most everyone has a skeleton in their closet that they would risk anything to hide.

When the gorgeous girl next door, Kelsey, (a sophomore in high school) makes friends with Danielle, Liz can't help but find Kelsey's very sophisticated interests in Danielle a tiny bit suspicious. Kelsey becomes a daily visitor to the McGinnis home, and Liz's relationships with her daughter and husband become more and more strained. It won't be long before the dream of living the high society life turns into an uncontrollable nightmare, where the residents will turn their backs on the new family in trouble.

Remember the saying: "The grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence?" This author has made sure to put together a spine-tingling story that definitely proves that point.

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



THREE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

By A.J. Tata

Full of action and suspense, this is one book that screams reality! Not a surprise, seeing as that Brigadier General A.J. Tata is behind the frighteningly credible plot.

An electrifying adventure for Tata's hero, Jake Mahegan, the story begins with the kidnapping of an Army Reserve Officer on United States soil. Captain Maeve Cassidy, a geologist specializing in natural gas drilling, is taken. Less than twenty-four hours after her return from Afghanistan, where she was on a "classified" mission, the captain vanishes from Fort Bragg. But this is far more than a breach in security; it's just the first stage of a large scale domestic attack.

Delta Force veteran, Jake Mahegan, is called in and assigned the task of finding the geologist. When a nearby nuclear plant is destroyed, and another in only a matter of days, Jake quickly realizes that the U.S. is being set up. When a third plant is targeted, Jake begins to hear the clock ticking down to Armageddon, which will begin "three minutes to midnight."

This is a knock-down/drag-out thrilling look at the reality of domestic terrorism, and how harsh and horrific it has most definitely become in the 21st century. Being a retired general, the author knows exactly the right words to use to scare people to death. The author of other unforgettable suspense novels, Tata has been a foreign policy guest commentator on Fox News, CBS News, NBC's Today Show, and the list goes on. Not only is this book an eye-opener on what could truly happen, it is also a tremendously amazing read. This is one you do not want to miss.

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

SUSPENSE THEATRE COMES ALIVE!

In Six Unique Resources by **Amnon Kabatchnik**

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

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

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

Gold Medal

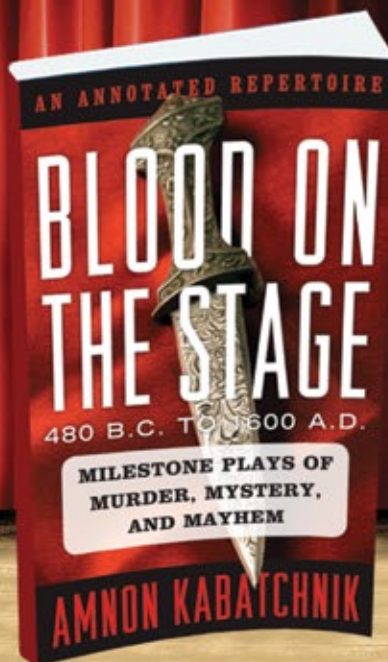
*Benjamin Franklin Awards
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Runner-Up

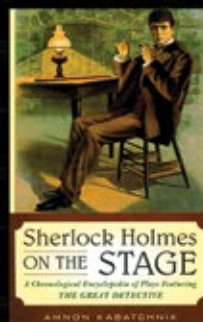
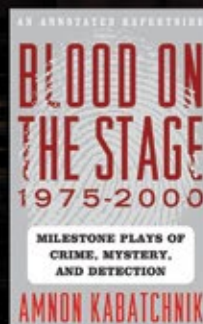
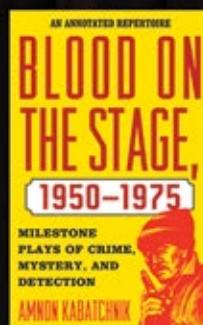
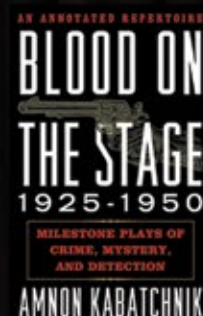
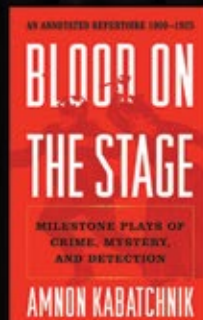
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ZOOTOPIA

2016

Genre – Animation/Action/Adventure (PG)



Let me state right off the bat that I'm a huge Disney fan, and I look forward to being immersed in terrific storytelling by someone's imagination and drawing talent with every release. When I first heard about this latest Disney animated feature, though, I was a bit hesitant at first. The idea of a city where animals can live together in peace and harmony sounded a bit boring. However the second the film started, I was enthralled and blown away by the surprisingly adult themes. Most of all, it is a fantastic thriller.

Judy Hopps becomes the first rabbit to graduate from the police academy. She believes she is going to change the world. Her first day shatters all of her dreams when she is regulated to parking enforcement. She stumbles upon a con artist fox named Nick Wilde, and they are soon forced to work together to solve a string of mysterious disappearances.

The creators of *Zootopia* do a phenomenal job of balancing adult themes involving prejudice, racism, and pursuing your dreams while also making the various elements in play fun and enjoyable for the kids. The pieces that make a great thriller (conspiracies, treachery, plot twists) are in abundance along with the laughs. Even the soundtrack feels like it was lifted straight out of a classic crime show. This is one of the best movies to come out of the Disney animation studios in years. If you pay super close attention, you

might catch a terrific joke based around the television show *Breaking Bad*. ■

BATMAN V. SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

2016

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



Though I try to keep this column devoted to films I recommend, I have to stray from that philosophy in this case to rant about the "injustice" of this movie.

The film opens with the Batman origin once again where a young Bruce Wayne witnesses the death of his parents. It's a dream sequence! Then Ben Affleck as Bruce Wayne experiences the damage caused by Superman's fight with General Zod from the previous Superman movie, *Man of Steel*. That sequence was God-awful enough and way too long, so why remind us of that fact again? Thanks filmmakers. Anyway, Bruce Wayne believes Superman needs to be destroyed from that moment on. Eighteen months later, Metropolis has been rebuilt. Lois Lane is working on a story and living with Clark Kent, and Bruce Wayne is continuing his vigilante ways while trying to uncover how to rid the world of Superman. Toss in Lex Luthor who wants to have Batman and Superman kill each other, and the end result is a huge mess.

The cast nails their parts well, especially Ben Affleck as a world weary Bruce Wayne/Batman. That surprised me. I'm still a bit torn on Jesse Eisenberg's portrayal of Lex Luthor. Sometimes he balances the line between insane and a clever psychopath well. Other times he's so over the top that it's difficult to believe he was not committed to a hospital already.

The movie hints at the future of the film franchise with appearances by Wonder Woman (stellar and can't wait to see her film next year), and the rest of the upcoming members of the Justice League make cameos courtesy of an email attachment. Seriously. It also hints at the big bad they will have to fight in the future, but those unfamiliar with that comic storyline will only be scratching their heads. And one of those is another dream sequence!

The worst travesty is how the filmmakers treat Superman. Superman is all about hope and justice, but Zack Snyder and the folks involved clearly don't like his character. Let's make him a brooding alien with messianic tendencies, and make everyone hate him. That will be fun. *Nope*. I grew up on his comics, and what made me love his character was that even when all was lost, you knew he would always do the right thing. Kids wanted to grow up to be the character, but nobody would want to be *this* Superman. Henry Cavill plays him well with the material he's given, but it would be nice to see him smile at least once. The key battle between him and Batman is hokey, and all that it would take to end it is for Superman to open his mouth and tell Batman what is going on, unless it is an allegory for how bad things can get due to lack of communication. The conclusion of their epic "fight" is laughable and sad at the same time.

Zack Snyder has ruined the *Superman* franchise, and that's even after watching the last two Christopher Reeve films and *Superman Returns*. At least in those films the fun and love of the character were in abundance. Snyder also loves the use of green screen technology, and it's quite obvious. The movie is fascinating and gripping in some spots, then contrived and hypocritical in the rest.

If the filmmakers want to fix the franchise before it's too late, they need to find the heart and emotional core of what once made these characters so endearing. ■

Jeff Ayers co-hosts *Beyond the Cover* with John Raab, and is a freelance reviewer for the *Associated Press*, *Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *RT Book Reviews*. He is the author of several books in the worlds of both fiction and non-fiction.



Featured Artist

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*

Sara Abdel-Latif
Sharing a Piece of Herself

LADY OF POWER



Sara Abdel-Latif, better known as Sarita Angel to DeviantArt fans, had a true passion for art since the age of four. Being a university graduate in architecture, it was through the constant study of this field that Sara first entered the 'realm' of Photoshop, which then opened the doors to a new world of artistic creation. With a desire to travel and a love for the mysterious, the work Sara creates focuses on her natural ability to use light and color to bring out her own love of adventure.

Born in the beautiful city of Setif, located on the high plateaus of Algeria, Sara works each day to conceive new pieces of art that will dazzle the viewer. Sara was kind enough to sit down with *Suspense Magazine* and talk about the life of an artist.

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

Sara Abdel-Latif (S.A.L.): *I discovered my true passion when I was just a little girl at the age of four. I adored drawing on wall's, non-stop, especially at home (ha, ha). My passion for drawing continued, and it became clear to me that art would be a part of my future while at primary school, where the teachers were constantly choosing 'work' to enter in*

school competitions for students to win prizes. I also loved cartoons. Animation and manga which have, of course, become hugely popular in schools and today's society.

S. MAG.: Your work is so vivid in color, casting that outer glow. Can you describe your creative process? What is your favorite part?

S.A.L.: *My art focuses on lighting; bringing it up or down to find that correct tone and perfect color to add luster to the work in exactly the way I want. You can see that most of my works feature dark color, accompanied by counter color and special tones to give it that shine and bring out exactly what I want people to see. This recipe makes the work clear and draws attention the way I believe it should.*

S. MAG.: Of all your pieces, which is your favorite? Do each have their own story?

S.A.L.: *I'm the type of person who loves mystery, excitement and adventure in my own life, so most of my works 'talk' about those emotions and show my personality. Other works bring out the quiet side of me, which are the ones with colors that are full of romance and peace.*

S. MAG.: What is your biggest challenge professionally?

S.A.L.: *I wish I could show my artwork and my talent to the whole world. Which is considered rare, especially in the community in which I live that doesn't have the slightest idea about this particular career. So that's the biggest challenge for me, sharing the pieces*





CASSANDRA

with many, and I hope to God that He'll bless me with that ability one day.

S. MAG.: Is this your full-time job? If not, what do you do for a living?

S.A.L.: *No, this is not my full-time job...yet. I work for an architect but, with my love of color and bringing out beauty, I wish I could branch out as a designer in that field.*

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

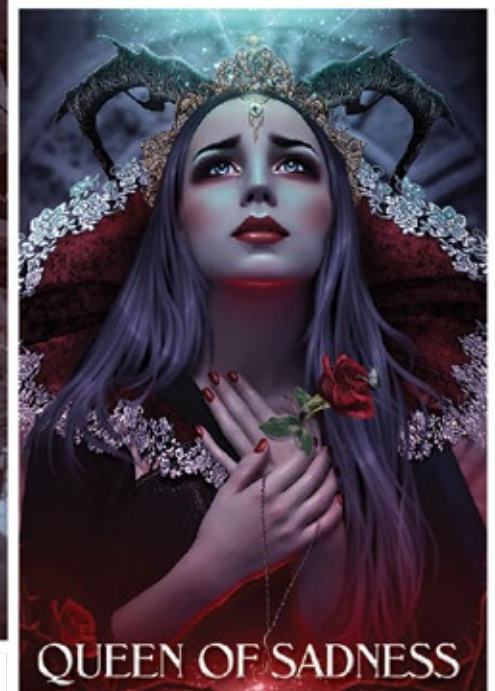
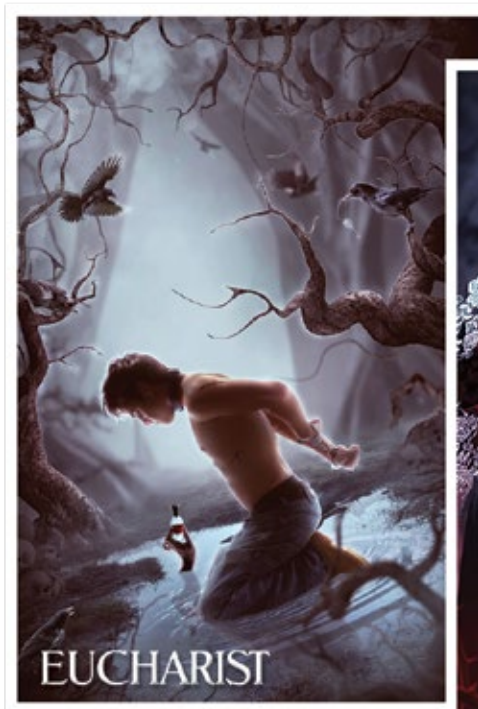
S.A.L.: *I've been influenced by many artists, but two that stand out are Omar Rodriguez and Mohamed Aldiria. Their style is fanciful and their works depend on the use of lighting and colors to create just the right fantasy.*

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

S.A.L.: *If I wasn't an artist, I'd love to be that designer in the architectural field.*

S. MAG.: Creative blocks can be a challenge for artists. Is this something that you have dealt with? And if so, what do you do to re-energize your imagination and get back on track?

S.A.L.: *Yes, it is quite true. As an artist, I am always trying to create the best with every work I do, not only to satisfy my own creative self, but also to please the taste of viewers and fans who are eager to see the art. I also always try to keep in touch and follow up with other artists regarding new paths. When I reach a creative block, I feed my own thinking and hone my own technique by watching movies, cartoons, keeping up with the newest designs in games, and listening to music—all of these give me great inspiration.*



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

S.A.L.: *I am from Algeria, specifically the city of Setif. Located in the high plateaus, it is the second largest city in terms of population and economic census in the country. It is characterized by quiet charm and offers the perfect weather. I hope you and your readers will visit and discover its beauty for yourselves.*

S. MAG: Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten?

S.A.L.: *If God grants me the time, in five or ten years I wish to gain more mental maturity and experience in art/technical processes. I wait for God to bless me with what is best in terms of success in all areas of my life—whether practical, family or personal.*

We would like to thank Sara for stopping by and taking the time to speak with *Suspense Magazine*. To learn more about Sara, or to view her art, visit: <http://saritaangel07.deviantart.com>. ■

TAKEDOWN

By Jeff Buck With Jon Land and Lindsay Preston
Jon Land Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

PROLOGUE

August 9, 1995; Montreal, Canada

On the last day of his life, eleven-year-old Daniel Desrochers rode his bike to a local schoolyard playground where he was supposed to meet some friends. The friends were late so Daniel waited on the sidewalk directly across the street from an innocuous white slab of a building that was actually the headquarters of the Rock Machine biker gang here in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve area of Montreal.

Daniel sat on his bike with hands tucked in his pockets. He'd brought his baseball glove along but somewhere along the path of his ride, the ball had slipped out. He was pretty sure his friends would be bringing one with them, though that ball had been his favorite, well worn and broken in just right. It was hot, so he took off his t-shirt and tucked it into the back of his shorts. His short dark hair was damp with sweat, and if he was lucky, a local ice cream truck would soon edge near, its annoying jingle announcing its approach ahead of the jangling of a bell at each stop.

If he was lucky.

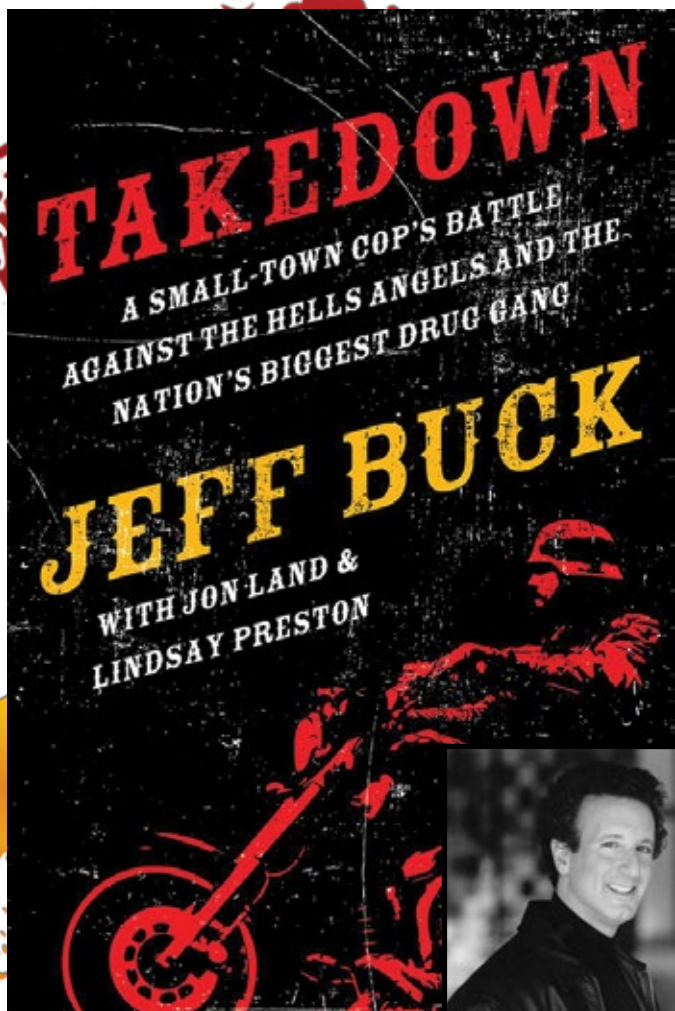
A year before, two members of the Hells Angels had strolled into a downtown motorcycle repair shop and gunned down Pierre Faucher, brother of the Rock Machine's leader, igniting a turf war over control of Quebec's lucrative drug trade. On this day Frank "Bull" Quелlette, another member of the Angels, had managed to pack a Jeep parked overnight in front of the Rock Machine headquarters with explosives.

The Jeep belonged to Marc Dubé, one of the gang's top drug runners and allegedly one of its de facto leaders.

Quелlette, a stocky man with tattoos emblazoned over his shaven skull, was a veteran of the Canadian military who had been dispatched to Iraq for the Gulf War a few years earlier. He'd later groused over the fact that he saw no combat and never got to kill anyone. He had gone to war for one reason and one reason only: to blow up "sand jockeys."

Quелlette's specialty was explosives.

