

Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

A man in a cowboy hat and mask is riding a horse and firing a revolver. The background is dark and moody, with a blueish-grey tone. The horse is brown and galloping. The man is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The revolver is pointed to the right, and there is a small burst of light from the muzzle. The overall atmosphere is gritty and suspenseful.

SEPTEMBER /
OCTOBER 2016

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CATRIONA McPHERSON

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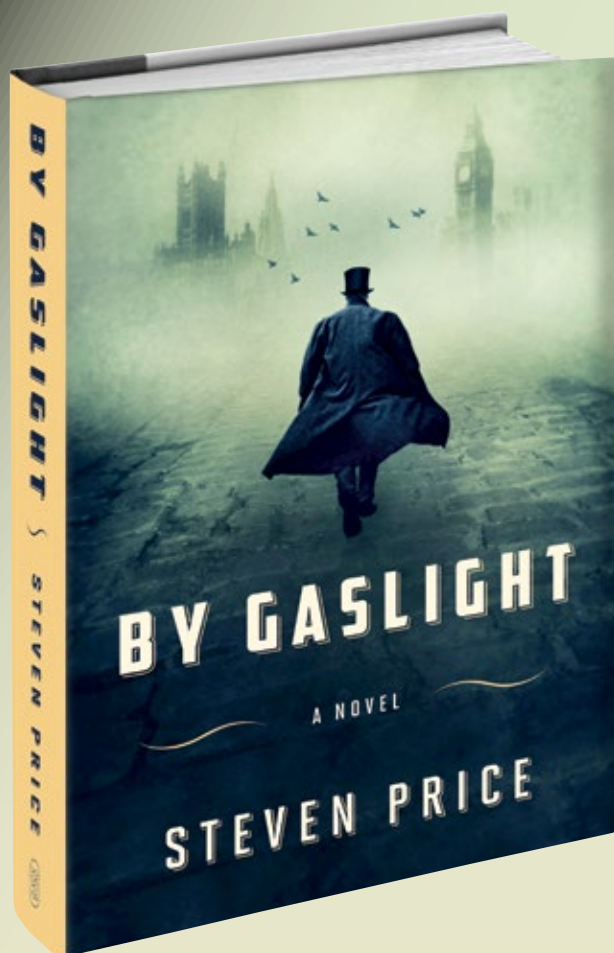
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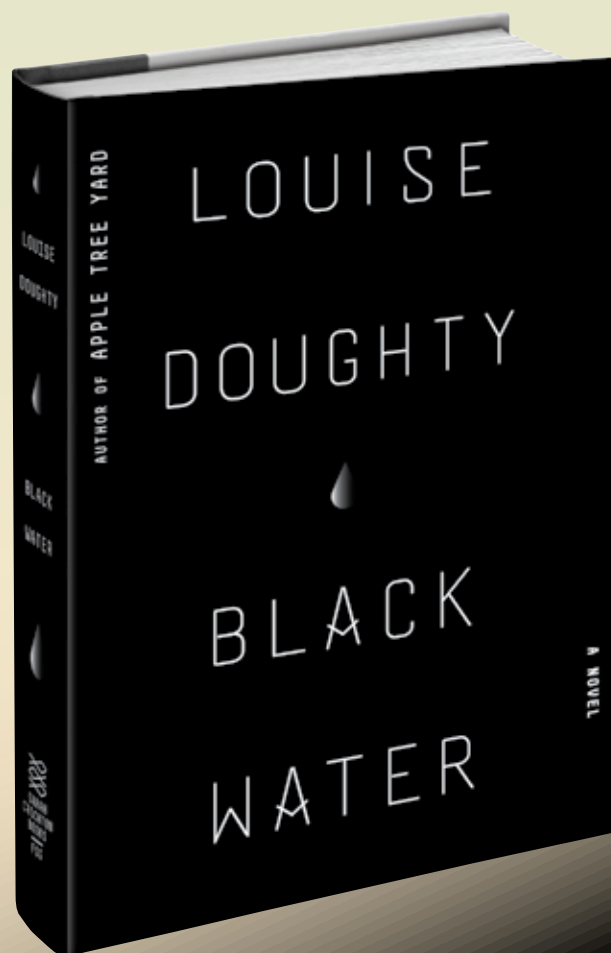
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Contributors

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Weldon Burge
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FROM THE EDITOR

Summer has now left us, though the weather might still be hot in parts of the country, we're coming into the best season of the year: fall. I thought this would be a good chance to reflect on things we'll be leaving behind as we head into those cool autumn days. I've not done a "Top Ten" list in quite a while, so let's have some fun.

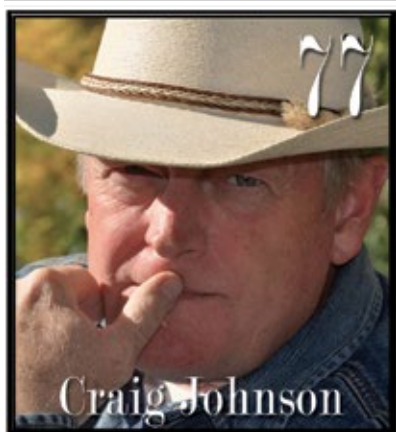
10. Humidity. You might be laughing at me if you live in the south, let's say somewhere like New Orleans, where you begin to sweat thirty seconds after you walk outside, but for many the nasty summer humidity is gone.
9. Long days. Yep, it won't be long before you look outside at 5:00 pm and think it's time to go to bed.
8. Baseball. While baseball stays into late October, fall is the season of Football. Basketball and Hockey come back in late October also.
7. Sitting in A/C all day. Again, for some this is still the case, but isn't it great when you can turn off the A/C, open the windows and feel that cool breeze, especially at night?
6. Mosquitoes. They don't like colder weather and we don't like getting bit, so it's a win/win situation.
5. Cutting the grass. Gone are hot weekend days of having to cut grass. Some of you might like that, but I have better things to do than sweat and spend two hours pushing a lawn mower around.
4. Pools. Most public pools close down after Labor Day, so if you want to get cool on one of those Indian summer days, you'll need to turn on the sprinkler or sit in a plastic kiddie pool.
3. Grilling season. This would be more for the people in the north. In California it's grilling season all year round.
2. Warm Weather. Yep, no more beach days or getting a suntan. However, you will have more time to read books and that's always a good thing.
1. No more kids hanging around the house all day. This is a parents dream! The kids are going back to school, so no more having them hanging around the house doing nothing. Parents around the country are having parties.

I'm sure you have some things that I didn't include, but with only ten spots you can't include everything. If you would like to send me over your ideas, I will post the best ones on the website. You can email editor@suspensemagazine.com. Now on to the real star of our show, the rest of the magazine.

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine ■



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Forensic Files

Q&A: CAN MY FEMALE CHARACTER CAUSE HER PREGNANCY TO BECOME "STONE BABY" BY SHEER WILL?



By D.P. Lyle, MD

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

Q: I am writing a story about a woman who, through sheer force of will, doesn't allow her body to complete childbirth. The baby dies and becomes a lithopedion. My questions are:

Will there be bleeding in spite of the labor stopping? What happens to the placenta? Will the body absorb it or will it harden like some kind of cocoon? Will the mother lactate?

Will it cause the mother pain to carry the stone baby? Will the woman have periods?

Is it plausible that the mother's body will experience contractions years later? Or pains caused by the stone baby that she could believe are contractions? How long does it take the fetus to calcify into the lithopedion?

Nicole Nelson-Hicks, Nashville, TN

A: First of all, there is no way she could stop her pregnancy, labor, or delivery by simple force of will. The body will do what the body does and it will eject the fetus either as a stillbirth or a live child. There is no way to stop this.

Secondly, lithopedion (stone babies—singular *lithopedion*) tend to occur in abdominal pregnancies as opposed to intrauterine pregnancies, even though it is possible for the fetus to remain within the uterus. Conception actually takes place in the fallopian tube as the egg descends and the sperm rises—at least in most cases. A tubal pregnancy can result where the fetus grows within the fallopian tube, and rarely the fertilized egg will escape the end of the fallopian tube and settle within the abdomen. Sometimes the blood supply is established and the child can grow within the abdomen. Rarely to term, but it can grow. It would take 12 or so weeks for the fetus to reach a size that would be easily visible.

In this situation sometimes the tissues of the dead fetus are not absorbed by the body but rather become walled off with fibrous tissue, and this can often then calcify which is where the term "stone baby" comes from.

Often the woman will have no knowledge of this whatsoever. Women have lived late in life, and indeed very late in life, and not known this has occurred. It is often found

on an abdominal x-ray that is taken for some other reason. But she could feel the discomfort or have some sensation of a mass or fullness in her abdomen and it could be discovered as a result of that.

If the pregnancy were outside the uterus and in the abdomen, as is most likely in these exceedingly rare circumstances, she would not lactate because those hormones don't appear until very late in the pregnancy. She would most likely have normal periods, and could even become pregnant again since the uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes would be normal and would continue to function normally.

However, if the fetus remained within the uterus, this could interfere with future pregnancies, though not always. It would be very similar to a woman who had large fibroids, which are muscular masses that develop within the muscular wall of the uterus and often cause pain and abnormal bleeding. Sometimes normal pregnancies occur despite these, and that could be the case here.

It is possible that she could experience discomfort many years later with the fetus being located in either the uterus or the abdomen, so that part of your story would work quite well.

In summary, this is an exceedingly rare circumstance and it is nothing that she could force to happen. Most likely it would be with an abdominal pregnancy but it could be an intrauterine pregnancy—though this would be even more rare. If an abdominal pregnancy, she could easily go through life normally and have other children and be completely unaware or she can develop symptoms later as I described above. If the pregnancy were intrauterine, she would likely have more symptoms and more likely be aware that something wasn't right. But in either circumstance it would be possible for her to have normal periods and even become pregnant again. ■

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

CREATING BELIEVABLE JOURNALISTS IN MYSTERIES AND THRILLERS...

FROM ONE WHO KNOWS

By Neely Tucker

Photo Credit: Marvin Joseph



Creating believable journalists in domestic mysteries and thrillers is an often overlooked means of building the story, and it's easy to see why.

The work these real-life characters do is pretty boring, as far as narrative drama goes. Digging through court cases, building databases, interviewing people (mostly over the phone)...it's just not sexy.

I've been a reporter for about three decades now. My day job as a roving reporter on the national desk at the *Washington Post* is largely consumed by background reading, catching flights, annoying facts that get in the way of a good story, ethics, endless fact-checking (which means sitting at a desk and reading figures, looking up assertions and spellings and dates and zzzzzzzzz).

But I was also a roving foreign correspondent for seven years, working in dozens of countries and often covering war and violent conflict. Nothing boring about that. Two friends were killed in conflict areas. More than half a dozen were wounded by gunfire or shrapnel. Three were kidnapped. I got beaten up by a mob in the Congo. An enraged Serbian soldier once put a gun to the back of my head and cocked it.

So when I started a series of crime novels built around a reporter named Sully Carter, my idea was to transplant a war-injured foreign correspondent back home to the U.S. He reports on the late 1990s criminal scene in D.C. as if the city's drug wars were another conflict zone.

But the reporter in your novel doesn't have to be Hunter S. Thompson, or an unethical loose cannon, to greatly complicate your story.

Good journalists are really just freelance detectives without the power of arrest or subpoena. They are skilled at computer and courthouse research, untangling bureaucracies, reading people and knowing that there is more than one way to get information.

Reporters can send a plot skittering in all sorts of ways that police, or private detectives, or vigilantes, simply can't. They transmit a public narrative of events to millions of people at once—though that information might be right, wrong, misleading, or mostly true but not quite. And they have access to expensive public-information databases—like LexisNexis (and Accurant)—that few people do. Seriously, in less than ten minutes, I can find out how much you paid for your house,

your credit rating, places you used to live and your driving record. Plus, the names and numbers of all of your neighbors.

When I covered D.C. Superior Court and the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, some of my best sources were clerks, secretaries and U.S. Marshals. They were privy to almost everything that happened in the courthouse beyond public view. They knew what files key documents were in, and they knew not only who could quietly access those documents, but who would.

It's getting a little sexier now, right, how this game gets played?

So I put together a list of Things Every Fictional Journalist Knows. They might be helpful in developing your troubleshooting (or causing) reporter. Either one would know all of these.

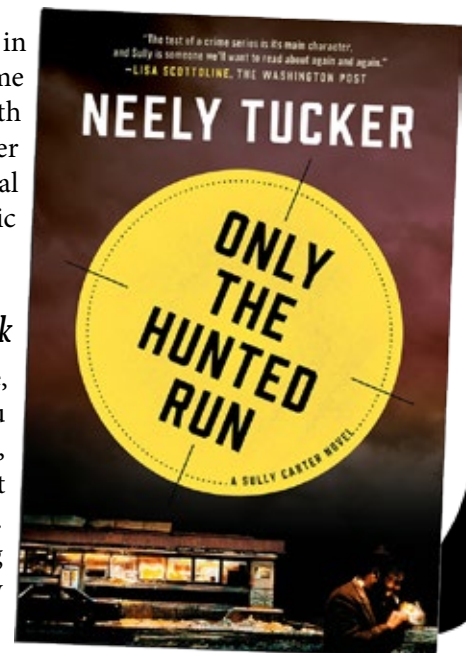
1.) **Everybody lies.** All the time. About everything. Big things, little things, things that don't make any difference. They lie to your face, they lie by omission, they stab you in the back. I once wrote a story in which a federal judge was quoting, talking sternly about a fellow judge who was in trouble. He dictated his quote and had me read it back to him for accuracy. He confirmed it and I put it in print. The judge never said anything else to me, but it turned out he got a lot of heat for this quote. So he wrote my editors an official letter saying that he had never spoken to me and that I had completely fabricated the quote and he wanted them to know what type of person I was. He did not want a correction because he, as an esteemed jurist, wanted to stay above the fray. Welcome to Washington, kids.

2.) **Even when they don't lie, they're often wrong, and it's not necessarily their fault.** When a reporter starts asking questions, they're often putting them in a framework that is not the same of the subject, so it's like asking the wrong question. Let's say the cops tell you a fatal shooting followed an argument at the XYZ Bar about 6 p.m. You show up and ask a witness, "So, hey, what was that argument about?" But the witness, who had been at the bar longer than you or the cops, thinks you're asking about the *original* argument, which happened two hours earlier, over a spilled drink, not a woman, and he describes that to you. You put that in your piece—and you're wrong. Maybe you actually know more than the police at this point, but you still put the killing in the wrong sequence of events, which (innocently) skewers the public's understanding of the crime.

3.) **The general does not prove the specific.** This is the No. 1 lesson my journalism professor, Tommy Miller, taught, and has proven to be the most valuable. Example: Cops are shooting a lot of unarmed black men. That's generally true. A lot of husbands beat up their spouses. Campus rape is a problem. Yep, Yep, Yep. But none of this proves the next case of the above that goes viral is true. It's the difference between statistics and data points. Remember "Hands Up, Don't Shoot?" It spawned the Black Lives Matter movement. But the U.S. Justice Department later found that Michael Brown, the victim in that case, did not have his hands raised when he was shot. The alleged rape at the University of Virginia, as reported in *Rolling Stone*, completely fell apart. And if anybody has found those "weapons of mass destruction" that the Bush Administration told us were in Iraq, hey, give us a call.

4.) **The most terrifying thing for any serious reporter is....a correction.** All you have in this business is your credibility. All good reporters are fiercely protective of their name and reputation. If your character hasn't taken a shower at 11 p.m. and realized, with horror, that they left something in their story that is wrong and it's ten minutes after deadline, and then started shrieking/yelling/crying/throwing things...that's not a real reporter. The cornerstone of any serious journalistic career is accuracy, and the statistic for this is corrections.

5.) **Corrections REALLY changed after the Jayson Blair scandal at the *New York Times*.** This is sort of a B.C./A.D. date for modern journalism. Before this date, newspapers in particular would correct only *serious* errors. A correction meant you had really, really effed up. After this date, EVERY error of fact, no matter how piddling, had to be corrected. In digital journalism stories can be updated continually. Most institutions acknowledge stories have been updated and/or corrected. Some don't. But remember: When someone sends a link of the early story...they are NOT sending the corrected one, meaning that the recipient wouldn't know it's been updated. (Now there's a nice plot twist.)



6.) **Your reporter always knows more than they can print.** The difference between what you know and what you can print is essentially the difference between what a cop knows and what they can prove. Just like lawyers work to get things in front of a jury by the rules of the court, reporters work to get things in a story, but by the rules of journalism.

7.) **The rules for getting facts into a story:** Roughly, you have to have a physical or online document, a recording, video or eyewitness testimony. When an editor points to a line in a story and says, “How do we know Sen. Tucker was drunk at the time of the car crash?” You’ve got to have the Breathalyzer results, the officer’s incident report, or court testimony. That’s it. You could report his bar tab, if you can get it, but just because Sen. Tucker paid for eight shots of bourbon in two hours doesn’t mean he drank them. It just means he bought them. Think of the proof as a tangible object. It has to be something the reporter can show their editor.