The Rock Machine began as a loose amalgamation of bar owners who distributed drugs in what became known as the Dark



Circle. When the Hells Angels, reborn and reinvigorated, looked to muscle in on the local drug trade, the Dark Circle recruited members of various other outlaw biker gangs to counter those efforts by forming an organization every bit the Angels' equal in violence and ruthlessness.

Their purpose was to provide Montreal with an alternative to the Angels as a source of drugs, especially cocaine. So to better make their mark, the Rock Machine undercut the Angels' prices, flooding the streets with drugs sometimes at a loss just to cut into their rival's market share and hopefully lead the Angels to pull up stakes and move elsewhere.

In the summer of 1994 the Hells Angels decided to go to war instead, muscling in on the Rock Machine's territory by taking a monopolistic approach to the drug trade and punishing any vendor who dared defy them.

With good reason, since this was about much more than just supplying a single city or even province. Billions of dollars in drugs were crossing into the United States annually through a single fifteen-mile stretch of this essentially ungarded border. The land in question belonged to the St. Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation, the Akwesasne tribe, a self-contained world unto itself that boasted its own government, its own laws and its own native ways.

As he waited to detonate the explosives packed into the Jeep, Frank Quelleté reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of Nations Best cigarettes. An eagle was stamped on the front of the Indian brand, specifically a symbol of strength of the Akwesasne tribe that manufactured them a few hundred miles away on the St. Regis Mohawk tribal land.

Quelleté himself didn't know a lot about Indians or profit margins and didn't care much about the intercine struggles that would ultimately determine the winner in Quebec's biker wars. But he did know plenty about the hundreds of hydroponic greenhouses across Quebec that produced the most potent marijuana in the world. Their intricate design was something any green thumb botanist would envy. The interiors had been hollowed-out and gutted. No walls, no furniture. Just a perfect electrical set-up, water pipes, a nutrient rich mix of soil and millions of dollars worth of pot plants that thrived in such ideal conditions. But these homes could only take so much of the moisture and humidity before the mold ate away at the structure's very integrity. At that point, after one final harvest, men like Frank Quelleté were called to burn them to the ground so no trace whatsoever would remain.

The real stakes in the war between the Rock Machine and the Hells Angels was control of the export of this "bud" into the United States across the St. Lawrence River and onto the very Indian Reservation that produced Quelleté's favorite cigarettes. This part of the river cut through Akwesasne tribal land, traversing Quebec and Ontario en route to forming part of the international boundary between Canada and the United States. Frozen often for up to four months a year, it

was essentially a vast, unmanned road, an "ice bridge" as the natives called it, and as busy as any other road in town.

So just after three o'clock that afternoon in August of 1995, with the Rock Machine headquarters packed with the very soldiers who were battling the Angels for control of that ice bridge as well, Marc Dubé climbed into his Jeep and started the engine. The explosives set by Frank Quelleté ignited instantly and the Jeep exploded in a single blast, sending steel, rubber and plastic bursting from orange flames that briefly swallowed all of the vehicle's frame, killing Dubé instantly. The blast's percussion and shrapnel blew out all the windows of the Rock Machine headquarters, wounding several and laying waste to, among other things, a pool table, faux leather couch and a beer-packed refrigerator that sent bottles flying in all directions.

Across the street, Daniel Desrochers was still seated atop his bike on the sidewalk when a wave of steaming steel shards from the Jeep's carcass slammed into him. The force knocked him from his bike and into a nearby waist-high rock wall, bracing him there half on and half off it with shrapnel having turned his young body into a pincushion, including an ultimately fatal fragment that lodged in his brain.

The boy was rushed to a hospital and lay in a coma for four days before dying, neither the first and far from the last victim taken by a war that was about to spill over the border into the United States. But Daniel Desrochers' death ignited a firestorm that led the Canadian government to declare its own war against the outlaw biker gangs. That war raged for years, through 2002. And along the way the Hells Angels vanquished their rivals and consolidated their power, in large part due to the most lucrative smuggling operation on either side of the border thanks to an Indian reservation that straddled both sides.

That reservation, the St. Regis Mohawk Akwesasne Nation, is centered around the St. Lawrence River, a body of water that has allowed the tribe to traffic in all manner of contraband transported back and forth through the most lawless stretch of land in North America today. And when the river freezes it becomes, quite literally, an ice highway to hell. In addition to the Nation's Best cigarettes that Frank Quelleté was smoking just before he blew up Mark Dubé's Jeep Cherokee, foreign sex slaves and illegal aliens are trafficked across the St. Lawrence through Mohawk land. One of the 9/11 hijackers entered the United States this way and the Department of Homeland Security still considers it to be a potential hotbed of terrorist incursion.

But what this relatively small stretch of border, measuring only six to eight miles, is known best for by far is drug smuggling. The entire two thousand mile long border between the United States and Mexico is estimated to produce somewhere around \$40 billion a year in drug revenue. In 2008, the year I got involved with the flow of drugs coming over the St. Lawrence, this six-to-eight mile

stretch alone accounted for an estimated \$2 billion alone, a staggering figure when you compare eight miles against two thousand. And, thanks in large part to that fact, some estimates now put drugs smuggled over our northern border to be greater than that \$40 billion figure coming in through the south.

As I would later learn, the reservation is a neglected, forgotten wasteland where federal agents and police play cat-and-mouse with natives along a mostly unmarked and unfortified frontier with Canada. These same natives are beholden to the Hells Angels out of Quebec in an unholy marriage of convenience and mutual gain, the money involved so staggering that it more than outweighs the risk mitigated by the geopolitical realities. Unlike the southern border with Mexico, where drug-related violence has exploded in recent years, the northern border rarely makes headlines. But this particular stretch that widens to thirty miles on the Canadian side just might be the most vicious, corrupt and dangerous strip of border anywhere in the country and possibly the world.

Federal officials in both Canada and the United States have become increasingly aware of the problem, thanks in some part to the Quebec Biker Wars. It wouldn't be those officials, though, who years later would ultimately bring down what was one of the most powerful and biggest drug gangs on either side of the border. It would be the police chief in the small town of Reminderville, Ohio hundreds of miles away.

Me.

CHAPTER 1

Youngstown, Ohio; 1995

Right around the time that Hells Angel bomb killed Daniel Desrochers, a single incident made me figure my time as an undercover drug officer was coming to an end. Incidents like this were what led me to give up the life I loved to spend the rest of it free of the kind of criminals who had left an eleven-year-old boy to die in a hospital bed two days after his brain was pierced by shrapnel.

I'd been working undercover for more than a decade already in 1995, an eternity in a world of deception, betrayal, loneliness and constant danger. I had developed a signal with my wife Kathi just in case I spotted a familiar face out in public. The signal meant for her to get away from me and flee, wherever we were, on her own before things took a potential turn for the worse in a hurry. Up until the Youngstown case in 1995, I'd never had to use the signal and never wanted to.

The case started with a guy named Mitchell. Mitchell was a runner that the Geauga County Ohio Drug Task Force had been watching for a year. They knew he was an underling for Terry Kincade, one of the most powerful drug guys in the

entire Midwest. They knew that Kincade was impossible to find, let alone touch. Mitchell was his mope and a bad one at that, picked up by a simple beat cop for doing sixty-five in a forty mile-per-hour zone. What idiot speeds when he's carrying ten ounces of marijuana? It didn't take long for me to get wind that Mitchell had been picked up. This was the Task Force's chance to finally get to Terry Kincade, one of our primary targets. But things had to happen fast. I had to convince Mitchell to become an informant before Kincade got word that Mitchell was late for wherever he'd been headed.

Mitchell, pathetic mope that he was, was shaking and near tears when I arrived. He was so relieved I put freedom on the table as an option that he'd have turned in his own mother to avoid a stretch behind bars. He agreed to become an informant and get me into Kincade's inner circle and, as a result, was back on the street an hour later to continue his run. We tagged the drugs he'd been carrying into evidence, then provided him with the money he needed to continue his run and maintain his credibility with Kincade. Six months later, with Mitchell's help, I'd immersed myself in Kincade's criminal organization under the undercover alias I went by, Jimmy Morgan.

That's where the patience kicked in. Most ordinary narcs would've had Mitchell lead them to Kincade, set up some sort of deal, and pop him immediately. Not me. I wanted to build a case a first. I was more a strategist than a cowboy and played a case like a skilled gambler played poker. It was about not grabbing a guy like Kincaid until you had everything you could possibly get on him. If you want to take down a drug dealer and make it hurt, you take his drugs, his money, his house and his toys. If you don't get everything, the dealer will get out of jail and open up shop again. Business as usual. My philosophy when it came to a drug bust was simple: if it floats, flies or drives we seize it. Pulling this off, though, required time and research, as well as detailed search-and-seizure warrants. I was willing to do whatever it took to make the strongest possible case, the best way to assure my climb up this particular drug dealing food chain, toppling links as I went. Patience.

When I was finally ready to take down Kincade, I had agents at all of Kincade's banks and tow trucks ready to take his speedboat, Porsche, Lexus, Mercedes, two jet-ski's, three snowmobiles, turbo-prop plane, and bulldozer. I could never figure out why he had a bulldozer but what the hell, I'd take that too. Hit the bastard everywhere to make it hurt as much as possible.

Everyone was in place for the final takedown. Detective Joe Motz from Reminderville was taking charge of the group of officers waiting for my command. I'd spent my undercover years as Jimmy Morgan and became Jimmy again that day, picking up three kilos of cocaine. Those three kilos would cost \$75,000, and in a well-organized sting I, in the guise of Jimmy, would present Kincade a suitcase packed with that

amount in hundred dollar bills. Unfortunately, the Task Force couldn't pull together all the cash, so my suitcase was \$30,000.00 short. \$30,000! That left no room for error. The officers sitting outside couldn't afford to waste any time moving on my position when I yelled out the signal phrase, "You ready to count?"

Mitchell and I pulled up to Terry Kincade's house where Kincade and his three drug soldiers were waiting for us inside the barn out back. I got out of the car and pulled out the suitcase, short thirty grand in cash, helping to make Mitchell even more of a wreck.

Guys like Kincade could smell a set-up plain as skunk odor. I needed Mitchell to pull it together and fast.

"You're going to get us both killed!" I told him. "Stay cool. We'll be out of there before you can blink an eye."

Mitchell just looked at me.

"I've kept you safe and out of jail so far, haven't I? Do you trust me? . . . Come on."

Mitchell finally nodded. He was sweating badly and I was glad he'd at least chosen a dark shirt to better disguise it.

"We're going in," I whispered into the hidden microphone that was wired to the police van out front. "Stand by. Shouldn't be more than five minutes."

I walked into the barn just behind Mitchell. Kincade was rubbing the head of his thoroughbred racehorse. The kindness he was showing to his horse made him seem human, almost. Kincade had been running drugs for a good twenty years. His trips to Miami to find the goods had wrinkled and cratered his face thanks to too much sun. The dark hairs that hadn't fallen out of his head were lacquered to his scalp. A chewed cigar hung from his dry thin lips. His three soldiers, clearly armed, stood back in the shadows like statues, not radiating any particular menace for now.

"How ya' doing, Jimmy?" Kincade asked.

"I'm good. You?" I replied.

"Just fine. You wanna see the product?"

"Sure do," I said, walking towards a foldout card table set up in the middle of the barn under the watchful eye of Kincade's soldiers.

Kincade began pulling out the tightly packed bricks of white powder when a voice whispered in my ear.

"Stall! Stall! There's a school bus with a bunch of little kids blocking the driveway. No way can we get up there right now! No way!"

I felt my heart drop. Drug dealers don't like to chat and hang out. I'd stall as best I could, but before too much longer I was going to have to open that suitcase, at which point Kincade would know something was amiss as soon as he realized I was short.

I picked up the cubes of cocaine, saying, "Looks good."

"That my money?" Kincade asked, pointing to the suitcase.

But I moved his gaze away from the case to the

thoroughbred instead. "Hey, that's a nice looking horse you have over there."

"He's a good money maker. Hand me the suitcase."

There was no way I could stall any further. The officers outside were going to have to figure out something.

"You ready to count?" I asked him.

"I am."

I couldn't hear cars approaching. Shit! And not far away from me, Mitchell began sucking in big gulps of air. The man looked like he was about to cry.

"What's the horse's name?" I asked, still in distraction mode. "So I can bet on him sometime."

"Miami Glory."

"I like that."

"Could you please just hand me the suitcase?"

"Oh, you're ready to count," I said, giving the takedown signal a second time.

"Didn't I just say that?"

I felt my heart thudding in my chest, loud enough, I thought, for Kincade to maybe hear. I was going to have to think of something and fast. I started slowly backing up towards the barn door. My only option was to run. I was unarmed; I always went in unarmed on an undercover buy. Believe it or not, guns make big drug dealers nervous. So now here I was unarmed and trapped in a barn with a drug dealer and his three bodyguards.

As Kincade unzipped the suitcase, my mind raced and I calculated my chances of making it out the door before the bodyguards drew their guns.

"What the fuck is this?" Kincade said, looking up from the bag.

Before I could offer some lame explanation, the door burst open and tossed me across the length of the dirt floor where I found myself lying at Kincade's feet.

"Police!" a voice shouted. "Police! Police!"

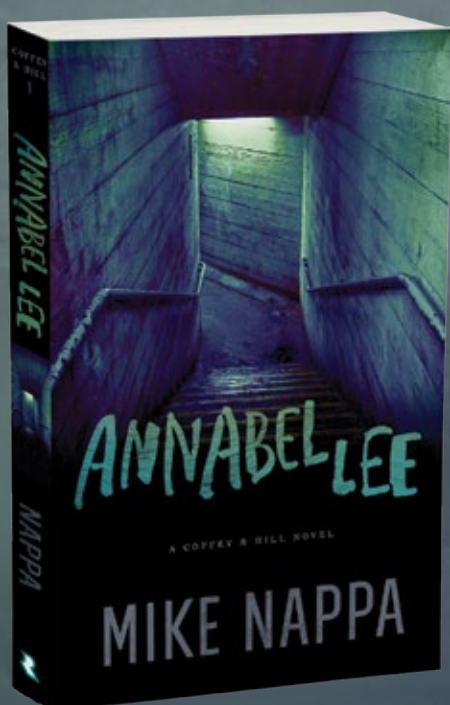
And my officers surged in wielding the most-welcome guns I'd ever seen in my life. They arrested everyone, including me in my guise of Jimmy Morgan, my terror genuine as the cuffs were slapped on. ■

Jon Land is the USA Today bestselling author of 38 novels, including seven titles in the critically acclaimed Caitlin Strong series: "Strong Enough to Die," "Strong Justice," "Strong at the Break," "Strong Vengeance," "Strong Rain Falling" (winner of the 2014 International Book Award and 2013 USA Best Book Award for Mystery-Suspense), "Strong Darkness" (winner of the 2014 USA Books Best Book Award and the 2015 International Book Award for Thriller) and "Strong Light of Day." His sci-fi collaboration with Heather Graham is coming from Forge in June of 2016. Jon is a 1979 graduate of Brown University, lives in Providence, Rhode Island and can be found on the Web at jonlandbooks.com or on Twitter @jondland.

Excerpt from "Takedown" by Jeff Buck with Jon Land and Lindsay Preston (Forge, March 2016).

"Impossible
to put down."

—LOIS DUNCAN,
New York Times bestselling author



On a farm fourteen miles east of Peachtree, Alabama, a secret is hidden—a secret named Annabel Lee. Her uncle's last words before he hid her away: *Don't open that door for anybody, you got it? Not even me.*

"ANNABEL LEE IS COMPELLING, FAST-PACED,
AND FILLED WITH
FASCINATING CHARACTERS."

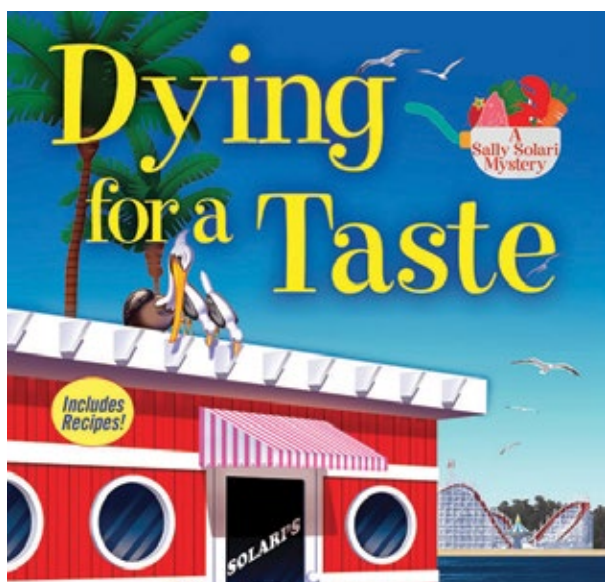
— M. K. PRESTON,
Mary Higgins Clark Award-winning novelist, *Song of the Bones*

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ARE YOU HUNGRY FOR MORE & “DYING FOR A TASTE”?

Meet Leslie Karst

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Toril Lavender



Ok, let's start with a joke; so stop me if you have heard this one before. What do you get when you mix a lawyer and a culinary artist? Well you get a cozy mystery writer of course. Leslie Karst has just released her debut book, “Dying for a Taste.”

The daughter of a law professor and a potter, Leslie Karst spent her early years in various locales: Columbus, Ohio; South America and Mexico; Oxford, England; and Santa Monica, California. She moved from Southern California to Santa Cruz to study English literature and Romance languages at UCSC, and has been a Northern California gal ever since.

Leslie went on to attend Stanford Law School and then worked for twenty years as the research and appellate attorney for a civil law firm in Santa Cruz County. During this period, she discovered a passion for food and cooking, and so once more returned to school—this time to earn a degree in culinary arts from Cabrillo College.

Now retired from the law, she spends her time cooking, singing alto in her local community chorus, gardening, cycling, and of course writing. Leslie and her wife, Robin, and their Jack Russell mix, Ziggy, split their time between Santa Cruz and Hilo, Hawaii.

We hope you enjoy the awesome interview we had with Leslie below.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): “Dying for a Taste” is your debut mystery book; give us a sneak peek inside.

Leslie Karst (L.K.): “Dying for a Taste” juxtaposes the world of an old-fashioned, family-run restaurant with that of trendy, politically-correct foodies. After losing her mother to cancer, Sally Solari quits her job as an attorney to help her dad run his traditional Italian eatery in Santa Cruz, California, but soon finds that managing the front of the house is far from her dream of running her own kitchen.