8.) **So we’re all good with using a leaked document that is factual, right?** No, no, no. The real-life problem for reporters is not “Is this document a source is leaking to me accurate?” It’s more like, “What else ISN’T this person leaking to me?” and “WHY is this person leaking this to me?” Sources, like everybody else, are rarely altruistic. They have grudges, they’re sanctimonious, they’re ambitious, they’re motivated by greed, lust and loathing. And a few have strong moral convictions and want to do the right thing.

9.) **Reporters almost always break stories from sources with whom they have long-standing relationships.** They are also most often “punished” by the same. The number two official in the police department is not likely to leak a key revelation in an ongoing criminal investigation to a reporter he or she just met. They’re more likely to confide in someone they have known to be discreet and trustworthy. Conversely, in big city markets, if a reporter breaks an unflattering story on this same police department, it’s not at all unusual for the department to retaliate by giving a competing organization a good scoop, thereby making the offending reporter look bad. Happens every day.

10.) **“Credible malcontents,” “nut grafs,” “off the record” and other fun jargon.** The aforementioned is a source within an organization who is sane, coherent and honest...but unhappy with how their agency or company is being run. This is what reporters are always looking for as key sources. “Nut graf” is the paragraph, very high in the story, that makes clear what the piece is about. “Off the record,” means it’s not for print, but beyond that, it gets weird. “Not for attribution,” “background only,” “deep background”—all mean different things to different people. Generally, when a source asks me if they can talk on background, I’ll say something like, “Okay, our conversation will be on background, but I’m recording it and taking notes. If I hear something I want to use for attribution, I’ll flag it and ask you on a case by case at the end.” If someone says they’re telling me something that I can’t use but need to know for context, I *always* tell them okay, but first: Depending on what it is, I may very well try to get those facts from other sources. You can’t just tell me something and act like I am therefore prohibited from pursuing it.

11.) **The thing reporters never really know is...motive.** Why did the suspect kill six people at a gas station? Why did the corporate executive embezzle \$6 million when he was already wealthy? Rarely do you know why anyone does anything. You may know why they say they did it, or what a lot of evidence suggests, but neither of those are the same thing. Why not believe that, even when the case is settled? See Rule #1.

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

Neely Tucker’s latest *Sully Carter* mystery “Only the Hunted Run” was published by Viking on August 30, 2016.



Neely Tucker is a staff writer for the Washington Post. He's the author of two previous Sully Carter novels, "The Ways of the Dead" and "Murder, D.C.," as well as his memoir "Love in the Driest Season," which was named one of the 25 Best Books of the Year by Publishers Weekly. Tucker lives with his family in Maryland.

THE JOURNEY: THE IMPORTANCE OF USING YOUR EMOTIONAL EVENTS

By Joe Clifford

Photo Credit: Niki Pretti

After a recent guest spot on *Suspense Radio*, we asked Joe Clifford, “How important is it to use the emotional events from your personal life in your writing? Even if those events are something very difficult to face again.” Here’s what he had to say:

Very! I am assuming you mean the drug stuff? Every writer is going to put his or her trials, emotional journeys, etc., into their work. It’s what we do, mining personal pasts, ideas—infusing beliefs to connect with the reader. Render the unique universal, the universal unique. I do that the same as any writer. I do, however, feel a particular obligation as it pertains to the drug addict.

As I mentioned in our interview (*Suspense Radio Inside Edition July 23rd, 2016*), I spent a little over ten years as a heroin and speed addict, with a good chunk of that time being homeless. Addiction is a tricky affliction to adequately convey. On the one hand, a junkie is there because of their own doing. Maybe they had a rough childhood. Maybe the street ate them up or they have mental illness issues. Still, I’ve always had a difficult time with the disease model.

My mom died of scleroderma and cancer. I watched her (sober, thank God) slowly die, as her body betrayed itself and withered away, through nothing she’d done. I mean, she smoked cigarettes for a while in the 1970s but then again who didn’t? What I’m getting at is, it is tough for me to ascribe the same weight to what she went through and what I did. I made some bad decisions. Good excuses. Bad decisions.

But something strange happened when I was out there. I grew up in a nice, suburban, solidly middle class family in Connecticut. My father was abusive. Lots of dads are abusive, and plenty of fathers are far worse. My decision to get into drugs was my doing, and mine alone. But living the way I did, I met a lot of men and women who didn’t maybe have the same luxuries and opportunities I did. While I was out there, I saw addicts who were parents. When I explain to people that these addicts loved their children and were “good” parents, I can see the looks of confusion on their faces. After all, they were doing drugs! Ergo, they are bad parents! Sure, doing drugs and raising a child is not smart. Not saying it is. But life isn’t this

**WHEN YOU GET TO KNOW THESE PEOPLE ON A DEEPER
LEVEL, THEY CEASE BEING VERMIN, NAMELESS SCUM
YOU PASS IN THE STREET.**



neatly assembled step-by-step manual. You meet folks out there who never stood a chance. Born in the projects, diminished IQ, brain damaged, psychological abuse, mothers who literally buried them in the backyard when they were twelve to go out of town with a boyfriend—that is not hyperbole—that is a true story. I met a woman in rehab once, whose mother would lock her, underground, in a very tiny space, the size of a coffin, so she could go out of town with different men. She'd leave a bucket, some food, and see you later; lock the lid.

When you get to know these people on a deeper level, they cease being vermin, nameless scum you pass in the street. They are human beings, with feelings, hopes, desires. And, yeah, sometimes they are raising children. It is very important that I humanize them in my work. I am not a social justice warrior, and I am not here to excuse bad behavior. But I do care about these people and that struggle, and I have a particular soft spot for addicts. Going back to that time isn't always easy. But it is paramount to what I do.

This probably manifests itself most in my rendering of Chris Porter, the junkie anti-hero (of sorts) of "Lamentation," the first in my *Jay Porter Thriller* series. Though the series revolves around Jay, a glorified handyman in the northern New Hampshire wilds, the heart of the book(s) is very much Chris. Writing the character of Chris, I use the POV of the straight man, Jay. Though the younger brother, Jay has, in many ways, been caring for Chris their whole lives. Because I lived as an addict, I feel I was able to escape some of the pitfalls I often encounter when reading literature revolving around junkies. It is all too easy to write them off as screw-ups and ne'er-do-wells, or worse, excuse their behavior—a sort of "hooker with a heart of gold" syndrome, but for dope fiends. I hold Chris accountable for his actions—he does some very bad things—but writing through Jay's eyes, there is still a love, a bond, a loyalty there. Addicts weren't always that way; they existed long before the needles and pipes. Jay knows Chris' story because it is a shared one. They both suffered the loss of their parents at a young age. They both handled it their own way. Most importantly, though Jay is understandably frustrated with his older brother, he recognizes that the steps that brought Chris down might've, had they been in a different order, dragged him down too.

As Jay is forced to investigate a murder that implicates his brother, and he descends into the madness of that world, he has to come to terms that it isn't just his brother; there are other addicts like him. Jay has to assign humanity he might not otherwise see.

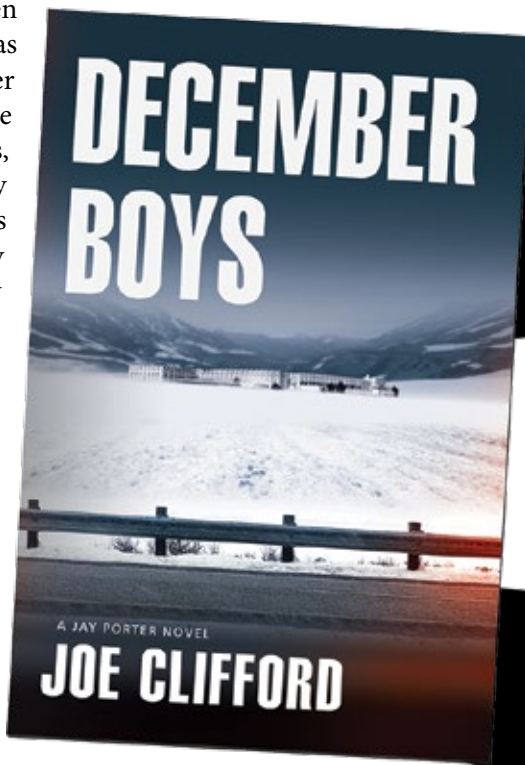
In the follow-up to "Lamentation," "December Boys," Jay is left to pick up the pieces of the wreckage Chris has left behind. That's the thing with addiction that you really only appreciate after the fact: how much you hurt others. When you are actively using, you are very, very self-centered. Most of us can be, sure. But a junkie feels everyone is against them. And they often are because of the behavior. But addicts don't view it in quite the same terms. Every day is such a struggle to stay alive; from the cops to the crooks, you start to shoulder a pretty big chip, developing a persecution complex. There's a lot of "poor me," "why me"? Well, it's "why you" because you are spending every minute of the day lying, stealing, cheating, using! But it doesn't change how much it hurts.

My mother didn't get to live long enough to see my books come out. She didn't live long enough to see me earn my graduate degree, get married, have children, or buy my first house either. I turned my life around. Just not in time for her to meet her grandchildren. I have to live with that.

The *Jay Porter* books, while still being entertainment first and foremost, allow me to examine the wreckage I left behind, make amends to those I hurt, even if it's in a fictional world.

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

Joe Clifford is Acquisitions Editor for Gutter Books and producer of Lip Service West, a "gritty, real, raw" reading series in Oakland, CA. He is the author of several books, including "Junkie Love," "Lamentation," and "December Boys," as well as editor of "Trouble in the Heartland: Crime Stories Inspired by the Songs of Bruce Springsteen." Joe's writing can be found at www.joeclifford.com.

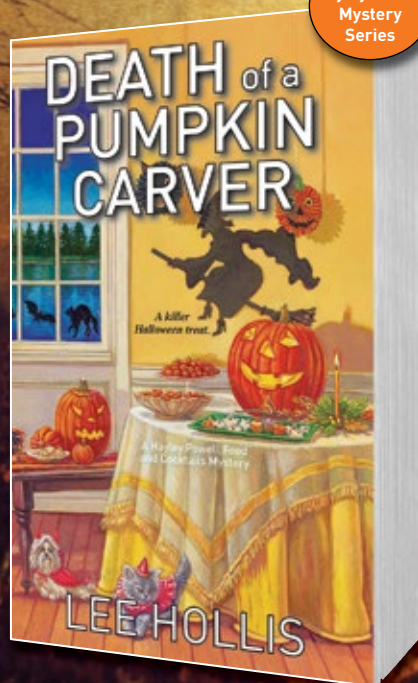


For Hayley Powell, a food and cocktails columnist, Halloween is all about covering costume parties and holiday treats—until a killer crashes the party.

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on *Death of a Country Fried Redneck*

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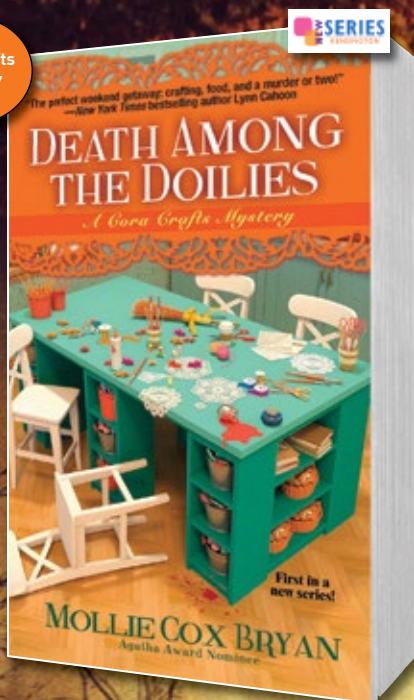
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SKIN OF TATTOOS

By Christina Hoag
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

I was bellied up to the bar at El Gato Rey after work, tossing peanuts into my mouth and watching a dancer wiggle her ass in a green G-string, killing time before going to meet Paloma, when Blueboy slid onto a stool next to me. He signaled the bartender for a beer.

"You got visitors. Flaco and Jackie are in the alley. Tweety and Cojo are on the way."

I frowned. "Whatup?"

Blueboy shrugged. "They say they're coming in for a sitdown."

This was news. Ten minutes later, I heard a 'sup, homes? at my shoulder. In the mirror behind the bar, I saw Flaco, Jackie Chan, Cojo and Tweety behind me.

"Ese." I told the mirror.

"Gotta a minute, Mags? We got something to say to you," Flaco said.

I took a long, slow swallow of beer, just to let them stew for a moment, then I gestured with my chin to a corner table.

We scraped back chairs and sat. I ordered them all beers and waited.

Flaco spoke. "It's like this, homes. We're all real sorry bout what happened at the meeting."

Tweety broke in. "Rico says the *pisto* is for Chivas, but he's styling in a brand new truck, and we're all hurting. Something ain't right."

"Another thing, homes." Jackie Chan chin-nodded at Flaco to continue.

"When me and Cojo were leaving Elysian Park the other night, we saw a crew of 51s driving up the hill as we were driving down."

I wanted to laugh out loud. "They see you?"

"I don't think so. It was dark," Flaco said. "They had the light on inside their mini-van. Cojo made the tats."

"That tranny called them," Cojo said. "She was smiling, saying something bout 'you boys ain't gonna be doin this much longer.'"

I sat back with the satisfaction of being right. "What did I fucking tell you, fools? I told you the *putos* would complain and the 51s would come down on this."

"We don't want a war," Flaco said. "If we get in a war, with Rico calling the shots ..." He shook his head.

"That motherfucker's crazy, homes," Jackie said. "He's gonna get us all iced."

"You should be calling the shots, Mags," Tweety said. "You're smart."

I studied them with narrowed eyes. "How do I know Rico didn't send you to set me up on something?"

Flaco leaned forward. "We know who that *jaina* was, the one that showed up at the *bautizo*."

"You know that how?"

"Maribel got it outta Rico. He was making like she just came by to get something to take to Chivas, but Maribel ain't stupid. She told Yajaira that Rico's cheating on her with Chivas's old lady, and Yajaira told me."

"Boning the shotcaller's *vieja* while he's locked up. That's low, man, real low," Cojo said. "Even if he ain't the shotcaller, that ain't done to a homeboy."

The others nodded. "We're sick of this shit with Rico, dog," Jackie Chan said. "It's one thing after another with him. And now he's politicking against you after you done time on his 211."

"We know you're still sore about us siding with Rico at the meeting, Mags. He was pushing us real hard. I guess we had a moment of weakness," Flaco said.

"So why're you coming to me with all this? You ain't told me nothing I don't already know. There's nothing I can do about it."

"We gotta get to Chivas and tell him what's going down so he makes you his man on the street. We'll back you," Flaco said. "But it's gotta be you, you always got his ear."

"I can't just walk into Men's Central and ask to see a shotcaller on a 187."

"You could write him a letter," Tweety said.

"They're gonna be reading all his letters," Jackie said.

I exchanged a look with Blueboy, then said, "Gimme *cinco* with Blue here."

They shuffled over to the bar, and I turned to Blueboy.

"What do you make of all this?"

"I think they're straight up, bro. We all been sick of Rico for a while."

"They ain't so sick of him they said no to his fucking promises."

"You know how it is, bro. They gonna say no to a *jale*? They just went along with it, didn't think of nothing else."

"A moment of weakness."

"Yeah."

The truth was I could really use the homeboys on the business with Gato to rake in more money. If I told Rico I had a new business for the *clica*, I could get out of the smalltime tax collecting shit, and stay lo pro, off the street.

"You thinking of something?" Blueboy said.

"What about cutting them in on the deal with Gato? If we got a crew, we can move more rides, make more *pisto*."

Blueboy nodded slowly. "I think they'll go for that. What about Rico?"

"I'll propose a new business for the *clica* at the next meeting. Why would he say no if he's looking to earn more?"

"Let's do it," Blueboy whistled. The *locos* trooped over and sat.

"Aight. Number one, I ain't making no moves on Rico, so get that out of your heads. I want peace so I can make some real *plata*." Heads nodded. "Number two, Gato and me are setting up a chop shop. I need a street crew and ..."

Jackie Chan cut me off. "I'm in, Mags." There was a chorus of "me, too."

"That's good *feria*," Tweety said.

"Number three, if you want in, I gotta have one thing—loyalty." I said the word real slow and looked at each homeboy in the eyes. "Anybody stabbing me or this operation in the back is gonna take a one-way ride out to the desert. I ain't getting played no more."

"We with you, homes," Flaco said.

"Number four. I'm going to bring this up to Rico at the next meeting. Everyone's gotta back me up or you're fucking out."

There was a moment of silence as everybody digested the plan.

Tweety's head darted around the table. "Any more numbers, Mags?"

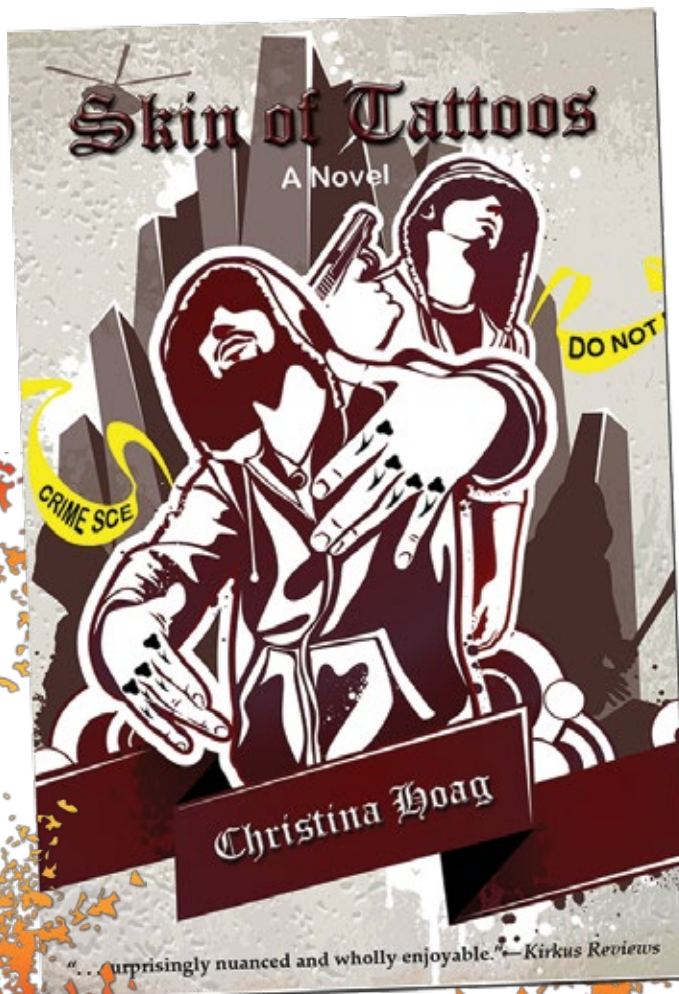
I tried to hide my smile. "No more numbers, Tweety."

Jackie Chan cuffed him gently on the side of the head. He smiled.

"Homes, we don't gotta tell Rico the exact amount we're pulling in," Flaco said.

"You're thinking smart, Flaco," Cojo said.

"And if he hassles us, we got the lowdown on Chivas's *vieja* to shut him up," Flaco said.



"Now you really thinking, homes," Jackie said.

"I like all this thinking," Tweety said.

We bagged up. Tweety sat there, a fat smile on his face, happy that he made everybody laugh even though he didn't exactly know what he said that was so damn funny.

CHAPTER 17

I bounced into Gato's office Monday morning. He was sitting at his desk with his coffee and newspaper, as usual.

"I got a full crew, Gato. We good to go soon as you say the word."

He looked up. "*Excelente*. I told those *cabrones* in-laws to fuck off. We'll start this week."

"Ready when you are, *jefe*."

Gato extended his hand and we shook. "I got a wreck coming in a bit. You can work on the Nissan til it gets here."

"Sure."

I was dismantling the rear quarter panel off a totaled SUV when Gato walked into the shop. "Rico's here asking for you."

I frowned. "The fuck he want?"

"He didn't say."

Did someone spill about the chop shop? I wiped my hands on a rag and went down to the entrance. Rico was standing outside his truck, his hands on his hips, looking around at the place like he was planning to buy it. Mouse stood next to him.

"*Ese!* This is a lot better than the clown suit. You moving up. *Oye*, I need to parlay with you."

"I'm working, Rico." Gato was standing in the doorway of his office, watching us.

"I'll make it fast."

"Come into the shop," I said.

We sat down on the car seats. Rico took off his black sunglasses and looked around, nodding. "Nice setup." Mouse fidgeted with his Hot Wheels car.

"What's on your mind, loco?" I prompted.

"It's about your sister. Lissy." I tensed. "Chivas saw her in the visit room this weekend, and he don't like who she was visiting."

I played the innocent. "Oh yeah?"

"Payaso Santana, know him?"

"Can't say I do."

"5150."

I rubbed my nose. "I ain't her keeper, fool."

"You know the code, Mags." Rico grinned. He was enjoying nailing me after the arm-wrestle. Motherfucker.

I had to think what to do, play for time. I went to the tool bench and grabbed a Snickers. I offered it to them. "Want some?" Mouse shook his head, Rico ignored me.

"Outta respect for you, Chivas wanted me to talk to you before taking it to the clicas. What you wanna do about it?"

I took a bite of the candy bar and chewed slowly as I thought fast. I was going to have to use the ammunition I had—Esme. I swallowed. "I don't know if you want Mouse hearing what I got to say."

Rico glared at me, trying to figure out what I had on him. I yanked another piece off the candy bar. Mouse looked at Rico for instructions. Rico jerked his thumb at the door. "Outside." Mouse left, closing the door. "Aight, fool." Rico folded his arms.

"I know what you got going down with Esme, the whole fucking world knows, except Chivas. So you tell him he was mistaken bout my sister, and I don't pass on the 411 that you're boning his *vieja*. Let me tell you, word spreads fast inside. People ain't got much to talk about."

Rico's eyes burned as he digested my threat. "You're making a lotta fucking waves since you been back."

"Better put on your life jacket." I sat, stretching out my legs and crossing my ankles like I was going to take a snooze in a beach chair.

Rico leapt to his feet. "You stay the fuck away from Esme."

I took the last bite of my Snickers, and crumpled the wrapper into a ball, which I tossed into a garbage can. "No argument from me, homes."

Rico flung open the door and stepped out. "Mouse! You playing with that fucking thing again? Gimme that!"

I heard a crack against the wall and crossed to the door. Rico and Mouse were marching to the truck. Mouse's Hot Wheels jalopy lay on the ground, its wheels broken. I picked it up, curling my fingers around it as I watched Rico reverse out of the yard, tires squealing.

I rolled into the garage for the *clica* meeting. Blueboy was already there, smoking a cigarette. I greeted him but he just looked at me with eyes like tombstones. What the fuck was up with him? I was about to ask but the others filtered in, and Rico started the meeting. The homeboys tossed the *feria* from collections and corner slinging onto a chair beside him. Blueboy seemed sunk in some internal quicksand. I kept throwing him looks, but he ignored me. Dread gnawed at my stomach.

The collection was finished. Rico picked up the pile of money and tidied it into a neat stack. Everybody watched, waiting for their cut. I threw a folded wad of bills onto the chair in front of him. It landed with a solid thud. Rico looked at me from under his eyebrows.

"I got a new business for the *clica*, loco," I said.

"Yeah?"

"Gato's got a chop shop going. He wants me to handle the chops. I need a crew to work the street."

"The homeboys got collections."

"It's big *feria*, Rico. That's just a taste." I pointed to the cash. "Younger fools like Mouse can take over the collections. We can earn alotta dead presidents with the more experienced homies working the rides but if you ain't down with it, I'll give Gato back his advance."

Blueboy was studying his feet pushing around a pebble. Everybody else was eyeballing Rico. He kept looking down at the bills he was shuffling in his hand, but I knew he was weighing my proposal. He finally took the wad and fanned it.

"Long as the *clica* gets its cut," he said to me.

"Aight." I nodded.

"Meeting over," Rico declared. Then he gave me a fat, smug smile. A chill ripped through me. I knew then what was up with Blueboy. I looked around for him, but he'd gone as the homies high-fived one another.

I told them I'd meet them at Gato's later, and rolled into the alley. No sign of Blueboy. Paloma.

I broke into a sprint. I had to get to her before he did.

I heard the crash as I entered the driveway to their house. I ran down and burst through the front door. Paloma lay on the floor. Blueboy was yanking her up by a fistful of hair.

"Tell me the truth!" he yelled.

The coffee table was overturned, a dark stain spread from a spilled glass.

"Let her go!" I shouted. "I'll tell you the truth!"

His head shot round. He released her and stood, chest heaving. Whimpering, she scrambled to her feet. "Paloma, get outta here," I said. She didn't move. Her face was contorted with fear. "Go!" I yelled.

She ran to her room as Blueboy's fist slammed into my jaw. I staggered back. He clocked me on the left cheekbone. Then an uppercut under the chin. My head spun.

"Fight me, you fucking punk cocksucker!" he yelled. "Fight me!"

He was pacing, breathing through his mouth, shaking his arms loose. His eyes flared. A bull ready to charge. I threw a right, but he blocked it with his left forearm and punched my gut with his right. I jackknifed and he got in a kidney shot. Pain bolted through me from different angles. Bent over, I swayed.

He tumbled on top of me, punching my face side to side like a bag. I cuffed his wrists with my hands. He struggled, but I pressed his arms to the right. I counted to three then I bucked the left side of my torso with as much force as I could muster as I pushed his arms to the right. He toppled onto the floor. I quickly pushed him face down and straddled him, spreading my knees so they each pinned an arm and shoved his head into the carpet. He made a muffled noise. I pushed it harder, harder. The noises grew more frantic.

"Magdaleno, stop!" Paloma was pulling at my shoulder. I let go and slid off Blueboy. I sat with my arms flopped on my bent knees, recouping my breath. Paloma turned her brother over. His face was red and patterned from the carpet pile. He stared vacantly, his eyes frozen like blue ice. My breath caught but then his chest moved up and down. I exhaled with relief.

"You almost killed him!" she said. "Blueboy!" She grabbed his cheeks and shook his head. He turned his head toward me.

"You ... come near ... me ... or my sister ... again ... I'll kill you," he rasped.

There was nothing more for me to do there. I staggered to my feet and stumbled home. ■

Christina Hoag is the author of two novels, "Skin of Tattoos," a literary crime thriller set in L.A.'s gang underworld published by Martin Brown Publishers, and "Girl on the Brink," a YA romantic thriller about an abusive relationship published by Fire and Ice YA, an imprint of Melange Books.

She is the co-author of "Peace in the Hood: Working with Gang Members to End the Violence" (Turner Publishing, 2014), a groundbreaking book about turning former gang members into street peacekeepers.

Her short fiction, creative nonfiction and poetry have been published in 25 literary journals with two of her short stories published in anthologies.

Learn more at www.christinahoag.com.

SEAN MCFATE TAKES YOU INTO THE “SHADOWS”

By Elise Cooper for *Suspense Magazine*
Photo Credit: Author Website



“Shadow War” begins with Tom Locke, a private contractor assigned to a dangerous mission. He has one week to rescue a Ukraine wealthy businessman’s family, and lead an assault on Russian forces to place that rich oligarch in a position of influence and leadership. With a team of highly trained mercenaries and careful planning it appears he will accomplish the mission. Getting in the way of success is Alie Macfarlane, an old love who stumbles, unluckily, back into his life at the very worst time imaginable and his boss, Brad Winters, is engaged in a secretive, high-stakes geopolitical chess game with influential power brokers in capitals around the world.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): Why did you decide to write this story as a novel?

Sean McFate (S.M.): *This is my first fiction book. It actually began as a memoir and I flipped it to fiction. Sometimes fiction can reveal truths better than reality. I couldn’t put certain things in a nonfiction book for various reasons including the threat of getting sued.*

E.C.: Is Tom Locke based on you?

S.M.: *Yes, he is a lot like me although more damaged and bad assed. His best friend Miles was an actual person, modeled after my platoon sergeant and was like an older brother to me. Locke and I served in the 82nd Airborne division of the United States Army as paratroopers from 1992-2000, and later worked as private military contractors. Locke is still a contractor while I am now a professor at Georgetown University, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and associate professor at National Defense. The differences are I did not have the actual mission assigned to Locke in the Ukraine, but we both worked on stopping genocides, arms deals, and went after African warlords.*

E.C.: Is Locke’s boss Brad Winters based on a real person?

S.M.: *Almost all the characters are based on real people or are hybrid. Winters is a composite of two to three people. As he is portrayed in the book, the bosses are extremely smart, Machiavellian, shrewd, very ambitious, who work for their own interests without any scruples.*

E.C.: It seems a lot of thrillers are transitioning away from terrorism and onto Eastern Europe. Yours included. Why this plot?

S.M.: *I see Putin as the biggest threat to the US, even more than ISIS. In future years the rise of nationalism will allow Putin to move into Eastern Europe through shadow wars. Remember, he thought the worst event of the 20th Century was the dismantlement*

"SOMETIMES FICTION CAN REVEAL TRUTHS BETTER THAN REALITY."

of the Soviet Union. He has a Czarist ambition for Eastern Europe. This plot shows how he might do it.

E.C.: Can you explain what a Shadow War is?

S.M.: *In this Internet age someone like Putin will take over a country, not like the Soviets did, but through disruption and installing a puppet to rule. It is done with massive propaganda, Internet trolls, proxy militia, mercenaries, and "Little Green Men," Russian soldiers without Russian insignia on their fatigues. Putin understands America will probably not risk World War III over Article 5 of NATO.*

E.C.: You show how women play a role in missions that are not in the military. Please explain.

S.M.: *I think women should be portrayed accurately, not as damsels in distress, window dressing, or babes. The women I came across were very courageous; yet, still maintained their femininity. In this book the character Alie was concerned about saving girls from child slavery who was a real person as a foreign aid worker. In my next book, Kylah, also based on a real person, is a field doctor. She does not follow the Hippocratic Oath literally and will not treat ISIS fighters. I want to show how women are strong, powerful with different professions who play by their own rules. They are tough and will not hesitate to engage in a firefight. They are based on women I have come across in these situations.*

E.C.: Did you want to change the impression people have about mercenaries/contractors?

S.M.: *I wanted to give them a real face. They are human beings who are not stock villains and do have a warrior ethos. I wanted to shed light on these new types of warriors. I think they will be used more and more because they allow for plausible deniability, are cheaper, and can provide manpower. They are a way for administrations to have a lack of transparency, oversight, and accountability. For example we have 3,500 troops on the ground in Iraq, but 7,000 contractors. Remember Senator Obama proposed legislation against private military contractors that President Obama has not touched.*

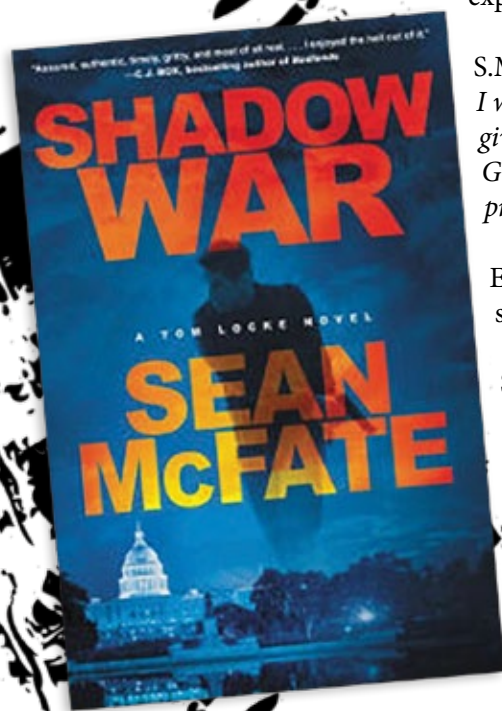
E.C.: You wrote the dedication to Theodore Roosevelt and in the story gave a shout out to General Stanley McChrystal. Please explain.

S.M.: *When I was in the military I was inspired by Roosevelt's Man in the Arena speech. I wanted to use those sentiments for this story. Those in the arena are doing their best given limited time and information and have to work under terrible circumstances. General McChrystal understood this and was the best military commander I had the privilege to work with. He is the real deal. He will go to hell and back with his troops.*

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

S.M.: *Corporations are involved in conflicts like Ukraine. Today's "great powers" aren't just countries, they're multinational corporations. "Shadow War" reveals some of the connections between Wall Street and K Street, and how national interests can be manipulated for shareholder profit. What happens to Tom Locke in "Shadow War" is a very good introduction to the ways modern warriors must navigate in this frightening new world. The book looks at the changing nature of war and the changing nature of warriors.*

Thank you, Sean, for speaking with us. To learn more about this author, go to www.seanmcfate.com. ■



“A THRILL RIDE.”

—Tosca Lee, *New York Times* bestselling author

As part of his street performance, a deception specialist who goes by the name The Raven picks his audience's pockets while they watch. It's harmless fun—until he decides to keep the wallet of a prominent politician. When he finds compromising photos, The Raven hatches a plan to blackmail the man. However, he quickly finds himself in over his head with the Ukrainian Mafia and mired in a life-threatening plot code-named “Nevermore.”

Private investigators Trudi Coffey and Samuel Hill must scramble to sort out the clues to rescue The Raven from a wild card bent on revenge.



SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

IN DUBLIN'S FAIR CITY

By Rhys Bowen

Detective Molly Murphy is anxious to get away for a while, mostly from her beau, Captain Daniel Sullivan. So she jumps at the chance to go to Ireland at the behest of theatrical manager, Tommy Burke. Tommy has recently learned that he has a sister in Ireland who was left behind when his family immigrated to the States. Tommy has rescued his pain-in-the-neck nephew over and over, but he plans to leave his forgotten sister his fortune if she's still alive. So he asks Molly to help him out and look into finding his sister.