Then her Aunt Letta is found stabbed to death at Gauguin, Letta’s swank Polynesian-French restaurant, and Sally is the only one who can keep the place afloat. When the Gauguin sous chef is accused of the crime, however, Sally must delve into the unfamiliar culture of organic food, sustainable farming, and animal rights activists—not to mention a few family secrets—to help clear his name and catch the true culprit before her timer runs out.

S. MAG.: Having traveled and lived in several places, including my hometown of Columbus, Ohio, were you able to draw on

those experiences in your writing?

L.K.: *Perhaps the greatest benefit of travel is its ability to make you truly aware of your surroundings, something we too easily take for granted after living in the same place for a while. This mindfulness of the world around us—its smells, sights, sounds, textures, and tastes—is of course a great boon to the writer. I've found, for instance, that I'm often able to draw from the sensory memories of my travels when describing a scene—even if the scene I'm writing about takes place in my home town.*

S. MAG.: With character creation being so important, what was your process in bringing your characters to life?

L.K.: *Because "Dying for a Taste" takes place in a community I know so well (I've lived in Santa Cruz for over forty years), I feel as if I've met most of my characters—or at least composites of them—in real life. So it's mostly a matter of imagining how these creations would talk, or act, or react, within the situations I've plopped them down into. Of course, sometimes your characters don't react the way you expect them to, which can be lots of fun.*

S. MAG.: Why did you feel now was the right time to finally dive into the mystery world?

L.K.: *That's easy: I had just retired from the law and finally had the time to write something other than legal briefs and appeals!*

S. MAG.: Being a retired lawyer and now creating culinary cuisine, which is harder learning: a great beef Wellington or getting a jury to go your way?

L.K.: *Convincing a jury is absolutely more difficult. You have complete control over the beef Wellington, and can choose your tenderloin, the kind of pâté, and whether you want to use pre-made puff pastry or roll out your own. And though the process is rather labor-intensive, if you follow the directions carefully the dish should come out just fine.*

Trial lawyers, on the other hand, have almost no control over their jury—or the facts of their case, which will ultimately determine how the jury votes (of course, cases with truly bad facts should always be settled before trial). I was a research attorney, and hence behind the scenes during trials, but I can tell you that the capriciousness of human nature—and thus of juries—often causes litigators far more stress and worry than do the legal aspects of their cases.

S. MAG.: Debut authors always have a great story about how they became published. Can we hear yours?

L.K.: *I don't imagine my story is all that unusual, but perhaps it will give heart to other aspiring authors. After nearly a hundred rejections from literary agents, I was getting close to giving up the search, but decided to work with a developmental*

editor and then give it one last shot.

But when I continued to receive passes from agents even after these further revisions, I called my editor, Kristen Weber, in desperation. What she told me truly helped: "You can get hundreds of rejections," she said, "and many writers do. But remember: It only takes one yes." Heartened by this encouragement, I forged on with my search, and within two months I finally got "the phone call" from Erin Niumata of Folio Literary Management.

S. MAG.: Sally Solari is your lead character. Tell us about her and why she is the perfect person to lead your series.

L.K.: *Sally is not yet forty and already experiencing erratic hormones and hot flashes. As a result, she can tend towards over-the-top emotions and sarcasm (though cycling and Bourbon help). But she's also smart, stubborn and resolute, and rarely takes no for an answer. So when Sally sets her mind on tracking down a murderer, you do not want to be the one who gets in her way.*

S. MAG.: Which other secondary character would you say had a bigger voice than you originally thought they would?

L.K.: *I originally envisioned the book as being primarily about Sally, and her quest to find her Aunt Letta's killer. But the more I wrote, the more I fell in love with the Letta character, and realized she needed to be a much bigger part of the novel. And so I created the subplot of Sally's simultaneous quest to learn the true story of the enigmatic aunt she only thought she'd known.*

S. MAG.: When you decided to write a mystery, did you always want to write a series or did it come to you while writing "Dying for a Taste"?

L.K.: *The concept for "Dying for a Taste" originally came to me as simply a stand-alone culinary mystery. But then, fairly soon into writing the story, I was hit by the idea of a series, with each book focusing on one of the senses: taste, hearing, smell, vision, and touch. Have no fear, though—all the books will continue to prominently feature the food, the restaurants, and the recipes!*

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

L.K.: *I just turned in the draft of my sequel (featuring the sense of hearing), in which Sally joins a local chorus that will be performing the Mozart Requiem, a musical work full of its own secrets and mysteries. Unfortunately for Sally, it turns out that balancing her jobs at the two restaurants, Solari's and Gauguin, along with chorus rehearsals—not to mention a dead tenor—makes her life pretty darn crazy.*

We would like to thank Leslie for talking with us and talking about her book. For more information, please visit her website at www.lesliekarstauthor.com. ■

S.G. REDLING SINGS HER ANTHEM: MORE COMPLEXITY IN WOMEN!



Interview by Amy Lignor
Press Photo Credit: Toril Lavender

With fifteen years in radio, and now on her seventh book release, S.G. Redling has brought a variety of entertainment to listeners and readers everywhere. A woman who “talks the talk,” she continuously charms her fans by producing complex characters that stray from the normal, everyday path of women in fiction by showing their grit, humor and determination. With her newest release, “Baggage,” S.G. Redling sat down with *Suspense Magazine* and spoke in-depth about the future, the power of an honest character, and that ever-present emotion enjoyed by every writer: anxiety.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): As an avid traveler, is there one specific location you have visited that you would one day like to use as a setting for a story?

S.G. Redling (S.G.R.): *Everywhere I go, I try to see the location as I would stage it for a story. I would love to set a thriller in Matera, Italy, or maybe Bucharest, Romania, or maybe even on a train throughout Europe. For me, the challenge is walking that line between knowing the area well enough to write with authority and capturing an authentic sense of being lost in a foreign land. I crave that sense of bewilderment that comes with arriving in a new city but I've yet to capitalize on it for fiction. I'm heading back to Matera in June. I'll let you know if I get anywhere with this plan.*

S. MAG.: Is there one genre that you absolutely love to read, but would not like to write?

S.G.R.: *International espionage. I adore stories set in Eastern Europe and stories of classic spy craft. The people who write those books well intimidate me. The thought of the labor necessary to acquire that depth of knowledge makes me want to lie down and put a cold cloth on my head.*

S. MAG.: Is there one “negative” thing you find about being a writer? If so, what would that be and why?

S.G.R.: *I don't know if it's just me, but there is a certain depression that comes with writing. There's probably a better word for it that I can't put my finger on but it's almost an addict's sense of chasing the dragon—this constant yearning and falling short that can make you a little miserable. Not big miserable, not if you're lucky and are smart enough to keep reaching out to the people who love you. I'm in no way advocating angst. That's boring. It's more like the ache of instability that is the result of keeping yourself emotionally limber enough to put your characters through their paces, while navigating the whip end of creativity—riding the highs, surviving the lows. Imagine if your dream career consisted of achieving deep personal fulfillment by having your*

hand slammed in a car door over and over again. You know the fulfillment is coming and it's unlike anything you can achieve anywhere else. You know the pain is temporary and that you'll survive it, even as you feel anxiety about the pain to come. But you love your job. And everyone thinks you're crazy. (Wow...that metaphor turned out to be a lot more accurate than I anticipated.)

Then there are days when the page is on fire and nothing in the universe compares. The pros outweigh the cons by an enormous margin.

S. MAG.: With fifteen years under your belt in morning radio, can you share one of your best (or even strangest) moments that you've had with a fan (whether that be from the radio side of things, or as a writer)?

S.G.R.: *Even after fifteen years on the air with a really popular show, it's difficult for me to use the word "fan." It feels so distant, so detached from the work. Movie stars have fans. In radio, especially the small market radio that I worked in, the listeners were part of the show, they were the most important part. That sounds like one of those faux-humble things you're supposed to say, but radio is a lot like writing—you sit alone in a room talking to yourself, hoping that someone is listening. Unlike writing however, radio audience members can call in. Their interaction is the lifeblood of the show. In a small urban area like ours, we got as invested in and attached to our regular callers as they became to us. Case in point, one of my longtime regular callers has become one of my closet friends. (Seriously, if you love a radio show, let them know. They love you too. If they don't, pick another show.)*

One of my favorite stories from my radio days involves three sisters who were regular callers. All three girls were Special Olympians and, when they weren't requesting songs and taking my side in disputes with my co-host, they would update us on events related to the Special Olympics. All three girls were funny and enthusiastic and we really enjoyed their calls. One year, one of the girls won a significant award in a competition so we invited all three sisters to come on the air and show us their medals. We did the interview live and went way over time because we were all having so much fun. The girls got t-shirts and went on their way and the show continued.

About an hour later, I took another call. At first, all I heard was sniffing. Finally, a woman told me, through what sounded like very messy tears, that her son was also a Special Olympian and had profound developmental disabilities. He was listening to our show on his way to school and, when he realized who we were interviewing, he got very excited and said, "Someone like me is on the radio!"

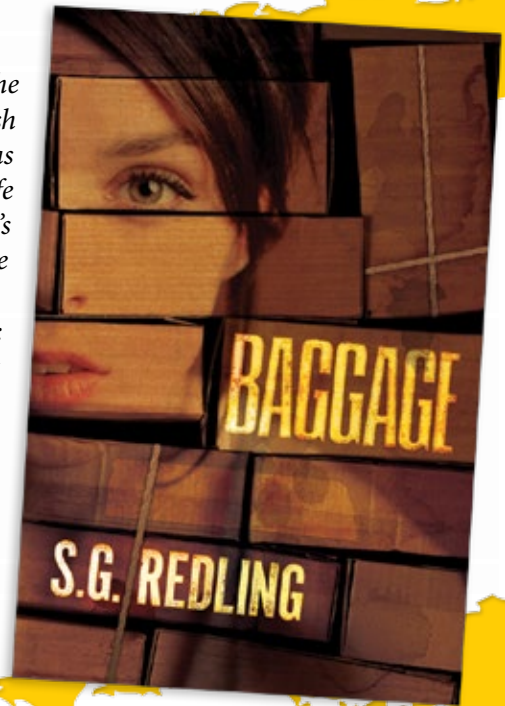
The mother was moved that we didn't talk down to the girls or use baby talk or try to talk over them. Please believe me when I tell you that none of this occurred because my co-host and I were in any way highly evolved human beings. The segment came to life organically out of mutual enthusiasm. But it's kept me aware that words matter. People are listening. And if you are fortunate enough to have an audience, bring your A-game. Rise to their level because their level is always above you.

S. MAG.: There are certainly some dark subjects written about in "Baggage." Do you find yourself becoming wrapped up in scenes like this, or can you disconnect as you write? Is there one subject you feel should be addressed more in books?

S.G.R.: *"Baggage" does deal with some pretty dark pain. The challenge for me as the storyteller was to express how normal that pain was for Anna. This was not all fresh pain and she had found a way to live (badly) with it. I really like Anna. She was funny and irreverent, even when she wasn't particularly effective in getting her life together. While she was a mess, my hope is that the reader doesn't feel as if she's limping through the story, moaning and rending her tunic. She's adapted the best she can. I wouldn't want to be her but I wouldn't mind having a drink with her.*

As for subjects that should be addressed more, I'm going to sing my anthem: More Complexity in Women! More complexity in women. Not more "kickass females" or "strong female characters" but women who have secrets and bad habits and have adapted as best they can to the world they live in. You know, women as actual human beings having a full human experience. This means supplying them with interests that include more than a fixation on who is going into their vaginas and who has come out of them.

S. MAG.: Do you have a particular literary guilty pleasure? Any specific author that you would like to call up and demand that they hurry with their next title because you happen to be a huge fan?



“I AM ALWAYS STARTING FROM SCRATCH SO I’VE LEARNED TO TRUST MY ABILITY TO FIND THE THING THAT STARTS THE STORY.”

S.G.R.: *I never feel guilty about my pleasures! Seriously, if I enjoy it, I read it. I tend not to binge-read anyone. There are just so many books in this world, I’ll admit it—I’m a promiscuous reader. I read around. That said, I was sorry when Lyn Hamilton retired her archeological mystery series. They were a travel-read favorite.*

S. MAG.: If you could give one piece of advice to a writer just starting out, what would that be? Was there any advice you received that made the profession of writing easier?

S.G.R.: *Be brave. Just be brave and write what you want and don’t let anyone’s advice get under your skin. Maybe you are a terrible writer, maybe nobody will ever want to read your stuff. You’re not writing for them. Write for yourself. Then you can prove them wrong.*

As for me, I read a piece of wisdom that eased my mind on more than one occasion. I don’t remember where I read it or who said it, but essentially it boiled down to the fact that we don’t live and die by one book. Aim to build a body of work that you’re proud of. This helps a lot with release day anxiety.

S. MAG.: What “plan” do you have when first beginning a book? Do you research, write up a draft, or just sit down and start writing?

S.G.R.: *Speaking of anxiety...I just turned in my seventh contracted novel. I have several completed manuscripts laying around. Every time I finish a book and go to start the next one, I realize I have no idea how to write a book. I can barely remember how to type. Every single time. This is not me trying to be adorable. It’s a truth that never gets less frightening.*

But here’s what I’ve learned about myself: Every book is different. I am always starting from scratch so I’ve learned to trust my ability to find the thing that starts the story. Some stories start with a character, some with a voice, some with an explosive event, some with the fact that I have a deadline looming. Some books I have outlined; some I have simply face-planted into. I’m getting ready to start a new book and it’s as if an alien ship has landed in my yard and is jutting up out of the dirt, glowing and humming. All I can do at this point is circle it and stare at it and hope I find a way to unlock it. Then I’ll find out how to write this story. It takes a great deal of faith.

S. MAG.: What is the ideal setting for you when you write? (i.e., music playing in the room, complete and utter silence, etc.)

S.G.R.: *After all those years in radio listening for the breaks in music, I require silence when I write. No music, no people talking. Someone coming to my door when I’m writing might as well just come in and hit me with a shovel. I can do edits anywhere but, for that first draft, I need to be alone.*

S. MAG.: Is there one particular character in fiction, whether it be yours or another writer, that you identify with the most? And why?

S.G.R.: *I don’t think so. Or maybe there are just so many I can’t name a frontrunner. I think, like many readers, the beauty of a good story is getting to walk around in other people’s heads. There’s nothing quite so satisfying as finding a rhythm with a good character. Going from book to book to book, if you’re lucky, you get to try on all kinds of thoughts and experiences. You get to feel all kinds of things and think thoughts you might not have thought on your own. That’s what keeps me in a book. So I suppose my answer is: all of them.*

Suspense Magazine would like to thank S.G. Redling for taking the time to sit down with us. For more information on this very talented author, follow her on Twitter at @SGRedling. ■

BREAKING NEWS: WRITING IS HARD!

By Dennis Palumbo

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



As a psychotherapist who specializes in working with creative people, I'm often asked to speak at writing conferences. At one such recent event, an audience member stood up and asked a question.

"When I write," he said, "I feel like I don't always know what I'm doing. I go over stuff, then I cross stuff out, then I try something else...I feel like I'm losing it sometimes. What does that mean?"

I shrugged. "It means you're a writer."

"But I spend a lot of time worrying, never sure whether or not the damned thing is working."

"Sounds like writing to me."

This did nothing to erase the perplexed look on his face.

"I don't know about that." He glanced around the crowded room. "I mean, I heard the other day on the radio that we're all crazy."

"Who's crazy?"

"Us. Writers. Artists in general. This shrink was on some talk show on NPR, and he said it's been proven that we're all bipolar."

"I'm confused. Do you mean that because you're a writer you're bipolar, or does being bipolar cause you to be a writer?"

"He said it could be one or the other, but it could be both. What do you think?"

"I think I'm gonna skip the next NPR pledge drive."

Apparently, it's in fashion again: the notion that the creative impulse, with its occasional emotional difficulties, is merely the product of a psychological disorder. It must be, the argument goes, given how much psychic turmoil, stress and disordered mood is often associated with it.

The current favorite clinical diagnosis for artists, particularly writers, is bipolar disorder—a condition that used to be called manic-depression.

In fact, there's a movie currently playing—based on Kay Jamison's influential book, *"Touched with Fire"*—that reinforces this very concept. But the idea that writers are of a single and highly neurotic personality type goes all the way back to—who else?—Freud. Later, in the 1950's, a fellow named Edmund Bergler (credited, by the way, with inventing the term *writer's block*) wrote a number of books on the subject. His explanation for the reason that writers write? "Psychic masochism."

Of course, the idea that the artistic impulse is inevitably the product of a psychological condition is not new. After all, history is filled with examples of the tormented artist stricken by melancholy, going on drunken binges, cutting off an ear, and generally behaving—as we therapists like to say—inappropriately. But to infer that some kind of "craziness" underlies creative endeavor; or, even worse, that the impulse to create is itself an indicator of some condition is just plain wrong.

First, to whatever extent a therapist believes in the validity of diagnostic labels like "bipolar," one thing is clear: Labels exist for the convenience of the labeler. How helpful they are to the artistic person is debatable.

Second, claiming that the creative impulse comes from any one source—whether mania, psychosis or the moon—is

**"I BELIEVE YOU SHOULD, AS A CREATIVE PERSON, WORK THE PROBLEM—
DON'T MAKE YOURSELF THE PROBLEM."**

both ludicrous and potentially harmful. Ludicrous because it's oversimplified and inconsistent with the lived experience of countless artists. Potentially harmful because it undervalues the mysterious, indefinable aspects of the creative act.

I'm reminded of a quote by H.L. Menken, who said, "There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible and wrong." The tendency to see a writer's creative struggles solely in terms of evidencing a psychological problem betrays a profound narrowness in scope, imagination, and appreciation for the hidden ways of the artistic heart.

The point is, yes, perhaps Van Gogh *did* suffer from symptoms that we might label bipolar. But what is also true—and certainly more important—is that he was supremely talented. Both facts can co-exist, without one necessarily causing the other.

Which brings me back to that worried audience member. Because the truth is, he's not alone in his concern about what his creative struggles *mean*. Many writer patients in my therapy practice wonder about the same thing, given the level of anxiety, creative self-doubt, and fear of shameful self-exposure that accompanies most scripts, plays or novels.

"If I'm plagued with anxiety," he or she laments, "doesn't that say something about the quality of what I'm writing? Let's face it: If I was any good, I wouldn't be going through this agony. If this story really worked, I wouldn't be bumping up against so many technical problems, narrative glitches, inconsistencies in some of the characters."