Molly sails for Queenstown on the *Majestic*, where the famous actress, Oona Sheehan, persuades her to change cabins so Oona can escape from her admirers. Molly is having the time of her life being in first class but, as always, something has to go awry. When Oona's maid is mysteriously killed, the police put Molly on the suspect list. Things get even worse when Oona is nowhere to be found.

On top of all that, when Molly reaches her Dublin hotel she discovers that Oona's trunks are packed with rifles. When she is looking for Tommy's sister, her original job, she gets involved with groups working to free Ireland from England. As she tries to move among the people, following leads for Tommy, she somehow becomes tangled up with the Irish Republican movement—an alliance that puts a mark for murder on her very own back.

Rhys Bowen never disappoints. She's a fabulous storyteller who can keep her readers guessing the whole way through. If new to the character of Molly Murphy, you will want to go back and catch up on the history of this fantastically fun detective the minute you're done reading this tale.

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



A CURIOUS BEGINNING

By Deanna Raybourn

The very lively Veronica Speedwell is back. Here is a Grade A+ heroine who happens to be into lepidoptery (the collecting of butterflies); a hobby that might seem to be completely normal for a lady. But Veronica, an orphan raised from birth by her aunts, has taken things much further. She actually captures the little flying beauties and sells some of her favorites to finance her personal excursions to some truly exotic places; places where she meets up with some very unsavory people.

Just as she's about to find herself in a new heap of trouble, Veronica's rescued from her latest attacker and taken off to London by Baron von Stauffenbach, who leaves her in the care of a Mr. Stoker. The Baron is on a quest to find out about Veronica's family but is soon found dead, and the police are looking at Stoker as a suspect. Stoker and Veronica decide to partner up and find the real culprit by gathering clues from places like a traveling circus, the River Thames and the Tower of London, as they dodge villains and other followers who want to halt them in their tracks.

Sooner, rather than later, they discover that the Baron's death may have been connected to the mysteries surrounding Veronica's own family. Stoker also has some secrets, however, including what happened on an expedition to the Amazon that left him scarred and disgraced.

This is a plot that never ends. It is so much fun, so adventurous, so beguiling, that the reader will be thrilled with each and every page. This is truly a wonderful new addition to this author's many incredible books.

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

DEEP SIX

By D.P. Lyle

With "Deep Six," D.P. Lyle has written a mystery reminiscent of the *Spencer* series written by the late, great Robert B. Parker and continued today by the impressive Ace Atkins. Mix pulp fiction with a great mystery, add a dash of humor, stir lightly and you'll have a perfect combination that is "Deep Six."

Ex-big league pitcher, now bar owner, Jake Longly, is moonlighting for his father's PI firm, Ray Longly Investigations. While staking out a possible cheating wife in his old neighborhood, Jake's ex-wife mistakenly thinks he's stalking her and takes out her anger with a golf club, smashing the windows of his prize Mustang. This unfortunate event leads to a much more fortunate one: meeting the stunning, Nicole; a woman who is as smart and sassy as she is beautiful. The investigation soon takes a turn for the worse when the party being investigated is murdered.

Lyle has written a mystery where the main character is surrounded by a great cast of misfits who work together in a style as smooth as the running of his vintage Mustang. But, are they in over their heads when they realize they're up against drug cartels and villains who value money more than human life?

Grab a cold beverage, sit back, and enjoy a great read. D.P. Lyle has hit a homerun with "Deep Six"!

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



LAST DAYS OF NIGHT

By Graham Moore

A non-stop, page-turning historical thriller based on actual events, this rocking tale about the battle to bring electricity to New York City in 1888 is all about genius, ambition and the high price that must be paid to achieve both.

As we begin, electric light is just now getting some press. Thomas Edison is winning the races to the patent office when it comes to his slew of "inventions." But when it comes to the fight for electricity, he must sue his only rival, George Westinghouse, for the hefty amount of one billion dollars and the right to claim genius status. Mr. Westinghouse hires a young attorney named Paul Cravath. Just out of Columbia Law, Cravath hasn't had any experience as of yet, but the monumental task facing the young attorney proves quickly that he is a real go-getter.

Edison is nobody's fool and is a very crafty opponent. Both of these men are very compulsive and want to win their case at all costs. So, as Attorney Cravath makes his plans for a counterattack against Edison, the inventor tries to keep one step ahead of him. Cravath has to give up much of his personal life as things come to a head and the Westinghouse Company files for bankruptcy. With big guns on his side, namely Nikola Tesla, Alexander Graham Bell and J.P. Morgan, Cravath will do all he can to win his first case and send Edison into the land of losers.

This book should not sit idly on a shelf. Moore has done brilliant research into a world ruled by so-called inventors who did anything and risked everything to claim that must-have patent that would fill their bank accounts. A truly fascinating novel that is part law/part order over the clash of...the light bulb.

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

THE CRACKED SPINE

By Paige Shelton

Delaney Nichols is an archivist who is no longer employed at the small museum in Kansas where she's worked since receiving her Master's degrees in literature and history. The one thing she's craving now is an adventure. So she has packed her belongings and moved to Edinburgh, Scotland, to take on a new job at a bookstore called, "The Cracked Spine." She knows that this will be very different but is game for whatever comes her way.

The first stumbling block is the trouble she has understanding the accented speech of the pleasant cabbie who delivers her to the bookstore door. Soon, however, she meets her fellow workers and feels more at home. There's Hamlet, a young student with a disturbed past; and Rosie, an elderly lady who greets her with a big smile. The shop owner, Edwin, is a big fan of rare books/manuscripts and even has a locked room full of them, and they all need cataloging.

The very next day, Delaney accompanies him to a private auction to bid on even more rarities. Edwin expects to meet his sister, Jenny, there—an addict he's trying to help by letting her keep his recent purchase of a very valuable Shakespeare First Folio. Unfortunately, Jenny is found murdered and the Folio is nowhere to be found.

The police officials are looking at Hamlet for the crime, as well as other addicts that Jenny lived near. Delaney goes on the hunt with some help from her landlords, Elias and his wife, along with the support of a good looking pub owner. Delaney is so eager to help out that it almost gets her killed, but the ending will surprise you.

"The Cracked Spine" is a terrific read and as any readers, like me, who have worked in a library know, this is a great beginning to what will become a great series.

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

AN OBVIOUS FACT

By Craig Johnson

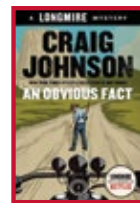
Longmire fans will be ecstatic with this, the twelfth novel in the popular series by author Craig Johnson. For those who do not yet know (and that may be one or two of you out there), *Longmire* is a crime drama on Netflix that focuses on Sheriff Walter "Walt" Longmire.

This time around, in the middle of one of the largest motorcycle rallies in the world, a young biker is run off the road and ends up in critical condition. Longmire and friend, Henry Standing Bear, are called in to investigate the hit-and-run that involved the young cyclist near Devil's Tower. Devil's Tower is a stunning butte that rises in the air 867 feet to its summit and was the first United States national monument, established in September, 1906—which makes for a very cool setting.

The two lawmen don't have any clue what they're getting into when they arrive in Hulett, Wyoming, the closest town to America's first national monument, but it's easy to see as soon as they get there that this case is going to be complicated to solve. Readers walk beside the men as they dive head-first into a mystery involving competing biker gangs, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, a military grade vehicle donated to the police force by a wealthy industrialist, and Lola, the real life femme fatale and namesake for Henry's 1959 Thunderbird.

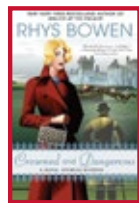
There's a lot of work to be done to get to the bottom of this motley group at Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in order to sort out the accident. And as Longmire and Henry get to it, the reader not only gets a great story but some wonderful history as well. The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, held annually in August, began in 1938 and has developed into one of the largest and most well-known events in the world. Both Longmire and readers will have a ball there.

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



CROWNED AND DANGEROUS

By Rhys Bowen



Life isn't easy if you're 35th in line to the British throne. Not that I know from personal experience, understand. I'm just a huge fan of the *Royal Spyness* mysteries penned by *New York Times* best-selling author Rhys Bowen. In Book 10 of this series, "Crowned and Dangerous," Lady Georgiana Rannoch is finally planning to elope with her dashing beau, Darcy O'Mara. But in order to carry it off, a few of the stuffy royal rules will have to be ignored, including the fact that Georgie is forbidden to marry outside the Church of England, and Darcy is an Irish Catholic. There's also the matter of where the soon-to-be newlyweds will live after the wedding. Though Darcy will eventually inherit a title, unfortunately he and Georgie are both currently penniless. Even his family's Irish castle has been sold to a reclusive rich American, who now employs Darcy's father as a hired hand to run his stables.

Ah, but the lovebirds are determined to plunge ahead with the elopement, no matter what. Until Darcy learns via a local newspaper that his father has just been arrested for the murder of his employer. With the elopement now postponed, Darcy heads off to Ireland to prove his father's innocence without Georgie, telling her that her life will be far better without him. The heartbroken Georgie is made of sterner stuff, however, and ignoring Darcy's attempt to call off their relationship, heads to Ireland to be by his side. Georgie, by the way, has been called upon by Queen Mary herself on previous occasions to step in and solve a few unpleasant royal problems, so she's no stranger to sleuthing.

"Crowned and Dangerous" is an absolute delight for fans of cozy mysteries. Rhys Bowen never disappoints! Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

LOVE HER MADLY

By M. Elizabeth Lee

This is the story of three very egotistical college students who become entangled in a love triangle that ends in tragedy, as one falls to their death.

Glo transfers to a small college in Florida where she is instantly drawn into a friendship by the stunning Cyn, a girl who brings her into a lifestyle of fun and recreational drugs. The two girls become very close and are definitely like sisters when the handsome Raj shows up on campus. So when both girls fall for him, it's Cyn's suggestion that they "share" him as a boyfriend. Loving Cyn so much, Glo agrees; yet, she has fallen head-over-heels for Raj and has doubts in her abilities to outshine her roommate.

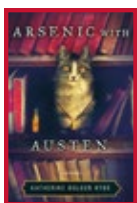
As time moves forward, the two girls decide to travel during their mid-semester break to Costa Rica without Raj, in order to help repair their friendship that slowly seems to be falling apart. But while the girls are relaxing on the beach, drug runners appear and Cyn runs off so Glo can escape.

Seven years after this incident, Glo is married to Raj but still feels guilty about what happened in the jungle so long ago with Cyn. Then, one day on the streets of New York, Glo sees a person that looks very much like her friend that is supposedly dead. Question is: Is it Cyn or isn't it?

Trying not to give any plot points away here, the only thing I can say is that this book has to be read by all suspense loving readers. Although there are moments that become slow with these two girls being completely self-absorbed, the ending that reveals the truth is definitely something you'll want to see.

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





ARSENIC WITH AUSTEN

By Katherine Bolger Hydy

This is a fantastic story of widowed literature professor, Emily Cavanaugh. Her Great Aunt Beatrice has just passed away and Emily has returned to Stony Beach, Oregon, to the mansion called Windy Corner, and her inheritance of six million dollars. It's been many years since she's been in Stony Beach and her homecoming has brought back lots of memories; this includes the memory of her first love, Luke Richards.

It doesn't take long before Emily hears rumors that Aunt Beatrice might have been killed in order to clear the way for a resort development to be built, which is something Beatrice most definitely did not want to see happen. Now that the property belongs to Emily, things haven't changed. She is very strong minded and believes in maintaining the town's character.

Not everyone is thrilled with Emily's inheritance, and this includes her cousin by marriage, Brock. Brock was hoping that he would be the only heir so he could get ready for bigger things, like the expansion of Stony Beach which the mayor and a local real estate agent are all set to begin. But with Emily on site, a monkey wrench has been thrown into the works and she has now got a target on her back.

After Emily speaks to the townspeople she starts to dig deeper into her aunt's death while trying to keep her distance from Brock. When another suspicious death, along with a couple of very close calls occur, Emily knows that someone wants her out of the picture but has no way of knowing who's on her side and who is dying to see her fall.

The good guys are terrific, the villains are pure sleaze, the house is extremely cool, and the plot is fantastic. The greatest news is that this is a debut from a highly intelligent woman who has the title of "bestselling author" definitely looming large in her very near future.

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

DOWNFALL

By J.A. Jance

I was so happy to receive this *Joanna Brady* mystery for review. It's been some time since I read one; not for lack of desire, but for lack of time. "Downfall" is fully as good as the last one I read.

It's the last day of August in the Mule Mountains of SE Arizona. Sheriff Brady, an already busy county official, has a daughter heading to college for the first time, a five-year-old starting kindergarten, and a baby girl due in early December. And now she gets word that her parents have been in a serious car wreck. Her stepfather is dead and her mother is in the hospital, victims of a kid with a rifle on the overpass. The kid soon crashes his 4x4 fleeing authorities, and she finds herself kneeling next to him, comforting her parents' shooter as he dies.

Then she's on to the next crisis, two dead bodies at the base of a steep cliff called Geronimo by some, Black Knob by others, but officially Gold Hill. It's a place local kids climbed as a rite of passage, situated in rugged terrain that has to be hiked to, making the investigation of the unknown women even more complicated.

When Joanna's mother dies of her injuries, she mourns their relationship. It was never good, but Joanna felt they were moving toward improvement and now will never get to achieve that.

Who the seemingly unrelated women were and why they are both dead in the same spot is the basis for the mystery that Joanna must untangle against the backdrop of her complicated family life.

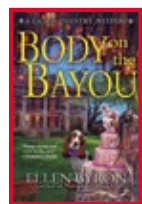
A truly satisfying read.

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



BODY ON THE BAYOU

By Ellen Byron



One of the most beautiful Bed & Breakfasts is located in Pelican, Louisiana, and is owned by the Crozat family. And even though there have been some things in the past that might have led to the death of their beloved plantation/estate, the Crozat clan has managed, by the skin of their teeth, to survive any scandal.

Now, there is a new happening in Pelican; the upcoming wedding of Maggie Crozat's archrival, Police Chief Rufus Durand to her co-worker, Vanessa Fleer. Maggie will be Vanessa's Maid of Honor, much to Maggie's dismay as she quickly discovers why everyone else in the wedding party refused to take the job. Seems that Vanessa is what is more commonly known as a Bridezilla, and when she hands Maggie her long, long list of duties, it's horrific.

The most important duty, however, will be to entertain Vanessa's cousin, Ginger Fleer-Starke, a mysterious woman with a dangerous and secretive past. Just a few days before the wedding, Ginger's body is found on the bayou behind Crozat Plantation and the police department, as well as the Crozat family, find that they have a murder to solve ... and fast.

A crowd of suspects are at the B&B, including; an ex-Marine with PTSD, an annoying newspaper reporter, and Vanessa's mother, who is scarier than every other suspect put together. But as things move forward, it is the bride that turns into the prime suspect which adds another job to Maggie's long list of duties: keep the bride-to-be out of jail.

This is the second *Cajun Country Mystery* from this author, and not only is the story a whole lot of fun to read, with a historical plantation setting, but there are also mouthwatering recipes for every reader to sink their teeth into.

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

BOUNTY

By Michael Byrnes

At the beginning of this fantastic book, an infamous Wall Street "shark" is put to death in his high rise office by a sniper's bullet. Folks that were definitely not upset by this called it 'the kill shot heard round the world.' Now, a rogue website for vigilante assassins—bounty4justice.com—pops up, where outraged citizens can bid up bounties on corporate crooks and corrupt, privileged individuals.

When the number of targets becomes more intense, amateur bounty hunters and professional hit men vie against each other to exterminate the people who have been destined for death in order to claim the cash reward. Of course, the competitors have to send 'proof of death' videos to prove their kills and post said videos on the internet.

The FBI, led by Roman Novak and Rosemary Michaels, along with other law enforcement agencies, are placed on the case as this once little site turns global. The law is desperately trying to find a way to out think and out play an antagonist with seemingly millions of dollars at their disposal, and cease the ability for murders to be helped along with just a keystroke. Finally, a hacker extraordinaire leads Novak and Michaels into the underworld, a haven for criminals who are against the rules of law; a place where Bounty4Justice's mastermind is hiding.

This book was definitely one of the best I have ever read. Think, Mob justice meets the internet. A rogue website for assassins? This story is consistently exciting and frighteningly real, as the world is today with the internet running the country. This is most definitely a plot that paints a mental picture of our technological achievements creating a civilization gone mad, and where free will and the law are irreparably damaged.

The author has done a superb job of showing that American justice's future may not be run by the bravest, but by the most brutal.

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

FOREIGN AGENT

By Brad Thor

Get ready for another terrific book from author Brad Thor featuring Scot Harvath, former Navy Seal. Now working for a private intelligence company, Scot aids the CIA and, most of all, the President of the United States.

Along with Harvath is his lady, Lara. Things are going in the wrong direction for Scot and Lara; she's on her way to Boston to start a new job and Scot is based in Washington D.C. They know that long distance romances are difficult and they have to decide whether to keep their present jobs and try to maintain a relationship, or scrap the whole thing.