Wrong. You're bumping up against technical problems, narrative glitches and issues with some of your characters for a very simple reason. **WRITING IS HARD.**

That's not to say that writing isn't often co-existent with anxiety, manifesting in a dozen different ways, from sleepless nights to procrastination to substance abuse. And these psychological aspects ought to be addressed. But these symptoms—and the self-recriminating *meanings* we give them—are not the reason that writing, as a craft, is difficult. Because whether or not a writer suffers from these symptoms, in small measure or to a crippling extent, the reality remains that telling a good story with intelligence, emotional truth and narrative complexity is hard. Really, really hard.

Let me put it another way: What I sometimes tell my writer patients, and what I'm trying to address here, is that an artist's job is to create. When you create anything—whether a script or a novel, whether painting a landscape or writing a song—you're bound to run into problems. Problems inherent in the process of doing that task. So your real, pragmatic, fundamental job is to work the problem. Solve the difficulties. Answer the nagging questions.

In other words, I believe you should, as a creative person, work the problem—don't make yourself the problem. You and your psychological struggles aside, problems with your art are inherent in doing that art. Case in point: One of my friends is a Buddhist monk, whose composure and emotional equilibrium is, in my experience of him, a model of psychological well-being. He's also a poet. The last time I spoke with him, he complained about this long poem he was laboring over. "Man," he said, "poetry's a bitch."

Note that he didn't say anything self-recriminating about his talent, his character, his work ethic, his puny place in the pantheon of poets. He didn't see his struggles and artistic frustration as evidence of a failure in himself. Or a reflection of his neurotic insecurity. He merely stated that writing poetry is hard.

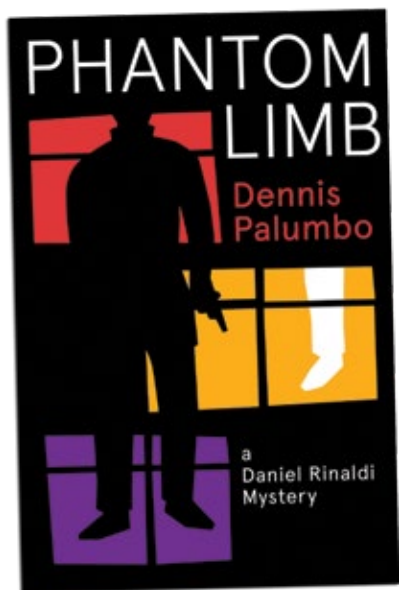
So, once again: when you come up against difficulties in your writing, **work the problem. Don't make yourself the problem.** You may have issues to be addressed, but the difficulties of writing are inherent in the task, not a reflection of your failings either as a person or a writer.

Remember, writing is hard. Writing *anything* is hard. Especially if you're doing your best.

Which reminds me of an old Hollywood story. Years ago, back in the days of the studio system, a roomful of contract writers were going crazy trying to solve an Act Two problem in a script they were doing. After almost a week of teeth-gnashing and garment-rendering, a new young writer was brought into the room. In a matter of minutes, he hit upon the solution. To which one of the exhausted old veterans grumbled, "Sure he beat it. He didn't know how hard it was." ■

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

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



**“AN URBAN THRILLER AS MODERN AS
TOMORROW’S *NEW YORK TIMES* WITH
A MAIN CHARACTER TO DIE FOR.”**

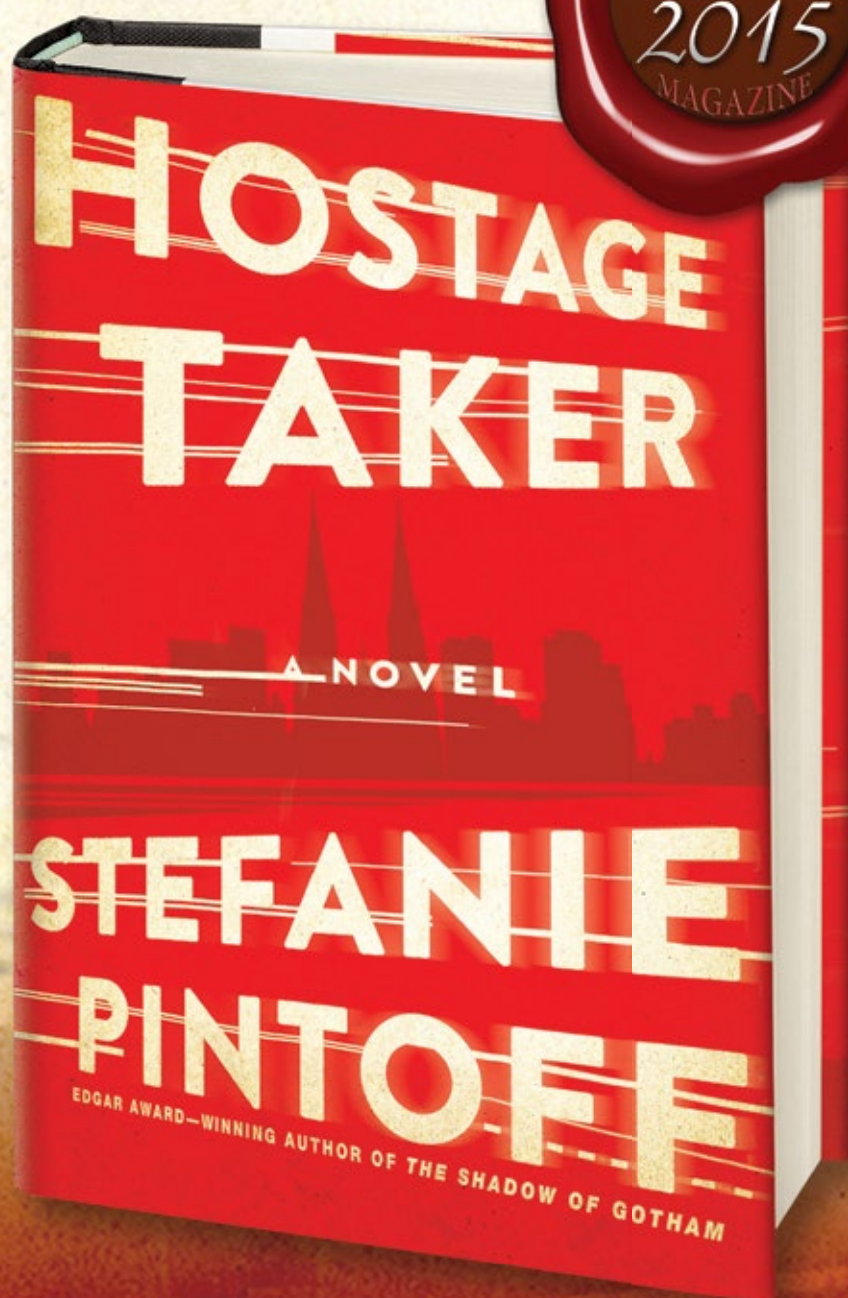
—LEE CHILD



**“A high-velocity roller
coaster of a thriller!”
—JEFFERY DEAVER**

**“Pintoff skillfully ratchets
up the tension and throws
more than one curveball into
this twisty, exciting read.”**

**—BOOKLIST
(STARRED REVIEW)**



KATHERINE NEVILLE

Shares a Secret, so Don't Tell

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



Sometimes we get an email that surprises us. Well, when we received an email from the publicist of Katherine Neville asking us if we would be interested in interviewing Katherine about her upcoming project, we couldn't say yes fast enough.

Katherine burst onto the scene with her book "The Eight" back in 1988. Since then she has written three more books, with her last being published in 2008. She is one of the few authors that doesn't have to write a book every year to stay on top of her game.

We didn't know what to expect with her exciting news, and I won't give it away here, as Katherine herself will explain below. We were thinking it could be anything. Maybe she was going to bring out another book, or maybe she was going to visit our office, we didn't have any idea.

For those of you that don't know Katherine Neville, here's a little background. She has lived and worked in several countries. Holding jobs from fashion model to portrait painter to busboy, she has seen

and done quite a bit. Her books have been tough to classify into one specific genre, but they have been translated into forty languages and sold worldwide. She is also the first author to be chosen to become a member of the Advisory Board of the Smithsonian Libraries in Washington, DC.

There is so much more to talk about with her accomplishments, we would fill up the magazine with them. Instead, let's take a quick look into her first book, "The Eight." Then check out her exclusive interview.

A fabulous, bejeweled chess set that belonged to Charlemagne has been buried in a Pyrenees abbey for a thousand years. As the bloody French Revolution rages in Paris, the nuns dig it up and scatter its pieces across the globe because, when united, the set contains a secret power that could topple civilizations. To keep the set from falling into the wrong hands, two novices, Valentine and Mireille, embark on an adventure that begins in the streets of Paris and leads to Russia, Egypt, Corsica, and into the heart of the Algerian Sahara.

Two hundred years later, while on assignment in Algeria, computer expert Catherine Velis finds herself drawn unwillingly into the deadly "Game" still swirling around the legendary chess set—a game that will require her to risk her life and match wits with diabolical forces.



Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): You have some exciting news to share about your book “The Eight.” Can you spill the beans?

Katherine Neville (K.N.): Yes, it’s really exciting news. And, as my readers all agree, long overdue.

As some insiders may know, over the decades my books have been “in turnaround” (that is, they were optioned by major producers/studios, then the rights reverted to me) five times, in Hollywood and in Europe. The first attempt started in 1988, just before “The Eight” was published as a book, when the galley were discovered and developed by Universal Studios and CBS as a TV miniseries, with screenplay by noted screenwriter Carmen Culver, who had just achieved deserved fame for her script for the miniseries of Colleen McCullough’s *The Thorn Birds*.

Then a couple of years ago, I met Ken Follett at Thrillerfest and heard him talk about the lengths he’d taken to protect “Pillars of the Earth” from being misinterpreted by the film industry. (Both “Pillars” and “The Eight” have huge international followings.) I already had 20 years of experience at rescuing my book from becoming “Cat & Lily’s Excellent Adventure!”

So I am pleased to say that I have signed with a new production company that plans to produce not only “The Eight,” but “The Fire” as well! The press release will spell out the details.

S. MAG.: Your last book “The Fire” (sequel to “The Eight”) came out in 2008, can we expect another book soon?

K.N.: Yes, I have been working on this particular book off and on for the past 30 years. It’s about painters in the 1600s. As a former professional painter myself, it is a subject very close to my heart, and for the last 3 years, with the help of some modern masters, I’ve been painting (and writing) up a storm! I took my final research trip to Italy this past September, and I plan to deliver the initial few chapters to my long-frustrated literary agents this May. Keep fingers crossed for possible pub date in 2017.

S. MAG.: For new readers just finding out about your amazing work, where would you suggest they start?

K.N.: Over the years, I’ve realized that there is simply no way to describe my work. Readers love my books because they’ve discovered them on their own, and while savoring the stories, each reader extracts whatever has most engaged his/her attention. For that reason, I always recommend “The Eight” as a starting point for my work. It seems to appeal to readers from 9 years old to 90—and it still remains a beloved book in 40 languages around the globe!

S. MAG.: Is there a certain character in your books that you still think about and maybe will expand on further?

K.N.: Believe it or not, the character that is closest to espousing my personal POV is Ladislaus Nim, who first appears as the mentor of my heroine, Cat Velis, throughout “The Eight,” and who reappears as mentor to her daughter, Alexandra, in “The Fire.” Nim is a brain trust, an iconic/ironic figure—hence by definition, a sexy guy (think Sherlock Holmes) whose sexiness has nothing to do with biceps.

“Readers love my books because they’ve discovered them on their own, and while savoring the stories, each reader extracts whatever has most engaged his/her attention.”

I think one of the reasons that so many of my readers are male (historically, more than 65%) is that my characters, both male and female, find intellect in the opposite sex is a really appealing ingredient. Just like real life—no?

So the iconic Nim will definitely be appearing in my subsequent work!

S. MAG.: When you write about characters that we have never met, how much research do you do to give them a voice for modern readers?

K.N.: *I have to know everything about them. Everything. The secret is, you have to know what they ate, what they saw, what they smelled, what they heard, what they touched. You have to live inside their skin to write them as real historic entities.*

The one comment that interviewers always made when I was a new author was: Your scenes are so immediate, I felt I was walking around inside the book. And your characters: Catherine the Great, Napoleon—his sister, his mother, his grandmother—you made them all seem so real! When I would reply: “Well, they were real...” people would pause, and say, Yes, yes of course they were!

History books and biographies rarely show us what historic figures must have experienced. Only fiction can draw you, with immediacy, into their world.

S. MAG.: Is there still a subject or time period that you would like to explore further in your writing?

K.N.: *I am really saturated with, and psychologically living in, the ancient world and simultaneously, the future that is already upon us—the transition between what we call the primitive world and “civilization” (which really means “Civitas,” or city dwellers, where we get our misused term “civilized.”) I’d like to explore a book showing the clash of cultures that’s happening right at this instant: the virtual reality that we must learn to live in, to survive, and the very real reality of nature that we must preserve, in order to live. (Yikes! That sounds way over the top. That’s why it takes me so long to write a book!)*

S. MAG.: Which one of your four books was the most difficult to write?

K.N.: *“The Magic Circle” hands-down. It’s 2,000 years of story, “From the Rise of the Roman Empire to the Fall of the Berlin Wall.” From the last week in the life of Jesus (Roman Emperors in Capri, Druids in Brigantium, Hebrews in Judea) to 1989 (the year of Tianamen Square and Berlin.) My modern heroine is an expert in nuclear waste, my former profession!*

S. MAG.: For new writers just diving into this crazy field, what advice would you give them?

K.N.: *There is no shelf in bookstores or libraries for Quest novels: but that’s the oldest form of fiction that we know of. So if you want to write them, just do it. No one can stop you from being a writer and telling great stories. The publishing world is ephemeral. Stories are eternal.*

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

K.N.: *Hopefully, something completely new and refreshing, every time! That’s what I want to read, myself!*

We can’t thank Katherine enough for taking the time to share her exciting news and speak with us. All of her books are now in eBook format through Open Road Media.

Please visit her website at www.katherineneville.com. ■

JOHN GILSTRAP

BEYOND THRILLERS



Interview by Weldon Burge
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Most people know bestselling author John Gilstrap for his thrillers, especially his *Jonathan Grave* novels (“No Mercy,” “Hostage Zero,” “High Treason,” “Damage Control,” “End Game,” “Threat Warning”). But fewer know that he is also an accomplished screenwriter, writing screen adaptations of novels by Nelson DeMille, Thomas Harris, Norman McLean and, of course, his own work. Outside of his writing, John has an extensive background in hazardous waste management, fire behavior, and explosives—knowledge that he has incorporated at times in his fiction.

John welcomed an interview for *Suspense Magazine*, and I thoroughly enjoyed our Q&A session!

Weldon Burge (W.B.): Let’s start with your screenwriting. Your first screenplay was an adaptation of your own novel, “Nathan’s Run.” Apparently you knew nothing about screenwriting before taking on the job. Yet you wrote the screenplay in, what, less than a week? What did you do to get up-to-speed on that project?

John Gilstrap (J.G.): *Two years after I’d sold the movie rights to “Nathan’s Run,” my film agent at CAA called with the bad news that Warner Bros. was putting “Nathan’s Run” in turn-around—the first in a complex series of steps that generally lead to a movie’s death. All because of script problems. I told my agent that the previous script writers were missing the point of the story; that I could do better, if only given the chance. Important Hollywood Lesson: Be careful what you say.*

“Hmm,” my agent said. “Do you think you could do it by next week?” The word “sure” escaped my lips before the filter in my brain had a chance to stop it. Sure I could write a screenplay in a week. Why should I let a little detail like never having seen a screenplay—let alone write one—stand in my way? Bravado, baby.

W.B.: So, with so little time to deal with the deadline, what did you do?

J.G.: *I dashed out to my local bookstore and picked up a copy of William Goldman’s book, “Adventures in the Screen Trade,” and read it cover to cover in a day. In it, he’s got the complete script for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, and when I finished it, I thought I had a handle on this screenwriting thing, so I started writing. Three days later, I had a completed script for “Nathan’s Run.”*

W.B.: Wow, three days? How did it go over?

J.G.: *My agent loved it. The executives at Warner Bros. loved it—enough to pull it out of turn-around and back into active*

development. But best of all, I had a decent writing sample for my agent to shop around Hollywood, in search of additional screenwriting work. And, of course, "Nathan's Run" is back in turn-around, where it has languished for 20 years now.

W.B.: You've also adapted the works of Nelson DeMille, Norman McLean, and Thomas Harris. I can't imagine taking an 800-page DeMille novel and squeezing it into a two-hour movie. Can you share a little bit about your adaptation process?

J.G.: *The first thing a screenwriter needs to remember—and it wouldn't hurt for authors to remember this, too—is that a film adaptation of a book is an entirely different work of art than the book from which it is adapted. As a screenwriter, my job is to tell an engaging story on the screen that captures the feel and the through line of story I'm adapting. It's much easier to do with an author like Thomas Harris because "Red Dragon," the book I adapted, is written very cinematically. That is to say it's written with a scene structure that lends itself to direct adaptation.*

With an author like DeMille, whose stories are less structured with lots of flashbacks and character development—all of which add page count—tougher decisions have to be made. The book of his that I adapted, "Word of Honor," was very long, and while very rich in detail (DeMille is one of my favorite authors), there were a number of plot lines, mostly dealing with protesting the Vietnam War, that had lost their social relevance, so those were fairly simple to excise.

I guess what I'm saying is, it's a balancing act.

W.B.: Joe Lansdale's novel, "Savage Seasons," was recently produced as a TV series, *Hap and Leonard*, for Sundance TV. Would you consider writing a short-run series of one of your books for television?