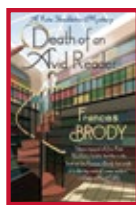
But while dealing with this romantic entanglement there are more pressing issues that arise. For instance, the death of thirteen Americans occurs when a safe house in Iraq is raided and the Americans are brutally killed by ISIS forces. Washington wants answers now, and Harvath feels guilty as it was his informant that led the team to Iraq in the first place. Now that they're gone, Scot tries to locate said informant and learns that the man is oddly missing.

As Scot continues to search for people who knew that the team was about to be demolished, he pursues a Russian by the name of Sacha Baseyev. Baseyev is holding on to a lot of hate from an event that took place in his childhood and will stop at nothing to take out as many folks as he can get away with. And the more Scot looks for Baseyev, the more innocent people die.

As this book moves forward at a gut-wrenching pace, much blood is spilled, but Harvath will stop at nothing to achieve justice. He's determined to make things right and stop an attack that's planned on the United States.

The author mentions many things that went on in some of his previous books and fits these new puzzle pieces in with absolute craftsmanship. As usual, Brad Thor proves he's the ultimate thriller writer.

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



DEATH OF AN AVID READER

By Frances Brody

Kate Shackleton, a female detective in the 1920's, has received a message from the much admired Lady Coulton. The Lady asks Kate to hunt down her daughter—a child who was born out of wedlock and given up to another family. Now that Lord Coulton's health is bad and he is very much an invalid, the Lady has decided that she wants to see her daughter and help the girl... even if the girl doesn't happen to need help.

The detective is a little hesitant to take the case and can't for the life of her figure out why, so she starts her investigation. In the beginning, everything she thinks she knows turns out to be a complete dead end. But then she becomes caught up in a murder that was committed at the Leeds Library where Kate is a shareholder.

It seems that a scholar by the name of Dr. Potter has been found dead under a bookcase in the basement. Soon the two cases come together in an odd way. While Kate is searching for Lady Coulton's daughter she finds the girl, named Sophia, and discovers that she was working in a library and left her employment without notice. The links between the two mysteries begin to reveal themselves.

After Dr. Potter's body is removed, the police find a man in the basement; an Italian man who just happens to be the owner of a monkey. The man, Umberto, is very ill and is taken to a hospital. Being far too ill to even be considered a suspect in Dr. Potter's demise, Kate delves into Sophia's life, as well as Dr. Potter's murder, and finds herself hot on the trail of a killer.

This book is a very good story and part of a series. Each mystery is a standalone, but all should be read in order to find out much more about the highly intelligent and very interesting Kate Shackleton.

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

FIST FULL OF GRIT

By Merle McCann

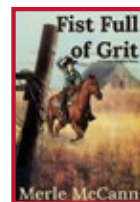
Whenever we think of suspense either a thriller or a mystery springs to mind. McCann does a wonderful job of reminding us that suspense can be found in any type of genre, and proves it with her extraordinary western. Set in the late 1800's, she has written a tale with a female lead, a heroine so young she can barely be called a woman, who faces up to almost impossible odds to keep her inherited ranch out of the hands of robber barons.

Cooper Hughes left school as a young teen to take up the running of the ranch when she was orphaned. The bank owners attempted to hornswoggle the land out from under her, knowing the railroad was due to come through and offer a lot of money for their rights. This forces Coop to take on a role as singer at the saloon in the next town over—and risk her reputation—to make enough money to pay off the last few payments and avoid foreclosure.

With the temperance movement in full swing threatening to expose her moonlighting, and threatening to have her young brother removed from her care, Coop finds life to be very stressful. It all comes to a boil when two local girls are murdered, stabbed to death. Certain she can do a better job at finding the murderer than the local sheriff, Coop investigates the killings on her own.

The timing of a new suitor makes her even more suspicious. Where will her trust lie? Is he for real or a plant? The suspense builds and comes to a screeching halt faster than being thrown by a bucking bronco. When the dust clears, we're left to find out if Coop survives to fight another day on the frontier streets of her cowboy town. My best guess is this tough little woman will be running the town when it's all said and done. An endearing story of the American West and the characters that led to its creation.

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



CHASING STARS

By Helen Douglas



The sequel to "After Eden," "Chasing Stars" is a book about love, separation, rivalry, and fighting a very powerful enemy. Main characters, Eden and Ryan, have to find out if their love for each other will continue to exist against the odds that have been handed to them. As per usual, the cards are stacked against the duo and readers will be drawn in by the challenges they have to face.

When Eden fell for Ryan she didn't know that he was a time traveler from the future. In the future, a subject called a 'cleaner' has come back to hunt these two down, and now they have to travel a hundred years forward to the year 2123 so Ryan can stand trial for his crimes. Eden knows that if she can't free him, she'll be stuck in the future for the rest of her life; all alone. So Eden must make what some would call a simple choice; if you were in love, that is. She must travel to the future with Ryan if she truly wants to stay with him. Not only that, however, but if she refuses, because of the power at work, everyone she cares about in the present day will be killed.

Almost as if the *Terminator* met up with the couple from *Twilight*, this enjoyable sci-fi/fantasy series has thus far been extremely cool. The characters are interesting, and the descriptions of the future and some of the space flight scenes really make the visuals come alive. Reading the first book would certainly help you in understanding the second, but it was still very easy to get into this tale and never look back. Either way, readers will find that the adventure of Ryan and Eden is a whole lot of fun.

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



A QUIET PLACE

By Seicho Matsumoto

"A Quiet Place" is a Japanese translation which might have been a difficult read, but it turned out to be a terrific thriller that'll keep the reader sitting in his/her chair for quite some time.

Why would a person with a very serious heart problem risk her life by hiking up a steep hill enclosed in an area where she doesn't know a soul? This is the question that worries Tsuneo Asai, the hero of this psychological thriller.

Tsuneo is a section chief in the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and is on a business trip when he's told that his wife, who has a heart condition, has died out of the blue in Tokyo. In spite of the distance in their relationship, the tragedy of her death is a huge shock to him but not enough of one to drop everything and travel back home. Instead, he takes care of his business.

When he finally arrives home, he doesn't believe the official account of her death: that she had suffered a heart attack in the street. After some investigating, he discovers that she died in a shop in a quiet neighborhood and thinks that her attack was set in motion by Eiko, herself, after she over-exerted herself, causing her own death. But... something still smells fishy.

No matter how hard he tries, Tsuneo can't get over the feeling that something is definitely wrong, especially after visiting the owner of the shop where his wife died to give the proprietor an apology for the trouble that was caused. Finding a nearby hotel, known as being a meeting place for lovers, he begins to open the door to secrets that show his wife was actually leading a double life. A life that may just turn her death into a full-blown murder case.

"A Quiet Place" is a marvelous crime story by Seicho Matsumoto, who is definitely a master writer that grabs the attention and keeps it until the very end.

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

A TURN FOR THE BAD

By Sheila Connolly

Maura Donovan is finally beginning to feel comfortable in her adopted homeland of Ireland. Her surprise inheritance of Sullivan's Pub in County Cork from a distant relative brought Maura from Boston to the Emerald Isle seven months ago. Every day brings a new surprise, and often a new challenge. Sullivan's Pub is the center of both entertainment and information in the village, and the residents gather there to speculate, gossip, and solve the problems of the world over a coffee or, more often, a pint of beer.

When local farmer John Tully disappears while out for a walk on the beach with his three-year-old son, the news is broadcast at Sullivan's Pub immediately. Although Maura doesn't know John personally, she shares the concern of the villagers, especially when she learns that a similar situation happened years ago involving a man and his young child that ended tragically. An immediate search is launched by the local police, including Maura's sometimes beau, Sean Murphy, but there's no trace of John. When the body of an unidentified man washes up on the beach, police suspect there's a connection with John's disappearance, but have no idea what that could be.

Maura begins to hear talk of smugglers operating in the area, something that's been going on for years. Not cigarettes and alcohol, like in the old days; now the goods are cocaine and heroin. John's brother, Connor, confesses to Maura that he's involved in a drug smuggling shipment that will be brought ashore the next night. He suspects that his brother is being held captive by the smugglers until the deal is completed, and begs Maura to help him.

"A Turn for the Bad" is the fourth in the prolific Sheila Connolly's *County Cork Mysteries*. It's deftly plotted, the characters are engaging, and the visual descriptions of Ireland made me want to grab my passport and visit as soon as possible. A real winner!

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



KILL 'EM WITH KINDNESS

By C. S. DeWidt



Chad was the school bully, a role that followed him into his small-town life. He and his boys—and his two giant Caucasian Mountain dogs—rule over their community, along with the local corrupt police chief. When Nick finds Kimmy, the local looker and Chad's main squeeze, beaten black and blue at the hands of that corn-pone Mafia megalosaurus, he opts to give her a ride home from the bar, just to be sure she makes it home alive.

Both Chad and the corrupt police chief had a file on Nick; he was, after all, a minor player in the marijuana growing business in the area. So, like it or not, Nick's act of kindness has Chad embrace him as an errand boy, coerced after watching his weed distributor be eaten alive by Chad's dogs of death.

Nick needs to get out of town, but that's not as easy as it sounds. His dead wife and child's ghost's still hold him captive, as well as his growing feelings for Kimmy. Only a deadline from the corrupt cop who wants complete control spurs him into action, and Nick finally attempts to rise to the occasion.

A true pulp fiction tale of redneck noir in rural America is told in gruesome, graphic detail that will hold you captive to the final pages. You'll think twice before driving through 'the fly-over States' again.

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

FALL FROM GRACE

By Tim Weaver

Leonard Franks has retired from the Metropolitan Police after working as a high ranking, hard-working, beloved detective for many years. Now, he and his wife have moved into a secluded farmhouse far from the noise and crime of London. The two of them are very content to live the rest of their lives in the quiet of the countryside but, of course, something evil happens one day: Leonard leaves his house to bring in some firewood and...never comes back.

Nine months later, the police investigation trying to track down what happened has turned cold, and Leonard's daughter, also a detective, decides to call in a man by the name of David Raker—a missing persons investigator who has a talent for finding the lost—in order to get some help. But as Raker takes over the search for the missing detective, nothing seems to make sense. There's a shocking secret behind the man's disappearance nine months ago, and by the time Raker finds out what it is, he ends up putting himself and everyone he cares about in grave danger.

An unforgettable book; main character Raker keeps readers from getting bored when anything and everything happens with a character that was once put on a pedestal, but certainly didn't deserve it. By following Raker, readers keep being surprised as he uncovers secrets that put him in ultimate danger.

This story is a conflicted investigation that will take the reader on a real thrill ride as they walk the sordid backstreets of London, head to the bleak, desolate quiet of the Devon countryside, and stroll through the menacing halls of an abandoned mental institution. Tim Weaver has set up readers to go on a very riveting quest and saves the best for last, with many astounding disclosures wrapped up in the end pages. For those who want a mind-boggling tale filled with action, adventure, mystery and chills, this book is a "must-read."

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

IN THE CLEARING

By Robert Dugoni

This is a story about Seattle Police Detective Tracy Crosswhite, and a cold case that takes her back forty years.

Tracy is more than willing to take her days off reopening the supposedly “plain as the nose on your face suicide” of Stoneridge High senior, Kimi Kanasket. There is a present day case that Tracy is assigned, which is the shooting of Tim Collins. But this particular case has brought her two confessions already: one from Angela Collins, Tim’s wife who is divorcing him, and the other from Angela’s teenage son, Connor. Angela has retained her father, Attorney Atticus Berkshire as her lawyer, and the case is becoming nothing more than a headache.

It is because of this headache that Tracy becomes sympathetic to her classmate from the police academy, Jenny Almond. Jenny is the one asking her to take a look at the first big case Jenny’s father, Buzz, handled as a police officer in 1976. The evidence in that case indicated that Kimi threw herself into the river following a breakup with Tommy Moore. Buzz hadn’t ever been happy about the outcome of the case, so Tracy takes the time to review the evidence herself. She notes that Buzz had been very careful about collecting evidence many years ago, yet some of the evidence has vanished, leaving Tracy wondering why Stoneridge locals might be covering up the truth. And when Tracy gets that truth, readers will be extremely surprised.

The cold case is really the fascinating aspect of this tale. Tracy uses her contacts to get the evidence and pictures saved by Buzz and is soon convinced that suicide had nothing to do with this girl’s death. Now... all she has to do is prove it. “In the Clearing” is a book that’s definitely worth a read; Robert Dugoni knows his subject, his characters, and places them against a crystal clear, mesmerizing background that is the Pacific Northwest.

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

DEADLINE

By Jessica James

Caitlin Sparks is a journalist who has been caught up investigating a series of shady deaths that are directly connected to the U.S. State Department. Detective Blake Madison is a man on his own mission where these killings are concerned and will do anything to uncover the truth. Seeing as both of these folks have personal reasons for being involved in these crimes, they decide to work together, which puts both of their lives in incredible danger.

Devising a plan, the risk to their lives grows right along with the body count as the narrative keeps you guessing until the last page. Each time you think you have the plot figured out, the author gives you something else, usually going back to the very beginning to show you another ‘piece of the puzzle’ that brought the characters to where they are. The chance of a breakthrough seems small and the outcome is something you will never imagine. Don’t expect a constant action novel; this is a slow buildup that will keep you reading as Caitlin and Blake find a way to work very well together.

The author of this book, Jessica James, is a remarkable writer. Her books on military fiction, beginning with the Revolutionary War, up to and including present day, are extremely good reads. Although this title is not in the history category, it does show that Ms. James has the ultimate skill and talent to write a very memorable political thriller.

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



DRESSED TO KILT

By Hannah Reed

Chicago native Eden Elliott is spending six months in the quaint Scottish village of Glenkillen, writing a romance novel set in the area. She’s settled into village life, been embraced by the locals, and is even appointed special constable on the local police force. One aspect of Scottish life that Eden is determined to ignore, however, is her own family roots. Her father, Dennis, returned to Scotland for his own father’s funeral and never returned, deserting his ill wife and little girl, Eden.

With only a few weeks before her tourist visa expires, Eden is determined to enjoy every last minute. So when she’s invited to a fancy whisky tasting by local grande dame and Glenkillen Distillery owner Bridie Dougal, she eagerly accepts. And, she’s encouraged to bring along an escort, hunky local heartthrob Leith Cameron.

The tasting is progressing nicely—who knew there were all these different kinds of whiskeys?—until Bridie’s housekeeper and companion, the prickly Henrietta McCloud, is found drowned in one of the vats of alcohol. There’s no way this could have been an accident, so Eden, as the constable on the scene, begins to investigate.

Eden realizes that the guest list for the doomed tasting was cleverly contrived, and it appears that several of the guests had reason to want Henrietta dead. Especially Bridie’s son and heir, Archie, and his unpleasant wife, Florence, since Bridie recently announced that she changed her will and is leaving life tenancy in her magnificent home to her devoted companion, the now deceased Henrietta.

Detective Inspector Kevin Jamieson takes over the case, and charges Eden with delving into the backgrounds of each of the guests. To her surprise, her questioning leads to her own grandfather’s death and the subsequent disappearance of her father.

“Dressed to Kilt” is a mystery rich in character development, plot, and setting. Although I was disappointed that it didn’t reveal one of Scotland’s greatest mysteries—What do Scottish men wear under those colorful kilts? Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Second Honeymoons Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

LIVE AND LET GROWL

By Laurien Berenson

Melanie Travis and her Aunt Peg are traveling together on Spring Break from Howard Academy. Melanie, a dog-lover, is on her way to the Kentuckiana Dog Show. Her Aunt Peg has signed up to be a week-long judge at the event, and Melanie’s canine companion, Faith, is along for the ride.

Kentucky is usually known for horses, not dogs. Aunt Peg just so happens to have recently inherited a horse, a mare named Lucky Luna, from Anthony Stone—a friend of her late husband.

On their way to the dog show they stop to check out Peg’s new treasure, which has kind of ruined Melanie’s plans to have a relaxing break.

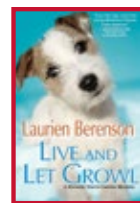
Peg is also very anxious to see an old friend, Ellie Wanemaker. Ellie dropped out of the world after a fatal accident claimed the life of her best show dog, Champion Gatewood Dunaway, but she’s heading to the Kentuckiana Dog Show so she can catch up with Peg.

As Peg throws herself into her judging duty, Melanie escorts Ellie around, but she can’t help noticing the cold reception Ellie gets from the breeders. It seems that Ellie’s presence at the event is making some folks rather angry. And, out of the blue, Ellie suffers a fatal accident while exercising her dogs.

Peg and Melanie immediately suspect foul play, but Miss Ellie’s family of pedigree animals (and relatives) prefer to just let her sudden death remain chalked up as an accident. Melanie can’t help snooping around, though, and soon digs up a whole bunch of secrets that Ellie was holding close to the chest; secrets in both the dog show world and among her very own Kentucky family.

Readers who love mysteries and dogs will love this tale. A great whodunit, with colorful characters amidst a great setting for a story.

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





DRY BONES

By Craig Johnson

For the zillions of fans of the *Longmire* series, as well as the books, this reviewer must say this particular tale has got to be the best of the lot.