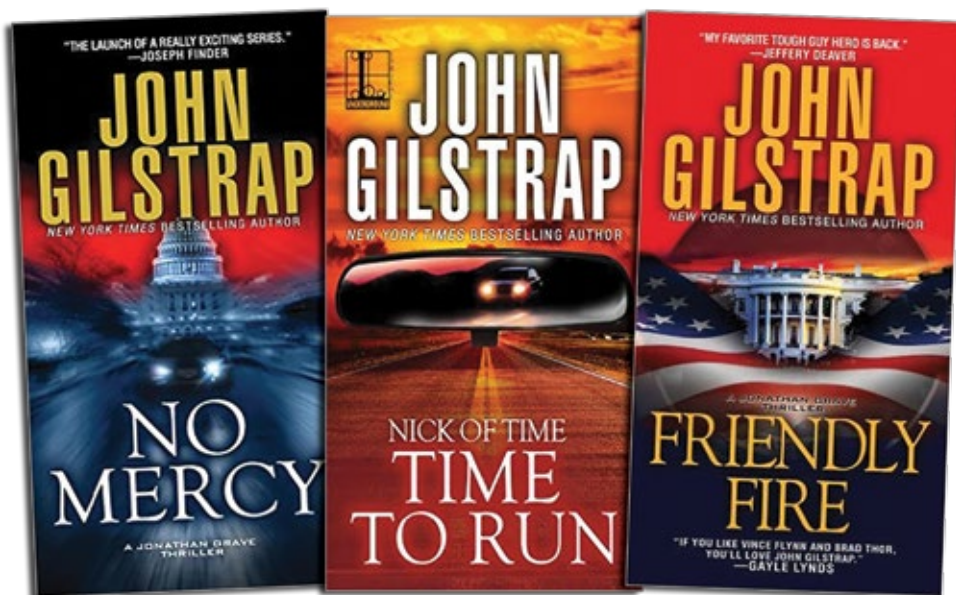
J.G.: *If asked, I would be delighted to.*

W.B.: Is it difficult to switch gears between writing a novel and writing a screenplay? Or is the process pretty much the same for you—creatively speaking?

J.G.: *It's not so much a matter of shifting gears as it is driving entirely different vehicles that share the same shift pattern. Story is story, character is character, and pacing is pacing. The major difference for me is that the specific detail that makes novels complete drag a screenplay down. In a Jonathan Grave novel, for example, readers will find detailed descriptions of Jonathan's office and home and the locations where he plies his trade. In a screenplay, it's perfectly acceptable (some would say preferred) to write merely, "INT.—OFFICE—DAY" then add something like, "It's opulent, more gentleman's club than business office." The production designer takes it from there.*

The other big difference between novels and screenplays is the inability to convey thoughts and inner-monologue in film. Those thoughts need to come through, but it's done in an entirely different way.

W.B.: Do you outline, do you just wing it, or do you have a different approach when beginning a novel?



J.G.: *Before I start a novel, I know the premise, the ending, and a couple of set pieces in the middle. After that, I work it out on the fly. When I first started, I was an obsessive outliner, but not anymore. Maybe again in the future?*

W.B.: Do you have any rituals/habits you must do when you sit down to write?

J.G.: *I don't have rituals in the OCD sense, no. My typical day starts with a two-mile walk that ends at my local Starbucks, where I read the paper and catch up on local gossip with the other gentlemen of a certain age. I'm generally in my office by 11 a.m., and I take care of email and social*

media stuff. Around 1:00, I'm ready to move on to the writing. I start every writing session by rewriting what I wrote during the previous session, and then move on with the goal of finishing a scene. It's mid-March as I write this, and with a mid-September deadline, I feel no immediate pressure to drive myself too hard—but when mid-August comes, I'll be pretty crazed.

W.B.: Do you have annual production goals? Say, one novel and one screenplay each year?

J.G.: *With the exception of an occasional short story, I only write fiction when it is under contract. That applies for novels, novellas, and screen projects. 2015 was a two-book year, so this year will be less hectic than last—unless the phone rings with an offer I can't refuse.*

W.B.: We first met at the Creatures, Crimes, and Creativity conference a few years ago. You often speak at such literary events. What is the value of these events for you? And, perhaps more important, what is the value for writers new to the industry?

J.G.: *I'm very much a Type-A extrovert. I draw energy from being around other people. Since writing is by definition a pretty solitary endeavor, I welcome the opportunity to step out and hang with other writers. As a group, I find writers to be an engaging, unusually intelligent lot.*

W.B.: I've always found the networking at conferences to be perhaps the most valuable aspect. I'm always surprised at how approachable most writers are.

J.G.: *As for the value of conferences to new writers, well, let's come at it from a different angle: Among the biggest mistakes I've seen made by new writers, the most devastating is to forget that publishing is first and foremost a business. Like any business, it has key players, it has mentors and it has rules. Without going to conferences, I don't know how anyone would even know what they don't know.*

W.B.: You've also taught in writing seminars and workshops. What have you learned from teaching other writers?

J.G.: *When I teach writing workshops, I do learn a great deal, if only because teaching forces me to articulate things that have evolved unnoticed over the years. While I'm more a pantsier than a plotter, I've come to realize that there is method to what feels like merely winging it.*

Also, my sessions almost always include writing exercises for students, and I'm continually amazed by the quality and quantity that they can put out in just five-minute bursts of creativity.

W.B.: What are you reading now?

J.G.: *At the moment, I am reading the page proofs for my next Grave book, "Friendly Fire," as well as two manuscripts sent to me by publishers in search of cover blurbs.*

W.B.: Two more questions, just for fun. Who is your favorite superhero and why?

J.G.: *No question here. It's Captain Underpants. I don't think there's a novelist on the planet who can't identify with a man whose superpowers are largely imaginary, yet he's protected by others who don't want to shatter the dream.*

W.B.: Magnum, P.I. or McGyver?

J.G.: *This one's tougher. Magnum's got the car and the girls and the 'stache, but McGyver's technical expertise makes up for the crazy mullet. I've got to go with McGyver, just as a hedge against the time I find myself held hostage in a submarine with access only to a pocketknife and dental floss.*

W.B.: I'd probably have to agree with you. Thanks, John, for a great interview!

If you'd like to learn more about John and his work, visit his website at www.johngilstrap.com, or his Facebook page at www.facebook.com/johngilstrapauthor. ■

STAR TREK WARS



By Jeff Ayers

Star Trek versus *Star Wars*: which one reigns supreme? This tops my list of ridiculous questions that don't really need to be answered but are nonetheless deliciously fun to debate.

Both series had somewhat tentative beginnings. *Star Trek* premiered on NBC on September 8, 1966. The show limped to three seasons and was cancelled, lasting as long as it did thanks to dedicated fans that flooded the television network with letters. Most considered it a failure. *Star Wars* debuted in theaters on May 25, 1977. The director of the film, George Lucas, and the studio thought it would be a failure. Soon there were lines around the block of fans.

In the end, both series also had legs. *Star Trek* went into TV syndication, and grew in popularity. An animated series, a movie (thanks to the success of *Star Wars*), and several series soon followed. For the fiftieth anniversary of *Trek*, a 13th movie will premiere in July and a new series will begin in January. *Star Wars* spawned several sequels, some excellent and some among the most regrettable ever made, and the most recent film broke box office records all over the world.

The size of their fandoms makes these two mega-franchises natural frenemies. You could argue that *Star Wars* is better for utilizing familiar storytelling techniques to inspire a new generation. Or that *Star Trek* used science fiction elements to showcase a hopeful future where humanity overcomes its own shortcomings. While I have enjoyed four *Star Wars* films, this is where I confess that *Star Trek* wins this imaginary war for me hands down. But what did you expect from a guy who wrote a *Trek* book ("Voyages of Imagination: The Star Trek Fiction Companion") and harbors a secret desire to hang out with Data? Let's break it down.

Star Wars would not exist without *Star Trek's* growing success. George Lucas had a tough time finding a studio to fund his project, and only succeeded in the end because of the financial success of his previous film, *American Graffiti*, and the fact that studios were looking for something that might appeal to *Star Trek* fans.

Star Trek found success from failure. How many failed TV shows can you name that we still talk about 50 years later? We talk about *Star Wars* because it was a success right out of the gate. *Trek* exhibited quality from the get go, but was not fully appreciated by the cast, crew, or the studio until after it was cancelled.

I'll admit that budgets were not the best in the 70's, but just watch the original *Star Wars* again. That's right—you actually can't. It does not exist. George Lucas fiddled with the film in home releases on VHS and DVD, creating special after special edition. Though *Star Trek* did go back and remaster the original series with state of the art special effects, they also made the original episodes available. You can see all of the Styrofoam rocks in their late-60's cheesy glory. They utilized the budgets they had at the time, but the creators understood that the characters and story were more important than the effects.

Characters are better in *Star Trek*. Everyone knows Mr. Spock is a Vulcan who constantly grapples with his human half. Captain Kirk has the charisma and swagger to save the day and get the lady. Doctor McCoy is irascible, but lovable. *Star Wars* main characters are a whiny farm boy, a main villain with an asthma problem, a spoiled princess, and a pilot who utilizes his charm to escape precarious situations.

Star Trek on television and the big screen have created both iconic moments (*KHAN!*) and some we would prefer to forget (the less said about *Star Trek V* the better). *Star Wars* has done the same thing ("Luke, I am your father") to (pick any of the prequels). Ask any fan about Episode I through III, and you will almost unanimously get disdain. There was a reason why *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was also a reboot of *Star Wars: A New Hope*. JJ Abrams had to bring back the fans that left in droves while also appealing to the diehards who live and breathe the franchise. I think he was successful, just as he was in reigniting *Trek* fans with his 2009 reboot. The new films starring Chris Pine as Captain Kirk divide *Star Trek* fans, but I understand the motivation behind making a story that would appeal to a general audience. Kind of like *The Force Awakens*.

I asked Chris Taylor, author of the amazing book “How Star Wars Conquered the Universe” what he thought about the *Trek* vs. *Wars* debate. He had some keen insight into why he believes *Star Wars* is better. First, he said, “It’s hard not to argue that *Star Wars* movies consistently look and sound amazing. Even when the plot of some of them (the prequels) may bore some to tears, what is being presented to us has obviously been meticulously crafted over many years. It’s pushing the boundaries of the visually possible—and it’s all scored by John Williams. *Star Trek*, being a franchise that consists of multiple TV shows and often-slapdash movies, rarely rises to this level of aesthetic and aural art. Perhaps the best of the movies—*Wrath of Khan*, obviously—and a few TNG episodes rise to this level. But only with help from George Lucas’ ILM.”

I would agree with him that the films look amazing, but *Star Trek* has always focused more on character (until the 2009 film) than visuals. John Williams is a musical genius, but the main *Star Trek* theme is quite recognizable as well.

Taylor said, “*Star Wars* was designed to be restless, a thrill ride that was always in motion (with the exception of a few romantic and mystical beats). Our heroes are forever escaping, under arrest, under attack, or planning a counter-attack. There’s barely any time to pause and admire any single set; the whole point is that you want to come back and see the movie again. *Star Trek*’s pace is often ponderous by comparison. Lucas deliberately designed this aspect to be in opposition to *Star Trek*. When he had his very first clear idea for *Star Wars*, it was that he simply wanted to see a dogfight in space rather than the kind of battle you’d see on *Star Trek*—the kind with static spaceships blasting at each other.”

Again I agree, since a show focused on character is unlikely to spend too much time on fireworks. The best scenes in *Wrath of Khan* are the moments that lack phasers and photon torpedoes.

He also remarked, “*Star Wars* is set in the past in a distant galaxy. It is rightly considered fantasy with high-tech elements, but fantasy nonetheless. And fantasy has always held an edge over science fiction. Utterly divorced from our world, it has to build myths and legends of its own. *Star Trek*, which had to present its creator’s vision of a future Utopia for humanity, didn’t have that luxury. Right from the start, *Star Wars* could tantalize us with rich backstory, prompting dozens of questions about what had taken place in the galaxy before Episode IV. What were the Clone Wars? What had happened to Anakin Skywalker? Who was this Darth Vader guy anyway? The more questions it leaves hanging, the better *Star Wars* gets (something else Lucas seemed to forget in the prequels.) With the sole exception of whether Spock would return from the grave in the third movie—never a well-kept secret—*Star Trek* has never really left us hanging.

“Its plots are all tidily resolved. There are no major in-universe cliffhangers. After *The Force Awakens*, you’re probably burning to find out who Rey’s parents were, not to mention what the deal is with Kylo Ren. Does anyone really have any burning questions about the third modern *Star Trek* movie?”

Well, OK, I spent a summer sweating about how Picard was going to get out of his new Borg assimilation, but I knew that it would all work out somehow. In terms of backstory, though, I respectfully disagree. Over time the *Star Trek* universe has developed an expansive and rich history of how the Federation was created, how humans made peace with the Klingons, and how the earth became known on a galactic scale.

The question of which is better has never seemed like a fair question to me. Both have thrilled me in turns and yet also stolen hours from my life that I regretted giving over. I think a person’s preference for one over the other boils down to first discovery. Which franchise were you first exposed to? I think those that lean toward *Star Wars* discovered *Star Trek* second and it couldn’t live up to the spectacle. Those who saw *Trek* first fell in love with the characters and vision of hope, and later enjoyed *Star Wars* well enough, but their hearts were already taken.

There are so many more important questions to debate in the world, but none perhaps as fun. Almost as much fun as who is the better captain: Kirk or Picard? But that is a debate for another day. ■



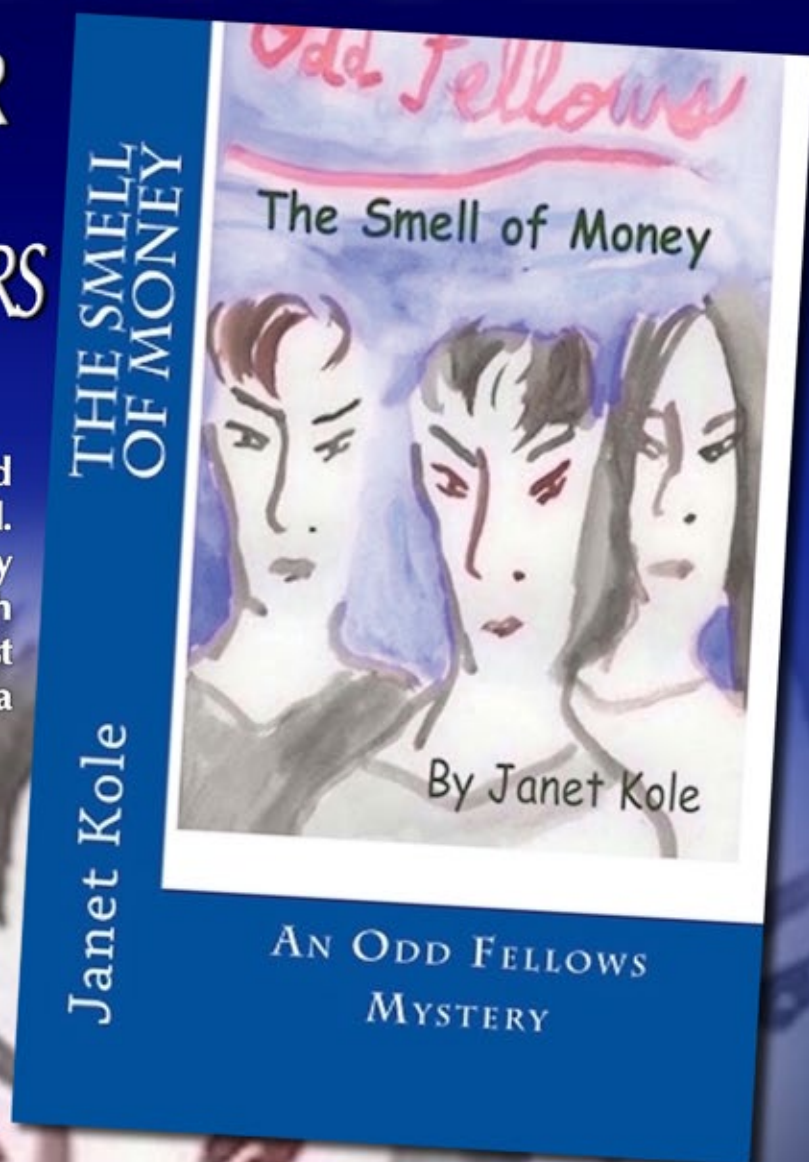
Jeff Ayers co-hosts *Beyond the Cover* with John Raab, and is a freelance reviewer for the *Associated Press*, *Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *RT Book Reviews*. He is the author of several books in the worlds of both fiction and non-fiction, including “*Voyages of Imagination: The Star Trek Fiction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

"A WITTY TALE WITH TWO RETIREES—A LAWYER AND A HIT
MAN—CLEVERLY PARALLELED."
~ KIRKUS REVIEWS

JANET KOLE

WHAT DOES A LAWYER
DO WHEN HE CAN'T
STAND HIS LAW PARTNERS
ANY MORE?

He teams up with his daughter and a hired
killer to right some wrongs in the world.
They are the odd bedfellows of the mystery
series *Odd Fellows*, the first book of which
is "The Smell of Money." Janet KOLE's first
novel, "Suggestion of Death," was called a
"page turner" by Kirkus Reviews.



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Women: Can You Live Without Them?

JOE HART EXPLAINS IN “THE LAST GIRL”

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
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Author Joe Hart has penned eight books in the psychological/horror genre. He has proved that he likes to push the limits with his readers and his characters, seeing just how much they can take before they break. With his latest release, “The Last Girl,” Joe has started a brand new journey.

Coming off his last book, “The River is Dark,” Joe takes readers to the edge of a new cliff with “The Last Girl,” but how long he’ll leave them hanging there before, perhaps, tossing them over the side with the *Dominion Trilogy* is the real question. Luckily fans won’t have to wait that long to find out, seeing as that book two in the series, “The Final Trade,” is due out in September 2016.

Now maybe you have never heard of Joe Hart. So who is the man behind the words? Well, we could simply offer up the bio from this website, but instead we have an exclusive interview with Joe where he tackles some very interesting questions. First things first, however, let’s take a sneak peek inside “The Last Girl.”

A mysterious worldwide epidemic reduces the birthrate of female infants from 50 percent to less than 1 percent. Medical science and governments around the world scramble in an effort to solve the problem, but twenty-five years later there is no cure, and an entire generation grows up with a population of fewer than a thousand women.

Zoey and some of the surviving young women are housed in a scientific research compound dedicated to determining the cause. For two decades, she’s been isolated from her family, treated as a test subject, and locked away—told only that the virus has wiped out the rest of the world’s population.

Captivity is the only life Zoey has ever known, and escaping her heavily armed captors is no easy task, but she’s determined to leave before she is subjected to the next round of tests...a program that no other woman has ever returned from. Even if she’s successful, Zoey has no idea what she’ll encounter in the strange new world beyond the facility’s walls. Winning her freedom will take brutality she never imagined she possessed, as well as all her strength and cunning—but Zoey is ready for war.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): “The Last Girl” is the first book in your Dominion Trilogy, tell us about the book and an overview of the trilogy.

Joe Hart (J.H.): The premise of the book is the birthrate of female infants drops precipitously in the near future without explanation. There is a worldwide effort to find the cause but 25 years later there’s still no solution. We see the story through Zoey’s eyes, a twenty-year-old woman who’s been imprisoned in a research facility all her life and is about to be subjected to another round of tests that no woman has ever returned from. The trilogy follows Zoey’s struggle to escape her captors, find the truth about the outside world, and also discover who she truly is.

S. MAG.: When the characters and the plot started to come together for you, was it then that you decided this would be a trilogy?



J.H.: Absolutely. When I realized how big the story was and how much I could run with it, that's when it sunk in that it was going to be a trilogy. The characters definitely had a lot to do with it.

S. MAG.: Both supernatural and human emotion are big within your books, how difficult is it to bring the two together and make it work?

J.H.: I think horror or supernatural elements are a fantastic way to examine human emotions. It's a wonderful way to pit ordinary people against the extraordinary and see how they react. You can learn a lot about a person when they're in the worst situation of their lives. I love seeing who a character truly is when their back is against the wall.

S. MAG.: When deciding who would be the lead character in the *Dominion* Trilogy, what type of personality were you looking for?

J.H.: Zoey's character came to me almost fully formed. She began speaking to me as a young woman who was very dubious about her situation and was unable to simply fall in line with everyone else. Her internal strength and cunning really stood out to me as well. I knew she wouldn't have any other real weapons besides those, so they became two of her most important features.

S. MAG.: Now with around a dozen books into your writing career, how have you evolved as a writer?

J.H.: Over the years I've realized how truly important it is to let my characters be completely human. They make mistakes, snap decisions that go wrong, and they become more real because of their flaws. Pacing is also another portion of writing that I've become more attuned to. Making sure the book has its proper ups and downs at the right times has greatly improved my fiction.

S. MAG.: Within your library, is there one book that was especially hard to write, maybe for the subject matter or the characters just not playing nice?

J.H.: My son has special needs, and in my book "The Waiting," the main character's son has severe mental and physical disabilities. I mined a lot of sensitive material from my everyday life for that story and it was very tough to write about at times. But overall though, I think it helped me deal with certain aspects in a constructive way, which was great.

S. MAG.: When fans first dive into "The Last Girl," will they see a little different Joe Hart then in previous books?

J.H.: Haha, well I always try to do something a little different in each book but the tension, suspense, and action that my readers have come to expect from me is definitely there. I think people will see a little more social commentary and some big questions about life in general tackled, so it's always interesting to see readers' reactions to different ideas.

S. MAG.: What scares Joe Hart?

J.H.: Everything. I think that's why I write what I do, to shine a flashlight on all my fears. Needless to say I don't think I'll ever lack subjects to write about.

S. MAG.: Is there a subject matter that you won't touch in your books?

J.H.: I don't think so. I like to explore topics that are important and sometimes disturbing, but I think the way a writer goes about it is the most crucial. A sensitive subject has to be handled in a smart way that provokes thoughtfulness and reflection. If you're too blatant or brutal I think it's an overload for many readers.

S. MAG.: We know that book two and three are next in the *Dominion* Trilogy, but what are you planning after that?

J.H.: I have a conspiracy thriller brewing in the back of my mind with a touch of supernatural themes within it. We'll see if it makes the cut by the time I'm ready for it.

We would like to thank Joe for taking the time to speak with us. For more information about Joe and his works, check out www.joehartbooks.com. ■



John Wells is Back and “THE WOLVES” ARE CLOSE With Alex Berenson



Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Press Photo Credit: Sigrid Estrada

We have had the pleasure of interviewing #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Alex Berenson before. However, after just releasing his latest *John Wells* book “The Wolves,” to rave reviews (and scaring some readers into thinking that this was the last book in the series) this time we put him to the fire with ten questions that even Alex was surprised by. We won’t hold you in suspense in regards to whether or not the beloved John Wells is history; according to Alex, on his website, he is already working on the next tale right now...so you can breathe again.

For those who have not had the opportunity to get to know Alex and his work, let’s begin at the beginning. Alex worked for the *New York Times* in 1999. He covered such stories as Hurricane Katrina, drug rings and was even a correspondent for the Iraq War. It was this experience that gave Alex his start in writing his first book, “The Faithful Spy,” which won the Edgar Award for “Best First Novel” and introduced the world to John Wells.

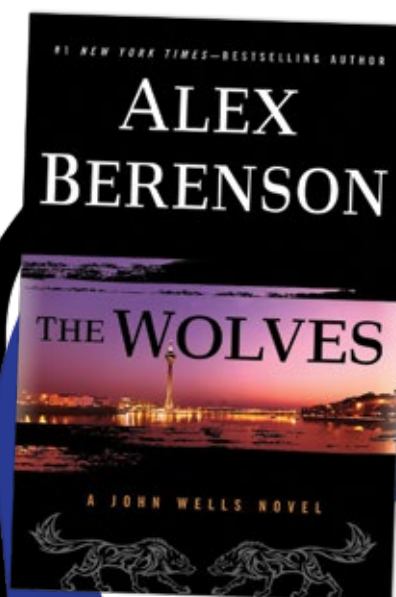
Luckily for us, Alex decided in 2010 to write full time. Now Alex has hit the magic mark of ten in his John Wells series with “The Wolves.” It would take several pages to talk about all the books in the series, so we will jump ahead and give you a sneak peek inside this newest treasure and then you can check out our interview. Next time we “question” him, it will be for *Suspense Radio*, that I can promise.

John Wells has just barely managed to stop an operation designed to drive the United States and Iran into war, but the instigator himself disappeared behind an impenetrable war of security. Now it’s time for him to pay, and Wells has made that his personal mission. There are plenty of crosscurrents at work, though. The White House doesn’t want anybody stirring the pot; his old CIA bosses have their own agendas; and other countries are starting to sniff around, sensing something unusual. It is when Russia and China enter the mix, however, that the whole affair is set to combust. With alarming speed, Wells is once again on his own...and the wolves are closing in.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Who is John Wells?

Alex Berenson (A.B.): Wells is the hero of all ten of my novels, a deep-cover CIA operative who now has left the agency but continues to work with (and occasionally against) it. He’s moody, a perpetual outsider, walled off from civilian life and the intelligence community by his own personality and the secrets he keeps. He has long since given up on saving the world, and now that he’s in his forties he knows he probably should leave the fighting to younger men, but he’s too stubborn to leave the battlefield.

S. MAG.: With so many books featuring Wells under your belt, how do you keep the



character fresh, both for your readers and yourself?

A.B.: *As long as I can find new challenges for him, I think he'll stay fresh. Wells is aging in a real way, and his relationship with his family is changing too, so he remains real to me. The key is making sure he isn't on an endless terrorist-killing treadmill, and I think I've done that by varying the worlds he inhabits.*

S. MAG.: What sparked the idea for "The Wolves"?

A.B.: *"The Wolves" was maybe the easiest Wells novel to plot—it comes straight out of the previous two books and is the culmination of his battle with Aaron Duberman, the casino billionaire who tried to spark a war between the United States and Iran.*

S. MAG.: Do you read other writers in your genre and do they influence you in your own writing?

A.B.: *Mostly, I don't, and when I do I tend to read more literary novelists like Joseph Kanon or John le Carre. I want to be a better writer on a sentence-by-sentence basis, so I look to them for inspiration.*

S. MAG.: How do you stay timely when it comes to situations for Wells to tackle?

A.B.: *I read a lot—places like Slate, War on the Rocks, Foreign Policy, etc.—and try to talk to smart folks with real-world experience.*

S. MAG.: How do you research your novels?

A.B.: *See the above answer. And I travel to the places I'm writing about too (though now that I have two little kids the travel has gotten somewhat more complicated).*

S. MAG.: Talk about your writing about television shows for esquire.com. How did you get those gigs and do you have plans for writing for them in the future?

A.B.: *I've written several television pilots over the years. None have been made, but I've been hired for a couple of writing jobs because of them. I would love for the Wells novels to become a television show or movie, but Homeland has made that process far more difficult. I am still interested in television writing, but unfortunately I can only devote a limited amount of time to it. Readers want a new Wells novel every year, and I want to satisfy them.*

S. MAG.: Newcomers to your series should start with which book and why?

A.B.: *"The Faithful Spy," the first. You'll have the best idea how Wells became who he is. In fact, it's best to read the series in order, since Wells is not wiped clean at the end of every book—events in one book often affect later novels.*

S. MAG.: Do you have any plans for writing a standalone thriller?

A.B.: *Not at the moment. I do have ideas for other thrillers, both spy and other—time is my main constraint.*

S. MAG.: What's next for you and John Wells?

A.B.: *We're well along on his eleventh mission, which involves the Islamic State and a traitor inside the agency. I've had to imagine what would make a CIA officer choose to betray the United States, which has been an interesting challenge. I think I've succeeded—I'll find out next February if readers agree!*

We would like to thank Alex once again for taking the time to talk with us. And as we mentioned before, we will get Alex on the radio show in order to delve deeper into his incredible writing and, perhaps, what comes next for John Wells. For more information on Alex please visit www.alexberenson.com. ■

Congratulations to the Nominees

The Edgar Awards

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*

Donna Andrews Press Photo Credit: Joe Henson Photography

Jeff Abbott Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist



Donna Andrews

Jeff Abbott

This is the time of year many authors look forward to. Mystery Writers of America have announced their list of nominees for The Edgar Awards. In over a dozen categories, one author will be chosen from each to win the award that has been around since 1954. I'm sure you have heard of some of the past winners like: John Le Carre, Dick Francis, Tony Hillerman, Robert B. Parker, Ken Follett and last year's top winner for Best Novel, Stephen King with "Mr. Mercedes."

The Edgars are, for most authors the award they want to hold. With thousands of books being published every year in the mystery/suspense/thriller/horror genre, to say the competition is fierce would be an understatement. We have been able to get some insight into the awards by speaking with Jeff Abbott, President and Donna Andrews Executive VP. This is the first time we have been able to get this exclusive insight, and let me tell you the process of selection is intense.

You will also see a full list of nominees and we are planning to follow up in the next issue with some quotes from some of the winners.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What do the "Edgar Awards" mean to you as an executive?

Donna Andrews (D.A.): *If you mean as the Executive Vice President of MWA—they're a high point of our year and it's exciting to help make possible the premier literary award in our genre—and for that matter, one of the premier events on the literary calendar, since the Edgars are given out at a black tie gala attended by many of the leading lights in the mystery field and the publishing community. It's also a lot of work—I know all of us in MWA are looking forward not only to the banquet on April 28, but also to breathing a sigh of relief the next morning. I'm pretty optimistic that it will be a sigh of relief, because our Administrative Director, Margery Flax, is a pro at event management and has been organizing the awards and the banquet for over a decade. So I'm looking forward to the ceremony and to meeting Walter Mosley, this year's recipient of our Grand Master award, along with the nominees and a lovely cross section of the mystery community—in short, I'm expecting another fabulous event.*

S. MAG.: How are the Edgar nominees selected?

D.A.: *The Edgars are a peer-judged award rather than one selected, like the Agathas or the Antonys, by a fan vote. Each year, MWA recruits a panel of judges for every award category. Those judges must be active status members—i.e., they are themselves*

published crime writers. And through the course of the year each panel considers every eligible work that's submitted in its category. In some categories, this means hundreds of books—for example, last year the Best Novel category had 526 entries, so that panel did a heck of a lot of reading. In fact, for some of them the amount of time it took meant giving up writing their own book that year, which is quite a sacrifice for a writer. (My writer friend Dana Cameron acknowledged that the year she served as a Best Novel judge, she found it incredibly grueling...but also surprisingly rewarding, like taking a master class in how to write the mystery novel.) The judges' work is confidential, so we can't say much more about what they do and how they do it, except to say that all of us who serve take the responsibility very, very seriously. And we're also proud of the fact that because we consider all of the books submitted, a book by a less well-known author or a smaller publisher has just as much chance to impress the judges as those from the big names. Once each panel has chosen its short list of nominees and its winner, we announce the short list and the winners are revealed at the Edgar banquet in late April.

S. MAG.: How can people get more involved in MWA?

Jeff Abbott (J.A.): Interested writers can get involved via the MWA Facebook page, attending a local chapter meeting, volunteering for or being a participant in one of our programs (such as the mentorship program). I've always found MWA to be a welcoming place, and I was a member long before I was published.

D.A.: And you don't have to be a published writer to join! You can be an aspiring author. You can be a professional in a related field—a librarian, an editor, a bookstore owner, an agent, etc. Or you can simply be a reader who loves mysteries so much that you want to take your passion beyond the printed page. Whether it's in cyberspace through our Facebook page and our discussion lists or face to face at meetings, there's nothing more satisfying for crime writers and crime readers than to hang out together, talking about the genre they love. After all, can you think of many other places where you can say something like, "I'm thinking of poisoning someone—do you think strychnine or arsenic would work better?"—and not get arrested?

S. MAG.: What are the best benefits for an author when they join the MWA?

J.A.: Some of the key benefits are our National Mentor program, where writers can get help and advice from established professionals; access to our approved publisher list, which can be helpful in making sure a publisher you want to work with meets our standards of good business practices and fair treatment of authors; and our National Critique program, which pairs your manuscript with a professional writer who will give you a constructive critique at a great price. As well, our chapters hold meetings with speakers from publishing and forensics.

D.A.: A less tangible but equally important benefit is that by joining MWA, you become more involved in and knowledgeable about the genre you love. If you're looking for an agent or trying to start a critique group, wondering if a new publishing trend is going to help or hurt your career, or just hoping to hear about the best new books out, more than likely there's a fellow MWA member who can help.

S. MAG.: How can magazines like us help out more with MWA and other writing organizations?

J.A.: Writing about the Edgars is a great help. Writing about the winners and the nominees is a help as well. The Edgar has long been the gold standard in mystery awards, but many casual or new readers don't know about it and its seventy years of recognizing great books.

D.A.: It's also very helpful if when mentioning the Edgars you help make people aware of the way winners are selected, as described above—by other writers. Often when the winners are announced, we hear people complaining that they've never heard of some of the nominees. If you ask me, that's a great thing! It's easy to find out about good books if they become bestsellers or receive good reviews from major publications, but all too often an excellent book won't receive the attention it deserves...until the authors serving on an Edgars judging panel say "Wow!" and put it on their short list. Of course, each year's Edgar nominee announcement can do a number on your book buying budget and your to-be-read pile if you're one of the wise souls who understands how seriously and thoughtfully the Edgar nominees are selected and tries to read everything on the short lists—but having too many excellent books to read is a nice problem to have.



BEST NOVEL

- “**The Strangler Vine**” by M.J. Carter (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)
 “**The Lady From Zagreb**” by Philip Kerr (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)
 “**Life or Death**” by Michael Robotham (Hachette Book Group – Mulholland Books)
 “**Let Me Die in His Footsteps**” by Lori Roy (Penguin Random House - Dutton)
 “**Canary**” by Duane Swierczynski (Hachette Book Group – Mulholland Books)
 “**Night Life**” by David C. Taylor (Forge Books)

BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR

- “**Past Crimes**” by Glen Erik Hamilton (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)
 “**Where All Light Tends to Go**” by David Joy (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)
 “**Luckiest Girl Alive**” by Jessica Knoll (Simon & Schuster)
 “**The Sympathizer**” by Viet Thanh Nguyen (Grove Atlantic – Grove Press)
 “**Unbecoming**” by Rebecca Scherm (Penguin Random House - Viking)

BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL

- “**The Long and Faraway Gone**” by Lou Berney (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)
 “**The Necessary Death of Lewis Winter**” by Malcolm Mackay (Hachette Book Group – Mulholland Books)
 “**What She Knew**” by Gilly Macmillan (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)
 “**Woman with a Blue Pencil**” by Gordon McAlpine (Prometheus Books – Seventh Street Books)
 “**Gun Street Girl**” by Adrian McKinty (Prometheus Books – Seventh Street Books)
 “**The Daughter**” by Jane Shemilt (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)

BEST FACT CRIME

- “**Operation Nemesis: The Assassination Plot that Avenged the Armenian Genocide**” by Eric Bogosian (Hachette Book Group – Little, Brown and Company)
 “**Where The Bodies Were Buried: Whitey Bulger and the World That Made Him**” by T.J. English (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)
 “**Whipping Boy: The Forty-Year Search for My Twelve-Year-Old Bully**” by Allen Kurzweil (HarperCollins Publishers - Harper)
 “**Forensics: What Bugs, Burns, Prints, DNA and More Tell Us About Crime**” by Val McDermid (Grove Atlantic – Grove Press)
 “**American Pain: How a Young Felon and his Ring of Doctors Unleashed America’s Deadliest Drug Epidemic**” by John Temple (Rowman & Littlefield – Lyons Press)

BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL

- “**The Golden Age of Murder**” by Martin Edwards (HarperCollins Publishers - HarperCollins)
 “**The Outsider: My Life in Intrigue**” by Frederick Forsyth (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)
 “**Meanwhile There Are Letters: The Correspondence of Eudora Welty and Ross Macdonald**” by Suzanne Marrs and Tom Nolan (Arcade Publishing)
 “**Goldeneye: Where Bond Was Born: Ian Fleming’s Jamaica**” by Matthew Parker (Pegasus Books)
 “**The Lost Detective: Becoming Dashiell Hammett**” by Nathan Ward (Bloomsbury Publishing – Bloomsbury USA)

BEST SHORT STORY

- The Little Men – Mysterious Bookshop* by Megan Abbott (Mysterious Bookshop)
On Borrowed Time – Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine by Mat Coward (Dell Magazines)
The Saturday Night Before Easter Sunday – Providence Noir by Peter Farrelly (Akashic Books)
Family Treasures – Let Me Tell You by Shirley Jackson (Random House)

Obits – Bazaar of Bad Dreams by Stephen King (Simon & Schuster - Scribner)
Every Seven Years – Mysterious Bookshop by Denise Mina (Mysterious Bookshop)

BEST JUVENILE

“Catch You Later, Traitor” by Avi (Algonquin Young Readers - Workman)
“If You Find This” by Matthew Baker (Hachette Book Group – Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)
“Curiosity House: The Shrunk Head” by Lauren Oliver & H.C. Chester (HarperCollins Publishers – HarperCollins Children’s Books)
“Blackthorn Key” by Kevin Sands (Simon & Schuster - Aladdin)
“Footer Davis Probably is Crazy” by Susan Vaught (Simon & Schuster – Paula Wiseman Books)

BEST YOUNG ADULT

“Endangered” by Lamar Giles (HarperCollins Children’s Books - HarperTeen)
“A Madness So Discreet” by Mindy McGinnis (HarperCollins Publishers – Katherine Tegen Books)
“The Sin Eater’s Daughter” by Melinda Salisbury (Scholastic – Scholastic Press)
“The Walls Around Us” by Nova Ren Suma (Algonquin Young Readers - Workman)
“Ask the Dark” by Henry Turner (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – Clarion Books)

BEST TELEVISION EPISODE TELEPLAY

Episode 7 - Broadchurch, Teleplay by Chris Chibnall (BBC America)
The Beating of her Wings - Ripper Street, Teleplay by Toby Finlay (BBC America)
Gently with the Women - George Gently, Teleplay by Peter Flannery (Acorn TV)
Elise - The Final Mystery - Foyle’s War, Teleplay by Anthony Horowitz (Acorn TV)
Terra Incognita - Person of Interest, Teleplay by Erik Mountain & Melissa Scrivner Love (CBS/Warner Brothers)

ROBERT L. FISH MEMORIAL AWARD

Chung Ling Soo’s Greatest Trick – Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine by Russell W. Johnson (Dell Magazines)

GRAND MASTER

Walter Mosley

RAVEN AWARDS

Margaret Kinsman
Sisters in Crime

ELLERY QUEEN AWARD

Janet Rudolph, Founder of Mystery Readers International

* * * * *

THE SIMON & SCHUSTER - MARY HIGGINS CLARK AWARD

“A Woman Unknown” by Frances Brody (Minotaur Books – A Thomas Dunne Book)
“The Masque of a Murderer” by Susanna Calkins (Minotaur Books)
“Night Night, Sleep Tight” by Hallie Ephron (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)
“The Child Garden” by Catriona McPherson (Llewellyn Worldwide – Midnight Ink)
“Little Pretty Things” by Lori Rader-Day (Prometheus Books – Seventh Street Books)

It will be a very exciting night for these authors. Just to be nominated for an Edgar is a monumental achievement and all the authors should be very proud of themselves. For more information on the Edgar Awards please visit www.theedgars.com. And for more information on the Mystery Writers of America please visit www.mysterywriters.org and search out one of the chapters closest to you. ■

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THE ROLE OF FEAR

By Adam Dunn

Press Photo Credit: James Sullivan Photography

*Do not be afraid; our fate
cannot be taken from us; it is a gift.*
—Dante Alighieri, “The Inferno”



A somewhat paradoxical title for an article. For how can “fear” (from the proto-Germanic *feraz* or “danger”), understood as intrinsically unsettling, disruptive, or even paralyzing in both its chilling transitive and dark majestic noun senses, have a “role” in any constructive sense?