Jurassic Park has suddenly appeared in Sheriff Walt Longmire's jurisdiction. Yet, what is supposed to be amazing news turns bad when Longmire finds himself buried knee-deep in a case—the drowning death of a local rancher. His name is Danny Lone Elk. Of Cheyenne birth, he was right in the middle of a deal with a fossil hunter to dig up the bones of a very high quality T-Rex skeleton buried on his land; a dinosaur that's worth upwards of \$8 million dollars.

The find is entertaining stuff for the town. The touch of comedy that we're about to be given starts with an Assistant Attorney General who's more interested in the long dead dino than doing his own job. The town expects this T-Rex to be a lucrative opportunity, especially for the High Plains Dinosaur Museum, and the Assistant AG shoves his nose into Longmire's business in order to bring about the cash, which doesn't make the sheriff very happy.

Longmire is far more interested in who killed Danny and left the man floating face down in a turtle pond. Of course, with millions of dollars just waiting to be claimed by various groups, including; Danny's family, his Indian tribe, the U.S. Government, the local museum... and the list goes on, Longmire has his hands full trying to figure out what happened. Add to that the arrival of Wyoming's Deputy Attorney and some FBI folks, and everyone seems to be in Longmire's way. Only Longmire's faithful dog (named DOG), and his best friend Henry Standing Bear can be counted on to help him solve the murder.

Humor, a fantastic plot, and watching Longmire attempt to help a human get justice from the turtle pond while helping free a T-Rex from the ground come together to make for an unforgettable read!

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

NIGHT AND DAY

By Iris Johansen

From the outset, the reader is tossed into the ongoing action, which is awash in characters. I got the feeling I was late to the party. Because of that, I'd highly recommend reading the first two in this series. This is a paranormal mystery featuring Eve Duncan, a likeable character who is accompanied by an odd assortment of eccentrics and misfits. All the characters are fascinating and fun to read about.

An eleven-year-old girl, Cara, is the center of the initial maelstrom. She was taken in by Eve to shield her from some evil people who want her dead. Little Cara has been through a lot in her short life. On another front, Eva's older adopted daughter, Jane, holds the key to finding a golden treasure through a mystical connection with a slave turned actress who escaped Vesuvius, named Cira. This gold is the center of the rest of the activity.

Between Mexican cartel bosses and Russian mafia bosses, the little band on the edge of the lake at Gaelkar, Scotland battle through impossible odds to fend off the evil doers and survive. There's a sweet relationship between the young Cara and the somewhat older Jock, a trained killer who is fiercely protective of, and dazzled by her. So much so that she is able to convince him that night is day and day is night.

You'll have fun on this wild ride!

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



FORETOLD BY THUNDER

By E.M. Davey



Journalist Jake Wolsey comes upon a manuscript recently declassified by the government. These pages tell the story of Winston Churchill and his deep-seeded interest in an ancient civilization called, The Etruscans. This is an odd, yet fascinating discovery that Jake tries to figure out what to do with, but he's not the only one showing an interest. A professor at King's College in London, Roger Britton, calls the journalist after reading a newspaper article written by Jake reporting that Churchill had met with the head of MI6, in 1941, to discuss 'the ancient Etruscan matter.'

Britton claims to know exactly what spawned Churchill's interest, and Jake politely listens to the man's claim, then dismisses him and ends the call. Not too long after this conversation, however, Professor Britton is struck by lightning and dies. Strange coincidences are occurring that make Jake decide to learn more about the man's detailed knowledge.

Meeting and striking up conversations with Britton's graduate assistant, Florence Chung, Jake earns enough insight into the dead man that he persuades his boss to let him travel to Turkey in search of the sacred Etruscan matter. There are some folks who are trying to stop him from reaching his goal, but finding out who these people are and what must be kept secret makes for a thrilling adventure.

Not only is this an engrossing tale, but it's also the first really good book in a trilogy, and will leave all readers looking forward to the next one in the series. From "The Life of Constantine" by Eusebius' to "The Histories" by Polybius, the Etruscan civilization practically comes to life. As everything from the fall of Rome to the rise of Nazi, Germany comes to light, readers will start to believe that perhaps the Ancients did predict the future after all.

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

GHOST SNIPER

By Scott McEwen with Thomas Koloniar

In this fourth installment in the *Sniper Elite* series, readers meet Chance Vaught, a former Green Beret who is now a special agent with the U.S. Diplomatic Security Service. On a mission in Mexico, his present assignment is to keep Alice Downly, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, safe. Sadly, when members of the local drug cartel hold up her motorcade, she is assassinated. It turns out that the cartel was the least hostile force Vaught should have been guarding against. Without his knowledge, a sniper was sneaking above, beyond, and farther away than Vaught had ever assumed.

Seconds after the initial attack, the rest of the convoy ends up dead. This leaves Vaught the only one alive to tell the 'powers that be' who, why and what happened that caused his operation to fail. He speaks of a killer known only as the Ghost Sniper, a man who's also an ex-military killer that offers services, for a substantial fee, to some of the most notorious criminals in Mexico.

From this time forward, Vaught is not doing so great in his intelligence community, until Director of the CIA Robert Pope throws him some work. Director Pope wants him to track the Ghost Sniper and find out who played a part in the assassination of Downly.

Vaught teams up with former Navy Seal, Daniel Crosswhite. The two men are out to kill the Ghost Sniper and uncover the truth about a huge conspiracy. The difficulties with hunting a sniper is that this is a person who can kill from afar before you hear the bullet coming. Not only that, but because of their hidden location, a sniper has all the time in the world to take that perfect shot.

Which basically means... this author, as always, offers up a real surprise at the end of this tale. "Ghost Sniper" is a fantastic story that will take readers on a great adventure that goes all over the map.

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

BAD COUNTRY

By C.B. McKenzie

It's sometimes difficult to find an excellent debut novel but...this is it. C.B. McKenzie writes with quality set in a gritty Southwest, offering up a detective who is tough, upright, and genuine throughout. The main character is a former rodeo rider from Arizona who has retired and is now a private detective taking on cases that are different, to say the least.

Introducing...Rodeo Grace Garnet who lives in the only "fit for human habitation" leftovers of a planned community in an area called El Hoyo (AKA: The Hole), in a remote part of Arizona. When he comes home with his dog one day, he finds the body of a murdered Native American teenager, which is the beginning of a very complicated series of cases.

Introducing...Sheriff Ray Molina of Los Jarros County. This is a rich man with a very sparse police department in a county with huge, empty areas that are only used as escape routes for illegals and drug traffickers to enter (and exit) the United States. Ray's daughter, Sirena, is a very willful girl who was dumped by Rodeo after she shot his dog, but she still comes by once in a while to visit.

Rodeo has a friend, Luis, who owns the trading post and sets him up to investigate a drive-by shooting of one, Samuel Rocha in Tucson. Samuel's grandmother wants to hire him to find the killer even though her whole family always ignored Samuel, but loved his beauty queen sister who was killed in a hit-and-run.

In other words, there are many people asking Rodeo to work on their cases. But as Rodeo slowly unravels the crimes and puts the clues together, he discovers that all the cases he's working on have very deep, very frightening connections.

A winner of the SPUR Award for "Best Western Contemporary Novel," there's no doubt that this author is definitely one to keep your eye on in the future.

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

RED DOG

By Jason Miller

Slim is a southern, redneck private eye. He is also sarcastic and extremely clever. In other words, you don't have to sit through any long sermon with this guy, seeing as that he says more in a few lines than most people say in a drawn out conversation. And when talking doesn't work, he uses other special skills, like beating on your head or bringing out the gun. First seen in this author's debut mystery, "Down Don't Bother Me," Slim is back and on a case with his teenage "detective fiction loving" daughter—this time taking on white supremacists and other ignorant criminals.

Slim gets a visit from a father, Sheldon Cleaves, and his son, asking Slim to find their missing dog. Not used to saving the canine variety, Slim does need the \$65 Cleaves offers him to get his air conditioner fixed, so he takes on the case. Slim retrieves the dog from the roadhouse owner who took it, Dennis Reach. But even though she's fine, the dog-napper has been shot. Slim becomes the number one suspect, so he immediately goes on the hunt. Helped by his own daughter, Slim chases a trail that leads him to the doorsteps of Dennis Reach's very well-armed ex-wife, Carol Reach, a white supremacist group, and J.T. Black, a meth partner of Reach's. It is up to Slim to survive while attempting to understand what occurred when a dog walked into his life.

Do not be turned away by the cover of this book, because as violent as it is at times, it is comical and all-in-all an extremely good mystery by author Jason Miller. For all the dog lovers out there? Just remember Mark Twain when he said, "Heaven goes by favor. If we went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in." Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



THE RABBI'S KNIGHT

By Michael J. Cooper



In his second historical novel set in Israel, Cooper establishes himself as a gifted historian with a penchant for research that creates his well-rounded, believable tales of ancient Jerusalem. The story is set in 1290, at a time when the Knights Templar is set to withdraw from Palestine. Jonathon St. Clair, knight and scholar, finds himself in possession of an ancient scroll whose cryptic inscription cannot be translated by the top Jewish scholars in the port city of Acre.

However, since he has been advised that the mystery to this scroll holds the key to the secrets of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, St. Clair is determined to learn more about Kabbalah, the soul of the Torah, and learn the document's secrets.

Bagdad's top minister, Rabbi Samuel, is the one man equipped to unravel the meaning behind the secretive writings, however he is on the run, targeted for assassination by forces within the Jewish congregation. Aided by a young rabbinic scholar of Acre, Isaac, a young William Wallace, whose Scottish father wanted to have him become a member of the divinity; a Muslim woman, Zahirah, found hiding in a den of lepers to escape her enemies (and who seriously challenges St. Clair's vow of chastity); and an eminent mathematician and cartographer, al-Hasani, they join forces with Rabbi Samuel, helping him on a mission to Jerusalem to risk all that is precious for their sacred destiny as guardians of the Temple Mount.

Cooper's voice is that of the thirteenth century. The wonderful breadth of the tale, the language, the time period is all captured. We get to look at this medieval life at ground level, from the traitors to the tradesmen, the Emir's to God's chosen servants, as we tread the streets of Jerusalem, stand before the campfires, and engage in hand to hand combat as our hero's hold steadfast to all that is right. A compelling read. Best book of the year by far.

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

ROBERT B. PARKER'S DEBT TO PAY

By Reed Farrel Coleman

All readers of mystery/suspense know Police Chief Jesse Stone of Paradise, MA, who just happens to be indebted to Boston mobster, Gino Fish.

A few years ago, Gino helped Jesse get in touch with a contract killer named Mr. Peepers. Because of this, Jesse agreed that he owed Gino a favor. Sadly, it's too late for Gino to call in the debt because the mobster has been shot, apparently by his own hand.

One of Gino's employees, before he branched out on his own, reminds Jesse that the debt did not die along with Gino. So Jesse, without protest, reviews the evidence in the case and soon realizes that the murder/suicide in which Gino stabbed his receptionist before he supposedly shot himself was, in fact, organized by Mr. Peepers.

As things move forward, it now seems that Mr. Peepers is looking for a new victim and the frontrunners are Jesse, his ex-FBI girlfriend Diana Evans, and his ex-wife Jenn who's about to marry a Dallas real estate businessman. It is also possible that Mr. Peepers is after Suitcase Simpson, a Paradise cop who wounded him; or even Molly Crane, who he just doesn't like. With Peepers toying with authorities as they struggle to find out where and when his next kill will occur, Jesse flies back and forth from Massachusetts to Texas to try and guess Peepers' next move, catching up with all the tempting targets in this mystery.

Reed Farrel Coleman has taken on a difficult task, as the previous author of the *Jesse Stone* novels, Robert B. Parker, owned a talent that mystery readers will never forget. Mr. Coleman, however, should be commended. He has done really well with the characters, and readers will be extremely pleased with this mystery. They will continue to want more novels starring Police Chief Jesse Stone in their hands ASAP.

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





BLIND SIGHT

By Carol O'Connell

On the mean streets of New York City, a twelve-year-old boy and a nun come up missing; they might have been kidnapped. The sister, whose birth name is Angela Quill, is a former prostitute. The boy is Jonah Quill, who was born blind. But matters quickly worsen when four corpses, including the body of the nun, are found on the lawn of Gracie Mansion—home to New York's Mayor. The victim's hearts have been surgically removed, and the case is turned over to Special Crimes Unit Detective Kathy Mallory and her partner, Detective Riker. The missing hearts wind up in City Hall where the Mayor orders them to be disposed of ASAP. So what does a well-educated aide to the Mayor do? He hurls them into the river.

While all of this is going on, Iggy Conroy is holding young Jonah and trying to decide whether or not to keep the kid alive. The two of them are having interesting talks about what Jonah has the ability to remember; for example, anything that Iggy says, even though Jonah's blind and cannot provide "eye" witness testimony, can be used by the police. Jonah is a very intelligent boy but that doesn't automatically mean he will survive. When the missing hearts, the dead people, and the Mayor's office are connected with Jonah's vanishing, the two well-known detectives must hurry to find the boy and keep him alive.

As in other novels featuring Mallory and her partner, Mallory seems just a little freaky, with a lot of real brain power and a whole lot of attitude toward her underlings. This is twelfth in a series by Carol O'Connell featuring the cool Detective Mallory and, at times, is a highly frightening book that keeps the reader on edge. Mallory shows her extremely smart mind and her absolute dedication to the job. She is one member of the law who can live, no matter what happens, on the very dangerous streets of the big city.

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

IN THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

By Jane Jensen

This book is the second in Jane Jensen's mysteries that focus on the lives of the Amish living in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In this new tale, Detective Elizabeth Harris learns of a problem when the family of Samuel Hershberger falls ill and one of them mysteriously passes away. Shortly after this incident, another family consisting of nine people all die.

An investigation led by the Center for Disease Control, with Dr. Glen Turner in the lead, identifies the cause of death as poisoning from milk tainted by a plant toxin. As the death toll rises, the police come to the decision that the poisoning is actually intentional, although the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture begins to suspend all raw milk sales, further harming the already suffering Amish community.

The detective earned the trust from these close-knit families the first time around, so she attempts to solve the case and help the Amish get back on track by looking for a very logical killer. Since her first go-round, Elizabeth settled down into the small town life which she never thought she would do after being a NYC cop. She's remained close to the Yoder family that she helped in the past, and she's the first law enforcement officer to hear about the deaths that went from being bad cases of the flu to poisoning to "hexerei," which is a curse placed on families by a man using old-world magic.

Former Amish man Henry Stoltzfus is looking for revenge on the community because of a time when they stuck their noses in his personal business. Elizabeth isn't sure Henry or the silly curse have anything to do with the murders, but when she starts to work with Dr. Turner and the CDC, the mystery blows up into what could become an Act of God.

The first *Elizabeth Harris* mystery was phenomenal, and this is a fantastic second tale establishing this interesting, smart, and well-written detective.

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



BECAUSE I'M WATCHING

By Christina Dodd

Readers are in for a real treat with this new book set in the very cool Virtue Falls, Washington, by Christina Dodd.

Jacob Denisov is a military veteran who lives alone in a small house in Virtue Falls. This is a dark, creepy home where Jacob barely exists on a daily basis. Sleepless, starving and very, very angry, he lives with the heavy guilt from his many failures.

One day his neighbor, Madeline Hewitson, drives her car through the front of his home, breaking his abode and his ability to be alone. While construction commences, the man sees the outside world and ends up watching Maddie.

Referred to as "Mad Maddie," Jacob sees a lot in her that he relates to. It seems that she's the survivor of a college dorm mass murder, and was also once accused of bringing about her own lover's demise. Madeline is haunted by ghosts and also plagued by a killer that only she can see. At night, she works—writing and drawing the monstrous thing that glides through her imagination—and waits in absolute fear for the moment when her nightmare will come alive in the daylight.

This incredible author offers up many twists and turns which will sound something like an Alfred Hitchcock narrative, as the two main characters are caught up in a world of oddities, creepiness and revenge. This is the third book in the *Virtue Falls* series and, if possible, the best yet!

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

MIRROR IN THE SKY

By Aditi Khorana

A new scientific discovery comes to light in this incredible book. There is talk that a "mirror" planet, referred to as Terra Nova, has been found. Here, people are living exact lives, or mirror lives, to those people living on Earth.

In the beginning, Tara Krishnan feels more than panicky. She's attending a private school on scholarship and has far less money than the other students; in addition, she's the only half-Indian on campus. About to leave in order to spend her junior year in Argentina, Tara's best friend suddenly drops her for no good reason. Tara had expected them to have difficulty while dwelling in two different countries, but the mean, sudden halt of their friendship still hurts.

To make matters worse, news breaks about the discovery of this mirror planet, with all the news channels making sure to let everyone know that they most likely have a twin living there.

Tara's family is made ill by the news that has sent the entire world into a frenzy. Her mom even stops going to work; all she does is sit in front of the TV and talk about making contact with those on the new planet. Tara, on the other hand, is thinking of another Tara who might very well be living a much better life.