Two possibilities spring to mind. First, fear functions as nature’s own early-warning system, a simple and instantaneous threat indicator that is easily seen as the lowest common denominator between species. Simply put, fear is the sensory arm of the self-preservation instinct. This can be termed its experiential or *internal* role. (I refrain from using the term “subjective” for reasons outlined below). It exists in the simplest of animals, in the *in utero* fetus that reflexively shies away from the cold intrusion of the amniocentesis probe, and in the endless illusions, anxieties, and constructs men create for themselves to block out the hyperanxious awareness of their own mortality (poignantly described by Ernest Becker in “The Denial of Death”).

The second role is that which may be seen as having an *external* role, that is, fear put to use as an extension of the will. From the sustained malevolent glare to the suicide bomber, fear covers inestimable distance at incalculable speed—it *strikes*. It can be transmitted at the speed of primal emotion through an air-raid siren, a doctor’s silent email, or the terrible cacophony of a predatory pack’s movement as it closes in. This external role can not only be deployed by one individual against others; it can be learned, and thus passed on to others as chosen, dark drops in the pool of accrued human knowledge. In physical form, be it the most primitive handmade spear or a remote-controlled precision airstrike, this role acquired undeniable priority early on in human development, which it maintains to this day.

Yet there is another dimension to fear’s external role, which is what concerns the writer most. This is the abstract or symbolic aspect to fear, one which may precede its physical core manifestation—the effective deployment of which may suspend the need for that violent core entirely. Consider the death’s-head logo, whether on a pirate ship’s flag, an SS officer’s insignia, or toxicity warning labels on sundry household goods. Here it is fear’s role to deflect or head off confrontation, by telegraphing the core’s violent promise in a way sure to be recognized by the target audience. Thus is the war won without firing a shot, the plague center sealed in quarantine, the restive populace kept in check by the implied threat of government agency.

Herein lies the role of fear for the writer: as a projective abstract tool which plays upon the innate impulse of the target in order to illuminate and amplify the storyscape. Fear soundlessly breaches the gap between storyteller and audience at the



speed of recognition; it elicits a desired cognitive reaction (as opposed to triggering a frenzied physical one). Whatever emotional nuance intended by the writer to be conveyed in a scene is magnified and sharpened by the deployment of fear, which resonates louder and longer within the audience's mind, so that the efforts of one effect results in many—force multiplication in action.

It's difficult to say exactly when this literary device first came into being. Doubtless

the gross use of fear existed in myth and oral traditions beyond accurate dating. The expulsion from Eden detailed in the third chapter of Genesis relies on it (as does the flood narrative three chapters later). One can imagine the audience cringing on its stone benches in some Periclean amphitheater, listening to the dire implications of Creon's condemnation of Antigone murmured by the masked chorus. Juvenal's immortal refrain "who will guard the guards" likely put a chill up the spine of any witness to the violent sequence of succession to the Roman throne in the first century. Innumerable religious tracts (from all ages and faiths) depict damnation and eternal suffering for transgressors of whichever hegemon holds the pen.

But the use of fear as a mature, refined literary technique is evident in Shakespeare's use of the dramatic aside to foment tension in the audience, as the target is made to recognize (through the well-practiced delivery of long-reworked lines) the dark machinations unfolding behind the scenes. The realization of worse yet to come heightens tension through the stirring of muted dread, as per Iago's dark closing couplet in *Othello* (I,iii): "I have't! It is engend'ed! Hell and night/Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light!" Not for nothing did the bard counterweigh this emotional manipulation of the audience's fears with bouts of comic relief, a balanced equation employed to varying degrees by veteran crime novelists, such as Carl Hiaasen, John Sandford, and Joseph Wambaugh in our own time.

The furthest extrapolation of abstract fear's written trajectory is found in Poe, who joined the method of delivery with repeated themes (premature burial, vindictive reincarnation, incipient madness) to enshrine this dynamic within a distinct, measurable framework: story. Whether in a vignette of rising monomania (*The Imp of the Perverse*) or a lengthy parable on man's flawed nature leading to his inevitable, terrible fall (*Berenice*), Poe was able to deploy his sophisticated word/impulse trebuchet to strike targets at various distances, to various degrees, from the uncanny and off-putting to incalculable despair and hysteria. (Poe's own disastrous literary career, compared with more successful figures in later stages of media development, such as Vincent Price and Christopher Lee, both of whom are now lauded for their recorded readings of his work, is a lesson all aspiring writers ignore at their peril.)

Modern storytellers of what is classified in bland commercial terms as "genre fiction" have added little to the structure of fear's written deployment as mapped by the trailblazers. The one ingredient (often overused) today is detail, with the ceaseless input feed of global interconnectivity serving up a seemingly bottomless crock daily. The audience in one remote part of the interlashed world can sup heartily on yarns seasoned with the larder-pickings of another far distant. Thus John Burdett provides the *farang* he ceaselessly mocks in the west with rich narrative broths full of fear-spice from the east, while Mo Hayder digs deep into the fear-cesspool lurking beneath the surface of her green and pleasant land for the bedside scrutiny of all to enjoy.

But the dynamic is the same, and in the long run we're the richer for it. Write on. ■

Adam Dunn is the author of the novels "Rivers of Gold," "The Big Dogs," and "Saint Underground," the forthcoming novel "The Unfathomable Deep," and co-writer (with Eric Anderson) of the forthcoming novel "Osiris." He spent years as a freelance writer cultivating networks among the military, intelligence, law enforcement, and financial communities. His byline has appeared in 18 publications in 4 countries. Including: CNN and BBC News (online); Inc., Paper, SOMA, and Publishers Weekly magazines (glossy); and the San Francisco Chronicle and South China Morning Post (newsprint). He and his family have left New York City. For more information, visit: www.dunnbooks.com.



RIGHT-HAND MAN

By Weldon Burge

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

THE TWO REMAINING CRÈME DONUTS WERE AS HARD AS A bull's ass, and the coffee was this side of motor oil. It was time to make another run to Dunkin' Donuts—as soon as it got dark and he could slip out unnoticed. At the donut joint, there was also a pay phone, something more and more difficult to find in the digital age. He'd need the phone later. He needed to call Solly.

God, he hated to recon his targets.

Francis "Flash" Conwright sat at a second-floor window of a dark, vacant house, holding high-powered binoculars to his eyes with one hand and a cell phone to his ear with the other. It was a burner phone and he had no intention of staying on it long. He watched another seemingly empty house across the street and five doors down.

"I don't know, Solly. Something doesn't smell right."

"What's the problem?" Solly Ventura asked.

"Intuition, I guess. I can't put my finger on it, but something

doesn't add up. I have to trust my intuition with these things. Saved my ass more than once. Listen, let me call you back in about an hour."

Conwright ended the call and pocketed the phone; he'd toss it down a storm drain later. He watched the tall man standing guard on the lawn in front of his target house. The guy obviously didn't care if he was conspicuous or not. But, why would he care? The entire development was under construction and there currently were no residents. The perfect sanctuary for a mobster in hiding. Conwright didn't recognize the thug, but he knew the old man, Cartanza, was in the house.

Vito Cartanza had been an enforcer in the Jersey mob most of his life, moving up in the ranks until, at the age of 80, he finally found religion and threatened to turn state's evidence. The Jersey families didn't take kindly to this possibility and had already attempted twice to take out Cartanza. The feds offered to put Cartanza into witness protection, but the old man didn't want to go into protective custody. He fled New Jersey with four of his henchmen, ended up in a house in a new real estate development in Paradise, PA, just outside of Lancaster. Amish country. Rolling farmland. Horses and buggies. A slower lifestyle.

Conwright thought for a minute. What was bothering him? Not like he hadn't faced similar scenarios in the past. He already knew the layout of the house from building plans. Had scoped the neighborhood, knew the ins and outs of the construction crews now building houses on the far side of the development. No clear obstructions other than the four men protecting Cartanza. Challenging perhaps, but certainly not problematic.

When the sun went down, he slipped out the back of the empty house.

* * *

"ARE YOU SURE THE OLD MAN'S THERE?"

"I saw them bring him in two days ago, just like you said," Conwright said. "Four goons and the geezer. Two guys at a time guarding the house, front and back, working shifts. Cartanza's got to still be there."

Conwright took another bite from the chocolate-covered donut, cradling the payphone receiver against his shoulder. He stood in front of the donut shop, watching the darkened, vacant parking lot. Not many folks buying donuts at 11:00 on a hot, steamy July night.

"So, what do you want to do?" Solly asked. "You can bail at any time, no hard feelings. Or, I can renegotiate the contract more to your liking, if that changes anything."

Solomon Ventura was Conwright's liaison with the mob, had known him since their early days in South Philly. Whenever the Philly mafia needed a clean hit with no family ties, Solly made all the arrangements with Conwright. Solly had ties with the right people in Jersey as well. The politics of the Cartanza situation, dealing with the Jersey mob, required a special tact—precisely the situation for which Conwright was most suitable and capable of handling. The Philly boys wanted nothing to do with it, of course.

"I'll need to take out the four guards to get to the old man," Conwright said. "What can you do for me?"

"Financially speaking?"

"Yes."

"I can swing five Gs a head, on top of the 100 Gs for Cartanza. I think the Jersey guys would go for that."

"What else can you do for me?"

"How so?"

"Can you tell me anything about these goombahs?" Conwright said. "I don't know all the Jersey boys."

"Describe them."

"The one guy chain-smokes. Tall guy, probably the most observant of the bunch, seems to be perpetually on edge. Kinda bald, big ears. Lots of tats on his arms and going up his neck. Doesn't seem to talk much with the others. But also seems to be the one making all the orders. I've seen him directing the others."

"Sounds like Benito Arturo."

"Benny the Artist. Heard of him. Real sleazebag."

"Yep. Benny does truly nasty things to young girls. Sometimes young boys. There are rumors that he does snuff films for favored clientele. I'm surprised he's there, actually. Benny doesn't go for the bodyguard thing. He must owe Cartanza big time."

"Advice?"

"I'd take him out first, if possible. He's pretty badass. You don't want to get anywhere near him. He'll rip off your arms and beat you to death with them."

"OK. Another guy is short, kinda overweight. Looks like he'd rather be somewhere else, like he could fall asleep at a moment's notice. Dark goatee, nose like a warthog. Older than the others."

"That's gotta be Louie Barcola. He's been with Cartanza for decades, an old friend. He's slow and not that bright. Shouldn't present any problems for you though. Next?"

"A real thug, built like a brick shithouse, arms wider than his head. I haven't seen much of him. He tends to stand guard in the back of the house, Benny in the front. Light hair, kinda long, to his shoulders. Seems to preen a lot. Probably spends a lot of time in front of a mirror."

"Hmm ... not sure, but it could be Nicky Suffo. He used to be a boxer, and the mob owned him. If it's him, he's been an enforcer, breaking legs and smashing kneecaps for the past few years. Younger guy?"

"Probably early thirties."

"I'm guessing that's Suffo. He could probably kill you with one punch, so you probably don't want to get within arm's length. Suffo is kind of a younger version of Cartanza, starting as a mob grunt but with higher ambitions. Not sure why he would side with Cartanza, unless he really respects the codger. What's the fourth guy look like?"

"He rarely comes out of the house. Every time I've seen

him, he's been right next to the old man. Doesn't look like mob material. Relative maybe?"

"How old is this guy?"

"Mid-twenties, maybe."

"Nah, probably not a relative. Cartanza's kids are in their fifties now and not involved in the business. Most of 'em are on the West Coast. No grandkids around here, either," Solly said. "Describe this guy."

"Light hair, clean face. Not a goon like the other three, not the build. I don't even think he's carrying a piece. I saw him with the old man just yesterday standing in the front bay window, talking. Just for a moment."

"Hmm ... sounds like Cartanza's right-hand man, his personal aide and gopher. Cartanza has some health issues, so maybe this guy handles the medicines, the food, and such. Doesn't sound like much of a threat."

"OK, thanks, Solly. You'll check into the extra payment for the goons, let me know?"

"Sure thing. Listen, don't jump on this if you're still having doubts. Hear me? I don't want to lose my best hitter."

* * *

AS SOON AS HE ENTERED THE ROOM, CONWRIGHT knew he was in trouble. Louie Barcola, the plump and slow one, stood opposite the door, gun raised. Stupid, stupid! How could he have let the guy get the jump on him?

"What the fuck you think you're doing here, Ace?" Barcola waved his gun toward the bedroll on the floor, the junk-food wrappers and empty coffee cups.

Conwright made a quick scan of the room. Despite the darkness, he was pretty sure he'd left nothing suspicious out in the open. The binoculars were in his back pocket. No guns left in the room. Still, what did Barcola know?

"Look, I don't want no trouble, man," Conwright said. "I'm just squattin' here 'til somethin' turns up. I been outta work for months. Wife kicked me out. Just tryin' to get by, ya know?"

"Yet, you can afford Starbucks coffee," Barcola said, nodding to the empty cup on the floor.

Damn! He only went to the Starbucks that one time.

"Look, man, I panhandle during the day, crash here at night. I know I'm trespassin', but I ain't causin' no trouble. And I don't want no trouble."

"How long you been here?"

"Coupla days. You want me to move on, I'll move on. I was lookin' to hitchhike to Philly anyway."

Conwright started toward his bedroll as if to collect his gear, but Barcola waved his gun again, motioning him to step back.

"Maybe I'll just call the cops," Barcola said.

"Man, you don't wanna do that. Just let me go, OK?"

"Or, better still, just put a bullet in your head."

Conwright forced his voice to sound terrified. "C'mon, man, I ain't done nothin'. Just let me pack up and go. You won't see me again, swear to God." He started toward his gear again.

"Hold it there, buckaroo."

Conwright stopped, stared at the man, waiting for the next move. He still wasn't close enough. But Barcola's hesitation was promising.

"Nah, I think I'll shoot you," Barcola said, stepping forward, closer, close enough, "and worry about it later."

Conwright slapped the gun from Barcola's right hand with his left hand, striking the pressure point just above the wrist to break his grip. Simultaneously, he punched the man's left ear with his cupped right hand—a practiced maneuver that usually burst the eardrum or at least caused enough inner-ear trauma to drive an assailant to his knees. As Barcola lost his balance, Conwright yanked a length of garrote wire secreted in his sleeve, looped it around the man's thick neck, and used the man's own weight as he fell to cinch the wire around his throat, cutting into the fatty flesh. Barcola fought for breath, flailing and grasping at empty air until, with a sharp tug, Conwright crushed the hyoid bone, sealing the man's doom.

He dropped Barcola to the floor. He uncoiled the wire from the dead man's throat, allowing the wire to recoil on the spool in his sleeve. Conwright stared at the frog-eyed face, the eyes already filming. Too fast, the garrote. Efficient, but not enjoyable or fulfilling in any respect. What he could have done with a handheld circular sander and a little more time, peeling Barcola's cheeks, taking off only the top epithelial layers where the nerve endings were the keenest. Maybe even grating his porcine nose down to the cartilage. Or maybe use a filet knife and slice those meaty jowls to the bone. It would have been far more fun, and far better than the goon deserved. Conwright could have also gleaned more information about the specific layout of the house and Cartanza's defense plans—if only he'd had time to play.

Time, however, was precisely what he didn't have.

The circumstances demanded a change in strategy. The others would soon miss Barcola. They would send someone else to investigate, or at least now be more wary. If they had sent Barcola to the house, that meant they were probably aware of his presence. Not good. He'd have to take action far earlier than expected.

Conwright pulled the binoculars from his back pocket and stepped to the window, then hesitated. Had a glint on the binocular lens given him away? Something must have alerted them. Had they seen him come or go earlier? Or did they patrol the neighborhood and just happened to come upon his gear in the house here?

Staying in the shadows, he looked out the window without the binoculars. Arturo stood on the front lawn of the home down the block, hands on hips and staring in his direction. Arturo lifted something to his ear—

—and a raking, static-filled sound came from behind Conwright, startling him. The sound came from a small device attached to Barcola's belt, a walkie-talkie of the sort often used by construction workers.