Soon, Tara begins to hang with the popular girls as she gains sudden attention from the most popular boy in school. She is starting to live a much bigger, happier life as odd little changes occur. Yet, where these changes come from and why they're happening in the first place, may just lead Tara to a frightening discovery.

This YA book is the author's first novel and, I must say, she's a first-rate writer. Highly recommended for all age groups, people should find this tale to be an absolute "5-star" read.

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

COLD SILENCE

By James Abel

The choice of setting for this third epidemic suspense/thriller (which author James Abel is incredible at writing) is the country of Africa.

Retired Marine Colonel Dr. Joe Rush and his partner, Eddie Nakamura, are helping out the starving people in the south Sudan, but their main assignment is to check up on rumors that an “Islamic splinter group” is building a new bioweapon. Joe changes his plans after he receives an SOS from Professor Lionel Nash, a former soldier of his who is doing research in Somalia. Nash tells Joe that he and his colleagues have been downed by a horrible unknown disease and they are being held hostage by a militia leader who will allow only two doctors to come to their assistance.

Joe and Eddie rush to Somalia to find that Lionel and company are badly disfigured, and the stakes go up significantly when Joe learns that comparable symptoms have now been documented as showing up in the United States.

Joe and Eddie find that an entire group of people are experiencing awful symptoms of an ancient sickness, once thought to be sent down to Earth as a punishment from Heaven, itself. Sadly, before the men can locate any hard evidence that identifies the odd virus, a local military leader takes matters into his own hands and the proof of the illness is erased just as the illness breaks out across America.

This certainly isn't a coincidence and it certainly isn't a curse reinstated by God. What it is, Joe and Eddie know, is a very well planned attack with a specific ending that could kill millions—and the only one who can bring the illness to a halt is Joe Rush and partner.

The plot is, of course, a frenzied race to stop the bad guys as the body count rises. James Abel gives to his readers yet another tale like no other, where an extremely horrible plague from the past awakens to take center stage.

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

STRIPPED BARE

By Shannon Baker

Kate and Ted Fox live in Frog Creek, Nebraska, where Ted works as the local sheriff and Kate takes care of the ranch. Living with them is Kate's teenage niece, Carly, who has gotten a bit of a wild streak since the death of her parents. Though she's still in school, she seems to do whatever she pleases, whenever and wherever she wants. Kate has a large family (eight siblings) who all like to give her advice, but Kate believes that she lives a dream life, with a dream husband, on a dream ranch.

One day, Kate gets a frantic phone call from Ted's old flame, Roxy, saying that Ted has been shot and Carly's paternal grandfather, Eldon Edwards, is also dead. Roxy is calling from the hospital where she's sitting with Ted's mother. Although he's stable, the doctor's think it's possible he may be paralyzed. To top that all off, Sheriff Milo Ferguson tells Kate that Ted may have been the one to shoot Eldon.

A furious Kate decides to investigate this claim, and the whole family provides advice on how awful Ted is that he's taken up with his old love. More whispers are heard about Eldon; he was about to sell his ranch to an Easterner who wanted to turn it into a buffalo preserve. His nosy neighbors, of course, were against the deal. Carly suddenly vanishes into thin air, the one person who is scheduled to inherit Eldon's property, which is the reason Sheriff Milo thinks Ted shot the man in the first place. There are so many snide cracks and innuendos that Kate is determined to solve Eldon's killing and find Carly, all while running the ranch and trying to decide what to do about the skirt-chasing husband she no longer trusts.

This is a terrific, fast-moving story with a savvy main character at the helm. Kate Fox is a detective that has made her mark and will (hopefully) stick around for many more books to come.

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



OFF THE BOOKS

By Lucy Arlington

The Novel Ideas Literary Agency staff in Inspiration Valley, North Carolina, have a nickname for fellow agent Lila Wilkins—“The Murder Magnet.” Even though she hates the nickname, Lila can't help but agree that it's true. No matter where she goes, she seems to stumble over a murdered body. Or two. And the fact that she represents only mystery authors makes her nickname seem even more appropriate.

Lila is hopeful that she'll get through the upcoming week without yet another example of her nickname. The town is celebrating a wedding-theme week, Booked-for-a-Wedding, featuring the state's best vendors and some of Novel Ideas' most popular bridal book authors. Not only is Lila representing a brand new author at the event, she plans to use the wedding show to gather ideas for her own upcoming nuptials to local police detective Sean Griffiths.

But on the first day of the program, before the doors are open to the public, there's an electrical glitch that threatens to ruin many of the beautifully decorated wedding cakes that have been stored in the venue's walk-in freezer. A local handyman is called to fix the problem right away before anything has a chance to spoil. Unfortunately, the only thing to spoil is the handyman himself, who ends up dead face-down in wedding cake frosting, shot in the head by a nail gun. I bet you can figure out who finds the body. Poor Lila.

Because she's more of an expert at solving murders than she ever expected—or wanted—Lila can't help but be drawn into the case. Especially when it becomes crystal clear that several of the Novel Ideas authors who are in town for the wedding events have reason to want the man dead.

“Off the Books” engages the reader from the opening page. It's a charming whodunit with a happily ever after ending that made me smile.

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

MUCH ADO ABOUT MUFFIN

By Victoria Hamilton

Merry Wynter has been staying with her late husband's family in Spain. She had traveled there at the behest of her brother-in-law Tony to make peace with her mother-in-law, Maria Paradiso, who was on her deathbed. They did make peace with each other before the woman passed, leaving Merry eager to get back to Autumn Vale, her own home in upstate New York.

Happy to be back where she belongs, Merry realizes that, sadly, others are not quite so pleased that she has returned to her home turf of Autumn Vale. Postmistress, Minnie Urquhart, really has a hatred for Merry, but soon Minnie's dead; her corpse was found inside the Post Office. Yes, Minnie was definitely a disagreeable sort who made enemies by the dozen when it came to the town's citizens, but with this murder being committed inside a federal building, the FBI is on hand to investigate. And as long as the big, old FBI is in charge, everybody is a suspect. All town Sheriff Virgil Grace can do is sit on the sidelines and watch.

Yet another nuisance for Merry is the fact that she has a very high strung opera singer, Roma Toscano, staying at her house; the woman is a friend of Pish who lives at Autumn Vale, as well. In order not to upset Pish, Merry puts up with Roma's constant noise. Add in the fact that Merry and Virgil have decided that their flirtations are more than just minor innuendos, and you come away with a mystery/romance/suspense that is a truly terrific read.

Hamilton is very good at keeping readers up all night trying to figure out who did what to who. So kudos to Victoria Hamilton for yet another incredible *Merry Muffin Mystery*.

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





BLUE MADONNA

By James R. Benn

Billy Boyle, U.S. Army Detective and former Boston cop is back, and in this terrific mystery he is up against his toughest case yet. He will be asked to sneak through enemy lines in France right before the Normandy invasion is about to erupt.

Court-martialed in 1944, Captain Billy Boyle lost his rank and was reduced to private when he was found guilty on bogus charges of black market business. Not only was the rank stripped but a sentence of three months hard labor was also handed out. But an opportunity is given to Billy; he can avoid the sentence if he takes on the mission to save a valuable allied soldier stuck behind enemy lines.

The first step of the adventure is to trek through a secret tunnel, once used by escaping Huguenots (French Protestants) in the 17th century and has now been taken over by the Allies. But this particular safety net carved into the outskirts of Chaumont, France, turns out to be anything but safe. Two downed airmen, one Canadian and one American, have been killed there. Billy is flown in as part of a trio that includes himself, Blake, referred to by one and all as "Big Mike," and Kaz, his sidekick on all previous military investigations. Their objective is clear, yet this mission to allow safe passage is more than harrowing.

This 11th installment of the *Billy Boyle Mysteries* uses the Invasion of Normandy as the background. The Army's toughest detective is determined to prove his innocence, hating the lies and charges brought against him. Add in that D-Day is about to happen, and he must also capture a black market ring, the Morgan Gang, who just might have had something to do with Billy's false arrest in the first place, and readers receive a non-stop action story that adds in the golden nugget of a really cool history lesson.

This is one fan who can't wait to read installment #12!

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

WATCHING EDIE

By Camilla Way

This is a fascinating book. The title will pull the reader in and the character of Edie is just the type of unique girl who makes you want to read. She is a girl who learns that things don't always work out the way you want them to.

Edie is thirty-three years old and working as a waitress. Pregnant, she's living by herself. When the child is born, Edie finds herself weighed down and falls into a depression, thinking that there isn't anyone she can turn to. However, someone is watching her... just waiting for the chance to enter Edie's circle and prove that she can be a perfect friend.

Her life is soon turned upside down and inside out. Edie is placed on a path where she quickly begins to realize that some people who have hurt her, or people she has hurt in the past, never let go.

Heather just wants a friend to call her own and chooses Edie to be that friend. Although Heather does have good intentions, some turn to suspicion and exploitation as the story moves forward.

So it's up to you, reader. Who is good and who is evil? That answer, among others, will be discovered as you dive into this fast-paced story that will make you not want to put down the book until it comes to a complete close. "Watching Edie" is a very devious suspense that author Camilla Way ends with an extremely interesting twist.

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



BRITISH MANOR MURDER

By Leslie Meier

Lucy Stone and her friend Sue are on their way to the "Heads Up!" hat exhibition at the Earl of Wickham's manor in the UK. The two women say that even if they have to spend the entire holiday curtsyeing they can't wait to get there. But, what they don't know, is at Moreton Manor the privileged life isn't always so privileged.

Things start out with a true 'bang' when a portrait falls off the wall with no help from anyone and talk of a deadly family omen crops up. The Earl, Perry, and his sister, Poppy, are extremely helpful to their jetlagged guests, but when the picture hits the floor, Lucy becomes just a little uneasy. More bad feelings come in quick succession; for instance, Aunt Millicent and her handmaiden, Harrison, unexpectedly drop by for the exhibition and family meals grow tense. Things then turn even more haunting when a body that has been smacked with the Chapel's gold-plated reliquary is found in a sealed-off room. The corpse is identified as Harrison's son, Cyril.

Lucy considers the situation, the weapon, and the location, and believes it's an inside job. It also turns out that Cyril wasn't precisely a gentleman and it's not clear what business he had on the property in the first place. He might have been trying to run with the family silverware before his demise, or was simply an object of a certain family member's contempt.

On the job, Lucy realizes that this reign of terror will continue, so she must keep her ear to the ground and catch a killer she believes has been in her company all along... just waiting for the chance to kill again.

Leslie Meier is the author of sixteen *Lucy Stone* mysteries and has written for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. Living in New England, she's gearing up for her next *Stone* tale and this fan, among a slew of others, can't wait to see what brilliant plot happens next!

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

KILLER LOOK

By Linda Fairstein

It is amazing to think that this is the 18th novel featuring Attorney Alexandra Cooper, seeing as that this character just keeps getting better and better.

This "fresh" tale looks into the fantasy world of Manhattan's high fashion industry. Alexandra, who ordinarily heads up the Sex Crimes Division, has been under strict orders to take some time and recuperate from the kidnapping nightmare that she has just been through.

But, as luck would have it, instead of rest she hears from an old teammate named Lily that her father, Wolf Savage, has died. Savage was a billionaire fashion designer who died with a plastic bag over his head; a bag full of helium. Lily is sure that her father did not commit suicide and Alexandra is quickly pulled into the case.

New York City is *the* fashion capital, and nowhere is this more evident than on the runways where top designers surprise the masses with their creativity. Of course, the fashionistas are also one of the meanest groups around. As for the death of Wolf Savage, this tragedy occurs only a few days before the biggest show of his career, and once "murder" is announced as the cause, the case becomes a media spectacle.

The Savage family members come out of the woodwork; namely Wolf's brother Hal, CFO of the business, and Wolf's son Reed, who runs the firm's international operations. Both rush to the mortuary to get the body buried right away. Citing religious reasons, they want to make sure that the police cannot inspect Wolf's body. The family also does not want Alexandra on the case.

Against orders, Alexandra dives right in, and with the help of Detectives Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace, she learns just how spiteful the fashion world really is.

It's not a surprise to say that this is an excellent story told by a champion "teller of suspense tales." Linda Fairstein never disappoints! Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

KILT AT THE HIGHLAND GAMES

By Kaitlyn Dunnett

It's getting near time for the annual Highland Games to be held in the small town of Moosetookalook, Maine. The invasion of tourists is second nature to Liss MacCrimmon Ruskin, but she's about to gear up to do a little detective work—which will include finding the killer of Jason Graye, Moosetookalook's most despised town selectman and a shady realtor to boot.

The case begins when she's awakened by her cat Lumpkin at three in the morning. Liss is about to fall back to sleep when she suddenly realizes that something isn't right. When she moves to the window the fire siren goes off and she finds her friend's, Angie Hogencamp's bookstore and apartment up above, on fire. When Liss and her husband get down to the scene the building is fully engulfed. It's determined that the cause of the fire is arson and Liss is very concerned for her friend, being that Angie and her two children are now among the missing.

As the police work the case things go from bad to worse for Liss, when she and Dan are on their way to the games and they hear a gunshot. The shot comes from the house of Jason Graye, and when they enter they discover Jason's body on the floor.

There are umpteen suspects and the law is swamped, trying to provide police presence for the games, search for the killer of Jason Graye, try to find missing people, and also look into a break-in that occurs at the post office. The law has to find out if the fire, break-in and murder are connected, or if an odd crime spree is about to hit the village.

From the name of the town to the theme of the Highland Games, this author has done a remarkable job bringing the reader in and offering a non-stop barrage of crimes that all come together perfectly.

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

SO SAY THE FALLEN

By Stuart Neville

Second in a new crime series featuring Detective Chief Inspector Serena Flanagan, it is important to note that even though this is a standalone, you will want to run back and delve into the first book as soon as possible.

Serena is sent to the scene of a sudden death. The victim is Henry Garrick, a local car dealer who had been very badly maimed in a car accident just a few months ago. Now it seems Mr. Garrick has committed suicide. At first, this looks to be a straightforward case of a man who simply did not want to live with all his wounds. Trouble is, Serena doesn't feel right about the suicide theory, even though there is no evidence to support otherwise.

Serena also hasn't had the best of luck. She is a cancer survivor but worries constantly that the dreaded disease will reappear. She's also in therapy and her husband is on her about giving up her job in order to save their marriage. If she doesn't do this for him, he says, she risks losing her children in a custody fight. But there's no way she can stop being a cop and this new case has her severely bothered.

More and more the police are calling it a suicide by morphine. The two things that bother Serena, however, are a photo found near the victim's bed and the extremely cheerful visiting nurse who makes Serena want to know more about the victim and his wife. More questions commence: What part did Reverend McKay play in Garrick's suicide? And why does Garrick's brother beg Serena to investigate the drowning death of a child?

Serena can be a real pain at times, but readers will want to make sure she isn't having to make the painful choice between her job and her family as she attempts to bring a killer to justice. What's there to say besides, Stuart Neville is a fantastic author.

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



SALEM'S CIPHER

By Jess Lourey

A fantastic story about a cryptanalyst (great career choice, aye?) who is a genius that everyone wants on their side.

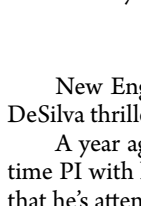
Her name is Salem Wiley; she has been bombarded by people wanting her to work for them and their companies since the day she made a breakthrough in the completely impossible to understand field of quantum computing. But even geniuses have their issues. Salem may be smart, but she is also dealing with a life of fear. She is immensely scared of all public places, which makes having a normal life extremely difficult.

The difficult life grows when, out of the blue, her work brings to light a plot to take out the very first female presidential candidate who has ever even had a shot at the Oval Office. And once Salem figures out this danger is imminent, she becomes a target of the bad guys who have their own plan to rule the world set in place.

But clues do not exist only in the present day for Salem. As things move forward, she realizes that to solve the mystery she will have to look back in time. Not literally, of course, but through the old writings of Emily Dickinson, where encrypted messages were hidden long ago. Not only that, but also codes going back centuries that Salem finds disguised in the Beale Cipher. As she proceeds through this maze, Salem must stop this horrific plot, solve the mystery, and keep herself alive.

History, a fantastic setting, a great character that draws the reader in who is both weak in her fears and strong in her mind... this suspenseful tale has something for absolutely everyone to enjoy.

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



THE DREAD LINE

By Bruce DeSilva

New England Patriots fans unite! (Just kidding, but they do play a part in this fantastic DeSilva thriller).

A year ago, Liam Mulligan was fired from his reporter's job and decided to work as a part time PI with his friend and owner of McCracken's Detective Agency. He's a busy guy, seeing as that he's attempting to solve three cases at once. He has to find a masked robber who pulled out a gun and jammed it into the face of an extremely wealthy man while he was looking into his safe deposit box at the bank. The robber walked away with sixteen million dollars' worth of jewelry.

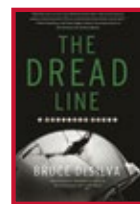
He also is working for a client, the New England Patriots, who want Mulligan to do a background check on a defensive tackle they want to draft. This should be easy considering Mulligan already knows the guy... but it's turning out to be more difficult than expected.