Arturo's voice, thick and venomous, came from the small speaker. "What's going on, you idiot? You've been up there for over an hour."

Conwright unclipped the device from Barcola's belt.

"Talk to me, numb-nuts!" Arturo growled.

At first, Conwright wanted to try to mimic Barcola's voice. But, he'd already made at least one stupid mistake, not securing this room. How many other dumb mistakes had he made? Why compound it now?

"Talk to me!"

Conwright clicked the button a few times, on and off, on and off, on and off.

"Sweet Jesus, you don't even know how to work the

damn thing!" Arturo said. "If you didn't find anything, get your lardass back here. Now!"

That gave Conwright some time. He hoped it was enough.

* * *

CONWRIGHT QUIETLY WORKED HIS WAY BACK to his car, parked about a quarter mile away next to an abandoned gas station. The car looked like a derelict and fit well next to the run-down garage. He was sure there were no active security cameras on the building. Popping the trunk, he pulled out what gear he thought would be needed for the job, gear that would not hamper him or slow him down if things didn't go well.

It would be so much easier to take out Arturo and Suffo with a sniper rifle, simply by positioning himself where both guards were simultaneously in range. Of course, the gunshots would alert those in the house and make things difficult. But, Conwright had never become proficient with a sniper rifle—largely because he abhorred sniper killings, much like he abhorred hunting. The thought of killing a deer from a distance—detached from the event, the deer not even aware of the hunter's presence, taking down an unsuspecting beast without even a confrontation—seemed cowardly to him. Too safe, too antiseptic. But, here he faced two trained killers before he could even enter the target house. What now? He had no time to strategize as he'd hoped. He had to move before they realized they had a problem.

* * *

WHEN CONSTRUCTION STARTED AT THE NEW development, streets, sewer and water lines, electrical cables, and other utilities had been the first to go in. So the streets were paved, largely through empty lots, and the streetlights had been installed. There was a streetlight just past the target house, fully illuminating the front yard where Arturo now stood, smoking a cigarette. No way for a frontal attack, so Conwright worked his way to the back of the house where he assumed Suffo was stationed.

Conwright crouched at the back of an adjoining house, scoping out the situation. From the back, he could see that there was lighting in the rear rooms, probably where Cartanza was holed up. There was also flickering fluorescence of what was certainly a television. A gas-powered electric generator had been placed near the back door—Cartanza had the only electricity in the neighborhood.

Suffo stood at the back door, staring up at the moon.

Conwright heard Arturo on the walkie-talkie, trying to contact Barcola again, his voice getting louder as no response came.

"Suffo, get your ass around here!" Arturo yelled from the front yard.

Suffo grumbled, then disappeared around the end of the house. That was the break Conwright needed. He quickly moved across the lot and melted into the shadows at the back of the house, working his way to the generator. He ducked behind it as Suffo returned to his position. The thug cursed under his breath, "Fuckin' Barcola. How the shit am I supposed to babysit Barcola and watch the house at the same time? Pain in my ass."

Conwright used the chugging hum of the generator to mask his movement as he approached Suffo from behind, his KA-BAR serrated knife in his right hand. Suffo became aware of him just as Conwright jammed his left hand over

Suffo's mouth, tilting his head back. Before Conwright could slide the blade through Suffo's exposed throat, Suffo clenched a massive hand around the knife-wielding wrist, nearly breaking bone. Conwright suppressed a scream as the KABAR dropped to the ground. Conwright shifted his weight, pulling harder on Suffo's head until the man's center of balance tilted him backward. Suffo still grasped Conwright's wrist, and Conwright felt the agony of grinding bones in his hand as he too began to fall. Both men hit the ground.

Suffo was faster than Conwright expected, releasing his grip on Conwright's wrist and rolling aside, quickly bringing himself up on one knee. Conwright tried to do the same, but Suffo landed a devastating kidney punch. The pain was immediate and excruciating.

"Arturo!" Suffo yelled.

Now on his back, Conwright reached for his ankle holster, but couldn't pull up his pant leg before Suffo landed another punch directly to his stomach, driving the air from his lungs and doubling the pain in his abdomen.

"What the hell's going on?" Arturo rounded the corner of the house, gun drawn.

"This asshole tried to take me out," Suffo said. The ex-boxer stood, looking down at Conwright writhing on the ground. "You know him?"

Arturo stepped closer, gun pointed at Conwright's head. "Nope. Never seen him before."

"Just shoot him, get it over with," Suffo said.

"Can't do that, you idiot. We need to find out who he is, who sent him."

"Isn't it obvious?"

"No, it's not fuckin' obvious. We need to question him. With force. 'Bout time we had some fun around here."

There was the crack of a gunshot, a muzzle flash at the back door of the house. Arturo staggered backward, a dark stain blossoming on his chest.

Suffo said, "What the—?" before another gunshot; a bullet this time punching a hole through the side of Suffo's head and blowing a chunk of skull the size of a lemon out the other side. Suffo tumbled to the lawn next to Conwright.

Arturo still stood, an expression of disbelief on his face as he looked down at his pulsing chest. Another shot and Arturo's head exploded; he dropped to the grass as well.

Conwright looked toward the door, expecting a bullet himself. In the frame of the door was the kid, the one Solly had called "the right-hand man," Cartanza's personal aide. He held the handgun to his side, smiling at Conwright.

"So, Mr. Conwright. We finally meet," the man said. "Sorry these two thugs caused you such distress."

What the hell? Conwright thought.

"May I call you Flash?" the man said. "Please, Flash, come into the house. Let's get acquainted." He lifted the gun. "But no funny business or I can make things very difficult for you."

* * *

CONWRIGHT'S WRIST THROBBED, AND HE FELT like his left kidney had exploded, judging from the pain in his lower back. How much damage had Suffo done? He could be bleeding internally, for all he knew.

He stumbled through the kitchen area, trying to maintain his balance, the man with the gun behind him. Noticed the refrigerator, connected by cable to the generator out back. A

number of cables snaked down the hall, he assumed to the living area and where Cartanza now resided.

"I guess you already took out Barcola, huh? I was the one who suggested he check out the house. You see, I've been expecting you."

"How?"

"How did I expect you? Simple. The man who hired me also hired you. I've known all along that you were hired to kill Cartanza. But, it's not quite what you think." The kid chuckled, and it was that little laugh that bothered Conwright the most.

Although the rest of the house was presumably empty, the kitchen, adjoining bathroom, and dining room (now acting as a living room) were well furnished, with electrical cables running every which way. Cartanza sat in an armchair in front of a large, flat-screen TV, watching an old episode of "The A-Team." Only Cartanza was no longer capable of watching or hearing anything. His eyes bulged from his bloated, purple face; his black tongue protruded from his dark lips—a leather belt had been tightened around his throat.

"All the comforts of home, wouldn't you say?" the kid said.

Conwright glared at him. "What's this about?"

"Like I said, I knew you were coming, knew you were here. As soon as you arrived at the house and I heard Suffo grappling with you, I took care of Cartanza. That was the plan, you see. You've been the real target all along."

"And the other two?"

"Also in the plan, although I'd hoped you'd take them out before I had to. I must say, I'm disappointed with your performance so far. I expected more, considering your reputation."

"It's been a fubar day, what can I say?"

"Take your clothes off," the man said.

"You're kidding."

"Not at all. I know you're carrying, and I have no intention of letting you use any of your weapons. So, take it all off."

"Just kill me now, junior. I'm not playing your games."

"No games. No games at all. Just precautions. You see, I've been paid to detain you, not kill you."

Conwright cocked his head. "What's this really about?"

"Like I said, you've been the target all along. You're a hard man to lure out into the open, Mr. Conwright. My employer has been tracking you for years. When Cartanza became a potential hit, my employer—"

"Just who is your employer?"

The kid ignored the question. "My employer had an opportunity to hire you to take out Cartanza. What better way to draw you into the crosshairs?"

So, Conwright thought, whoever was behind this had mob connections, knew to contact Solly Ventura to contract him. Had to be someone who could fund a contract on Cartanza, someone tied to the Jersey mob—yet also someone who could hire this weasel to capture him.

"I want you nude," the man said. "Now. Everything off. I'm not supposed to kill you, but I can certainly put a bullet where you wouldn't want one."

Conwright sighed and started to undress. He dropped his clothes in a pile next to Cartanza's chair, then stripped off his various holsters, sheathed knives, and other killing devices

(including the garrote and a pouch of shurikens). The young assassin was most impressed with Conwright's Bernadelli .22, a palm-sized handgun Conwright had positioned in a holster between his shoulder blades, easy to pull from the back of his neck—and generally missed in a pat down. The Bernadelli was Conwright's preferred firearm.

Conwright stood naked in front of the man, arms outstretched. "Unless you want to check the crevices of my ass, that's it. Now what, junior?"

"Sit. On the floor. Legs crossed."

Conwright sat. As he did so, he glanced around the room, weighing his options. "You got a name, kid?"

"Actually, I kinda like 'The Kid.' Has an outlaw feel to it, wouldn't you say?"

"This isn't the wild west, kid. This is Amish country. We're not gunslingers."

The kid nodded. "Maybe not gunslingers, but certainly killers."

"You really don't know what you're dealing with, do you?"

The kid smiled, tipped the gun. "Inform me."

"Remember in the news, the Atlantic City Slasher, killed a dozen hookers? They never caught the guy. Or the Baltimore Strangler?"

"Man, that's old news, happened a decade or so ago. So what?" The kid's eyes narrowed. "Wait, are you—?"

"Catching on, junior."

"No way, man. A serial killer? And a hit man? BS. Pure BS." The kid laughed.

"Even hired guns take vacations. A little R and R. On the job, I don't kill unless I get paid to do so. But, on my own time, well ..."

"Bullshit!"

Conwright shrugged. "Let's just say I have unique skills and experience. For example, I can imagine attaching jumper cables to your scrotum and giving you the thrill of your short life. Plus some fun and games with strategically placed drops of hydrochloric acid. I can hear you screaming, quite a bit. But, of course, that would be way too much fun. I don't mix business with pleasure, and I'm here for business. So, more than likely, I'll take the boring route and just put a bullet in your head."

The kid laughed again. "Aw, man, you're killing me here! I'm the one with the gun, dipshit. You're sitting on the floor, naked. Your career ends tonight, old man." He pulled a cell phone from his pants pocket, punched in a number. "Yeah, I have him here now. He's not going anywhere. No. Arturo and Suffo roughed him up a bit. I had to take them both out. Yeah, Cartanza's dead, too. No. No problem." He finished the call, and then smiled at Conwright. "He'll be here soon."

"Then what?"

"Oh, I think he wants to take care of you himself. Some revenge thing. I hope it's fun to watch."

"I'm sure it will be," Conwright said as he grasped an electrical cable on the floor next to him and yanked with all his strength, sending spikes of pain from his injured kidney through his spine. The cable snapped taut against the back of the kid's ankles, toppling him cartwheeling backward to the floor. Conwright sprang from his sitting position, straddled his captor, and drove his flat, open hand into the man's throat, punching his larynx, causing spontaneous gagging.

Conwright ripped the handgun from the kid's hand, jammed the gun into the side of the kid's knee, and fired one shot. The kid then howled.

Conwright put his lips next to the man's left ear. "What's the plan?" he asked.

The kid sobbed, his eyes now wide.

"What's the friggin' plan?" Conwright repeated.

"He wants to kill you himself," the kid said.

"Why does he want me dead?"

"I don't know! Can't you see I'm bleedin' here?" the kid cried out.

"I noticed."

Conwright put a bullet in the kid's other knee. The punk screamed.

"Bet that hurts like hell," Conwright said. He clamped his left hand over the kid's mouth to stop his screaming, and then jammed the gun under his jaw.

"You're leaking pretty bad. You may bleed out before you get to a hospital. Why does he want me dead?"

He lifted his hand from the kid's mouth. Tears welled in the boy's eyes, beads of cold sweat on his forehead, shaking uncontrollably with pain. Conwright had to get him to talk before he passed out.

"I don't know nothing," the kid said.

"Anything."

"What?"

"I'm correcting your grammar. Anything. You don't know anything."

"Yeah, yeah. I don't know a fuckin' thing!"

"Did Solly put you up to this?"

The kid looked thoroughly bewildered.

"Solly?" Conwright repeated. "Was it Solly?"

"Who the shit's Solly? Dude told me his name was Hanson."

"Hanson?" Conwright couldn't remember anyone named Hanson from his past. Probably an alias.

"Yeah, Hanson. That's all the fuck I know, man. He set the whole thing up. And, right now, I wish to hell I never met the stupid—"

"So, you met him? What did the guy look like?"

"What? I don't know. Little guy, like an accountant or something."

"Dark hair?"

"No hair. The dude was bald."

Not Solly, then. Who could this be?

He pressed the gun deeper under the punk's chin—

"Wait! Wait! No—"

—and put a bullet straight up through his brain.

Conwright stood, wiping blood from his face with the back of his hand. "Tough business for rookies, kid." He tossed the gun to the floor.

He then got dressed, pulled the Bernadelli from its holster, and sat in the chair opposite Cartanza's corpse.

And waited.

* * *

CONWRIGHT POINTED HIS BERNADELLI DIRECTLY into the man's face. Hanson, or whatever his true name was, had strolled into the room like he owned the place, his face beaming. But the smile instantly dissolved when he saw the kid dead on the floor and Conwright sitting in the chair holding a gun.

"Never send a child to do your dirty work," Conwright said.

The man glared at Conwright, hatred and malice in his eyes. The kid was right. He was a puny, balding guy who looked everything in the world like an accountant, someone who hovered over a desk for much of his life crunching numbers and perusing spreadsheets.

"I'm assuming you're Hanson."

The man said nothing.

"I'm sure it's not your name. Why do you want to kill me?"

"You killed my fiancée."

"I've killed many people. What was her name?"

"Josephine Hunnicutt."

Conwright couldn't place the name. It must have been a hit, not one of his "pleasure" kills, for Hanson to attach him to the killing. He hadn't hit many women over the years. Probably not a mob thing. More likely a jealous lover or ex-husband. But he was always better at faces than names. If he had a photo—

"You don't even remember her!" Hanson vibrated with anger, clenching his fists at his sides.

"How long ago was this?"

"Sixteen years."

"Well, there you go! You can't expect me to remember that far back."

"You ruined my life. Took away the only love I've ever known."

"Nothing personal, I assure you. Strictly business."

Hanson's face reddened deeper, a vein throbbing in his forehead. "You *killed* her! Of course it was personal!"

Conwright shrugged. "That's what I'm paid to do. Let me remind you, you apparently paid me to kill. You paid the weasel on the floor over there to kill. You're no different. You have no moral high ground."

"I'm nothing like you."

"Tell me if I have this straight. You're a bookkeeper for the Jersey mob, and the boys told you to fund a hit on Cartanza, right?"

Hanson said nothing.

"So, you called Solly Ventura and asked for me specifically. I don't know how you figured out Solly was my liaison—"

Hanson grinned. "I have my connections. Took me years to develop them, years to track you down. Here we are."

Conwright nodded. "But once you contracted with Solly to have me hit Cartanza, you then contracted with the kid to take me out."

"No, not take you out. I wanted that opportunity."

"Do I have the story straight?"

"Think you're smart, don't you? You're not so smart."

Conwright nodded again. "I was a little sloppy this time around, I'll admit. And my gut told me something was screwy with this set up. But I never figured on you."

"So, I assume you're going to kill me now," Hanson said. He crossed his arms, glaring at Conwright. "It will bring you no satisfaction, you know."

Conwright smiled. He stood. "You clearly misunderstand me. This is a business. I'm a businessman. I don't kill unless I'm paid to do so. There is no profit in killing you." He moved closer to Hanson, making circles with the gun in his hand. "Oh, I did kill one man who refused to pay me, refused to

honor our contract. Thoroughly unprofessional. I viewed it as writing off a bad debt."

Hanson's eyes never left Conwright's face. He remained silent. Conwright sensed the hatred growing like a parasite on the man's soul, almost an entity itself.

"I've killed in self-defense," Conwright continued. He took another step closer to Hanson.

"Is that why you killed the kid? In self-defense?"

"No, he was part of the contract. You paid me to take him out, as the others. Unfortunately, your boy took them out before I had a chance, even Cartanza." Conwright sighed. "So, you owe me \$10,000, for Barcola and the kid."

"Well, I'm not part of the contract, correct?"

"True."

"And since I'm not foolish enough to attack you while you're swirling a gun in my face, I'm not an immediate threat to your life."

"Not immediate, no."

"So you cannot kill me in self-defense."

"Right again. I have no intention of killing you. By the way, are you right-handed?"

"What?"

"Are you right-handed? It's not a tough question. Most people are right-handed. I was just wondering if you are."

"I'm right-handed, yes. But—"

Conwright thrust his Bernadelli into Hanson's right shoulder, angling the barrel up under the armpit, and rapidly pulled the trigger four times, exploding muscle, tendons, nerves, and cartilage, shattering the rotator cuff and the head of the humerus.

Hanson dropped to the floor, screeching like a skewered pig.

"Extensive corrective surgery and you'll eventually regain some use of that arm," Conwright said. "A little physical and occupational therapy, you may be able to hold a cup of coffee with your right hand. Someday. I suspect tennis is now out of the question."

Hanson's eyes, just a moment before brimming with hatred, were now wide with fear and agony.

Conwright crouched next to him. "My advice? Drop it. You're still alive. Cherish what you have, while you have it. This hatred will only consume you."

"You bastard," Hanson hissed.

"Now see, you still haven't learned the lesson here. Just remember that there are other parts of your body that can take a bullet without killing you. Other parts that can be hacked or blown away. Please keep this in mind if you harbor any thoughts of striking out at me again. Oh, and don't forget you owe me ten grand."

As Hanson writhed on the floor, Conwright used the kid's cell phone and anonymously reported a shooting to the police. He pocketed the phone and would dump it later. He also picked up the kid's gun, also to dispose. Then he walked out the front door of the house.

Conwright knew, as he always knew, that he would have to watch his back. ■

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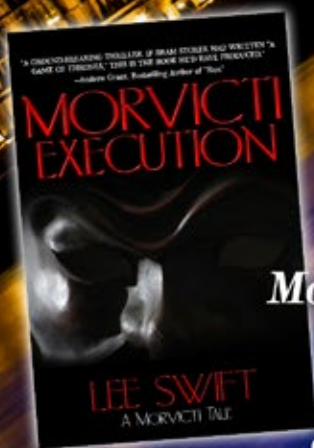
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