Final case is tracking down the person or persons who are kidnapping dogs and killing them. Mulligan has two dogs of his own and wants to get this beast that's leaving kills on his own porch. He has granted the slime the name, Cat the Ripper, and will gladly do this job for free.

The NFL affair really seems to be ten-fold, as the player has something to hide and a bad guy is out there willing to commit murder to make sure that secret doesn't get out. Do these three cases come together? You'll have to read and find out.

And that won't be a problem because this book is a real gem. From the very beginning the reader is caught up in the mess of a high priced football team, which sounds a great deal like it's been ripped from the headlines during the start of any football season. The characters are fun, the paths to prosecution are many and intricately written, which means that (no surprise) DeSilva has done it again.

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





**"STANDS TO BECOME THIS
GENERATION'S TRAVIS MCGEE."**

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STEALING THE COUNTESS

By David Housewright

There has been an unbelievably bold theft. A person, or persons, have stolen a very famous and very expensive Stradivarius. This violin is known as the Countess Borromeo, and has a price tag of \$4 million dollars.

This theft brings forward a very unlikely private investigator. Millionaire Rushmore McKenzie sometimes works on cases, although he's not a licensed P.I. In fact, he just does it as a hobby and likes to help out his friends when they're in need. This particular friend, Maestro Paul Duclos, was back in his hometown of Bayfield, Wisconsin visiting, when the violin was stolen from the Bed and Breakfast where he was staying. He has asked McKenzie for help in finding a way to track down the thieves and get it back. Seems that his insurance company is refusing to pay until someone has been convicted for taking it.

McKenzie is to be the middleman and offer the thief \$250,000 for the safe return of the Countess, no questions asked. The maestro is willing to pay from his own pocket because he 'feels' about the violin almost as one would feel about their child. McKenzie accepts the challenge, knowing it will be illegal and that everyone from the police and FBI to the insurance company and his own lawyer will be part of this particular game. But as McKenzie heads out to the small town of Bayfield to find out who stole the violin and buy it back, he also discovers that there are others after the violin who just might be willing to kill for it.

The reader is taken right into the story without any delay and it captures the interest immediately. Even the emotional classical music genre as the background allows the reader to see what intense bond exists between artist and instrument, as the plot becomes more and more fascinating by the moment.

This story is a must read and should be on the list of any and all suspense readers.

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

MURDER AT ROUGH POINT

By Alyssa Maxwell

All that glitters is not gold is a well-known saying that means not everything that looks precious actually is. This can mean people, places or things that promise to be a lot more than they really are. Such as, the glittering town of Newport, Rhode Island, at the end of the 19th century. That was the high-point of the Gilded Age, where gold glittered and slime roamed the halls of stunning mansions.

Emma Cross, a poor relation of the famous Vanderbilt family, is looking for a way to shape her identity by being a reporter for *The Newport Observer* and, on the side, working as a detective.

Emma is sent by the *Observer* to cover a cream-of-the-crop house party being held at Rough Point, the Newport "cottage" owned by a distant cousin of hers, Frederick Vanderbilt. Upon arrival, Emma is surprised that the guests include her own estranged parents who have recently returned from Europe, along with a variety of artists including author, Edith Wharton. When one of the artists, an Englishman, is discovered dead at the bottom of a cliff, Rough Point turns from a glittering gold retreat to a dreary, dark murder scene. Then, when a second guest is found belly-up, no one is above suspicion.

As Newport Police Detective Jesse Whyte searches for a killer in the middle of all these folks, Emma tries to help with the assistance of Mrs. Wharton. With lots and lots of suspects on hand, Emma and her aide will need to find the culprit before he or she can silence them for good.

This particular book is number four in a series called, *Gilded Newport Mysteries*. It seems that Ms. Maxwell, the author, is a fan of Newport and its grand houses and neighborhoods. The characters are fun, the dialogue is both charming and intelligent, but the scenery that makes up that extravagant time period in New England really is the gem in these glorious tales.

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



THE VERITAS DECEPTION

By Lynne Constantine

I have to admit, "The Veritas Deception" took me by surprise. Constantine has written a gritty, pre-apocalyptic thriller that will have you wondering if we're living in this period of time. The characters, both good and bad, are written with such realistic emotion that you'll be cheering and jeering throughout the novel. Some of which you'll both cheer and jeer, because you won't know where on the good and evil spectrum they lie until they're fully exposed.

With "The Veritas Deception," Constantine has written a novel that will leave you thinking about the realism of its possibilities. The next time you turn on the television or look at a print ad, you just might find yourself wondering if there is an ulterior motive to the words and images you are viewing.

Although this story comes to a conclusion, you'll want to see these characters again as their story is not complete. "The Veritas Deception" is written on the grand scale of good and evil, yet delivered by ordinary, everyday people with the same virtues and flaws as all of us.

Once you start reading, you'll be hooked.

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

NOVEMBER RAIN

By Donald Harstad

In the previous entry in the *Carl Houseman Mystery* series, the small-town Iowa deputy sheriff had become embroiled in a case with national security implications. Now, in the sixth book in the series, Deputy Houseman becomes involved in a terrorist kidnapping that uproots him from Iowa and lands him in London, England.

It's November, 2003, and Carl's daughter, Jane, is studying in the United Kingdom along with Emma Schiller, her best friend from Maitland, Iowa. When Emma disappears on her way home to their Highgate flat from the local pub, it's not immediately worrisome to Jane. Emma is a free spirit who likes to party, and she has plenty of male friends. But days pass without her return, raising concerns for Jane as well as back in Maitland. The sheriff makes arrangements to send Carl to England to consult with the Metropolitan Police. He also saddles Carl with Carson Hilgenberg, Nation County's young prosecuting attorney.

Unknown to Carl, the kidnapping of Emma is part of a larger conspiracy that began nearly a year earlier. Of the triumvirate who set the plan in motion, two of them—a self-important college professor and a female solicitor with Palestinian roots—view their group as a way to help Muslim prisoners in English jails. The third participant, though, is a graduate of the al Qaeda camps who plans to manipulate the others to mount a major terrorist strike.

Carl's involvement becomes much deeper than his hosts at Scotland Yard planned. The kidnappers release a series of videos along with their demands. But then the story takes an unplanned turn for both the police and the terrorist—a turn that puts Carl directly in the line of fire.

Harstad has done his research and gives an interesting and faceted depiction of London. With his twenty-six years of experience as a deputy sheriff and investigator, Harstad keeps the story grounded and realistic. Where some terrorism stories are drawn in stark black and white, Harstad is comfortable with gray—like a rainy November day in London.

Reviewed by David Ingram ■





COFFIN ROAD

By Peter May

A man is washed up on the seashore, barely alive. He has no memory of who he is or why he's been living on the island of Harris in the Outer Hebrides for the past few months. As he staggers up the beach, a woman shouts out to him. Addressing him as Neal Maclean, she immediately takes him to a cottage that is supposedly his. It doesn't take long before people living on the island tell him that he was writing a novel based on the disappearance of three lighthouse keepers back in the year 1900; a disappearance that has never been explained.

Moving forward, Neal discovers a map highlighting a location called, Coffin Road. He doesn't have any idea what the road should mean to him, because the memory loss is literally wearing him out. Heading to the outline of his supposed novel, he finds that nothing has actually been written; not one single sentence. He begins to believe that maybe this is a scam of some kind put on by his neighbors, but why? With no other path to walk, he takes the map and follows it to Coffin Road, trying to find anything that will jog a memory. What he does find is something very strange. He comes upon the body of a murdered man and has a creeping suspicion that he may be responsible.

In comes Homicide Detective George Gunn. Gunn doesn't quite believe Neal's story of amnesia but doesn't arrest him. After all, evidence is needed, and until Gunn can either break Neal or find a way to uncover secrets the man may really have forgotten, finding the killer will be a brutal task.

An extremely chilling tale. From a man with memory loss, to a young girl dealing with the loss of her father, to a tale of a policeman unmasking the past, readers will have to pay close attention so they don't lose track of the amazing web May has created.

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

CURIOUS MINDS

By Janet Evanovich and Phoebe Sutton

It's no mystery why the prolific Janet Evanovich is a *New York Times* best-selling author. She knows how to hook a reader from the very first paragraph of the very first chapter of every book. Consider the opening hook of "Curious Minds," a *Knight and Moon* novel written by Evanovich and Phoebe Sutton, which features one of the main characters holding a flashlight and creeping through a dark cave toward a twelve-foot tower of solid gold bricks, shining like new because gold never tarnishes. See what I mean? And that's just the beginning of this adventure, which pairs two extremely unlikely protagonists, Emerson Knight and Riley Moon.

Emerson Knight is introverted, eccentric, and lacking in some basic social graces. But he's also mega rich, brilliant, and good-looking. When Riley Moon, a recent graduate of Harvard Business School and Harvard Law, lands her dream job at the Manhattan mega-bank, Blane-Grunwald, as a junior analyst, she's surprised that her very first assignment is keeping an eagle eye on bank client Emerson Knight. Things really get dicey when Knight demands to see the gold bars that are a huge part of his account with the bank. And won't take no for an answer. What follows is a search for a missing man, who just happens to be a partner in the bank and a life-and-death race across the country to find the gold, which is suspiciously missing.

"Curious Minds" is a roller coaster ride done in typical Evanovich fashion, mixing humor and adventure with a liberal amount of romantic teasing. Another winner, for sure!

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



MANITOU CANYON

By William Kent Krueger

There is a search on for John Harris, a wealthy builder who grew up across the street from Cork O'Connor, the well-known main character of this series. It seems that Harris was on a trip into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness with his grandchildren when he mysteriously disappeared.

The local police and rescue have attempted and exhausted all possibilities of finding him and have unwillingly called off the search. At this point, the family heads straight to Cork to ask him to take another look. It is now late November and winter is looming; soon the first snow of the season will be upon them. As this place is located in the town of Aurora in the deep north woods of Minnesota, once winter blows in, it will last forever and call off any and all searches for the beloved man.

Adding to the winter darkness is the fact that November has always been a very disturbing time of year for Cork; he lost his wife in November and has had some very unpleasant and disturbing things occur in this specific month. Now, to top it off, his daughter is planning her wedding to be held this dismal time, so Cork isn't thrilled to take on a missing person's case. Seeing as that it's his nature to help people, however, he agrees to go back to the place where Harris was last seen. If he can find nothing in two or three days, his search will end as well.

As the days pass, Cork's family nervously await his return. Finally, they fly to the lake where Cork was last seen, locate his campsite, but find that he has disappeared also. What they do find is... blood.

Krueger writes so well that the reader can feel the icy winds and hear the waves lapping at the sides of canoes as a frightening mystery unwinds. Highly dramatic setting, incredible plot—this is an incredible thriller.

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

LIAR'S KEY

By Carla Neggers

"Liar's Key" is a new novel featuring the great FBI agent duo of Sharpe & Donovan.

This time out, Agent Emma Sharpe becomes just a little distrustful when retired Special Agent Gordon Wheelock—who was one of the FBI's best in the field of art crimes during his time—pays a visit to her Boston office. Wheelock tells Emma that he has heard a rumor recently about ancient mosaics being stolen. Emma, being an art crimes expert herself, refuses to discuss the case with him. After all, they are rumors and not facts... so far.

The rumors could be truthful, however, seeing as that Oliver York, an English art thief, is at the core of them all. In the past, Emma's grandfather—a private art detective by the name of Wendell Sharpe—followed Oliver for at least ten years, and Wheelock knows that Wendell never passed on all the information he had on Oliver, keeping the thief from arrest and prosecution for his crimes.

When Emma is drawn into a distressing death, the evidence in the case points to a plot between Wendell Sharpe and Oliver. Emma's fiancé, a deep cover agent named Colin Donovan, is sure that he cannot stay out of this case as Emma becomes obsessed by it. He also knows that it'll be difficult for her to be questioned in regards to her own family member being a part of a criminal's past.

From Boston to Maine and on to Ireland, Emma and Colin follow the trail of a dangerous person as their families and friends are placed in the killer's sights. With assistance from their friends, Irish Priest Finian Bracken, and Emma's brother, Lucas, the Sharpes and the Donovans band together in order to protect themselves and stop a murderer in their tracks.

Again, a big hurrah for Carla Neggers! She is one who consistently pens exhilarating and full-of-action suspense novels, making her one of the "best of the best" in the world of fiction.

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

BURN WHAT WILL BURN

By C.B. McKenzie

Bob Reynolds is a man who moved from the Lone Star State to an old house in the town of Doker, Arkansas. He did this after he lost his wife, and everyone else he cared about, to the hands of death. After inheriting some money, he now lives with some chickens and is surrounded by truly odd neighbors in a town that holds many, many secrets.

But trouble and pain seem to follow Bob. It doesn't take very long for him to trip over the body of a dead man in the Little Piney Creek. He'd like to forget he found the corpse, but his morality wins and he gets in touch with Sheriff Sam Baxter. But when they both return to the creek, lo and behold, the body's gone. Bob turns a bit anxious when he becomes aware of the fact that the sheriff might just be looking to arrest him. And after he's knocked out while snooping on the property near the creek, Bob finds himself in jail.

As much as Bob would have been better off if he had pretended not to see the body in the creek, the hair goes up on the back of his neck as he starts to question just what's going on in the little town. After being released from the cell, the local doctor gives Bob information about the twisted relationships that make up Doker, with some going back generations. The doctor also adds that Bob might like to take a little trip to Hot Springs. Bob does get away for a time, yet seems to have a death wish when he decides not to leave well enough alone.

Bob must stand against the loyalty that spans eons between these townspeople in a place where something negative always seems to be blowing in the wind. The character of Bob is solid, and the haunting surroundings make for a fantastic mystery! Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

THE KEPT WOMAN

By Karin Slaughter

You know that list you own (a list we *all* own) of the people, places, things, etc. that never let us down? Well, when speaking about writers, here she is again and has *still* not let us down.

In this new Karin Slaughter suspense novel, Will Trent and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation are brought to the forefront when a murder scene is discovered at an abandoned construction site—a scene that becomes much more dangerous when the dead man is found to be an ex-cop.

Will and Sara Linton, who happens to be the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's new medical examiner and also Will's lover, are surprised that the extensive amount of blood loss didn't actually belong to the corpse. Not to mention, the bloody footprints leading away from the scene of the crime do indicate there is another victim, evidently a woman, who was carried away from the scene. She has vanished and will vanish altogether if they don't figure out what the heck happened and find her ASAP.

Will knows that the warehouse where the corpse was found belongs to the city's biggest and most high-profile local athlete, a man who is wealthy, powerful and connected. This athlete happens to be married to Will's ex-wife and is protected by a group of high-priced, very smart, very smarmy lawyers.

This new case is about to blow up in everyone's face as an unexpected discovery reveals a personal link to Will, which makes things very tough for him and everyone he works with, as well as his family and friends. Beginning with a crime and building to an ending that's beyond suspenseful, readers will learn all kinds of secrets they never saw coming.

"The Kept Woman" is straightforward, very fast paced, and Slaughter's characters are those very imperfect souls who jump off the page. A combination police procedural and psychological suspense, Karin Slaughter has, yet again, created an unforgettable tale that includes thrills, love, loss, recovery and ultimate salvation.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of *The Angel Chronicles* series and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by *Suspense Publishing* ■



SEDUCED

By Randy Wayne White

Hannah Smith makes her daily wage as a fishing guide and part-time investigator in Florida. She has rough patches in her life like everyone else, but now she's facing something much more dangerous than ever before.

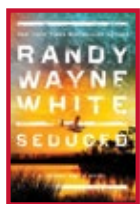
From out of the shadows of her mother's past comes a threat. This phantom is Harney Chatham, Florida's former Lieutenant Governor who just happened to have an affair with Hannah's mother, Loretta. Now deceased, the man lost his life while in the company of Loretta. Being a married man that fact, if known, would cause gossip and destroy his legacy as well as his family.

Reggie, who worked as the Lt. Governor's chauffeur, is a man who always seems to know everything that went on with his boss. He locates and enlists Hannah's help to avoid a scandal by moving the corpse to a place called the Salt Creek Gun Club—this is a location that has a strong link to Chatham and would be a perfect spot for his reported "death."

Unfortunately, Hannah and Reggie run directly into Kermit Bigalow, manager of the club's orange groves, along with Lonnie Chatham, widow of Mr. Chatham. Hannah never wanted anything to do with her mother's boyfriend, yet now she's telling lies and everything is turning out badly.

While the personal issue is bad, there's also a mysterious disease ravaging the orange trees. Apparently the only cure comes from pre-Columbian trees growing deep in Florida swampland. This cure could bring a ton of money to the person who finds and patents it, which Kermit is striving to do. Hannah will have to struggle with problems, both human and inhuman in this tale, as she fights for her mother as well as a source of income that could be fading straight into the Florida sunset.

This is the fourth novel featuring Hannah Smith by Randy Wayne White and, hopefully, will not be the last. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



SECOND LIFE

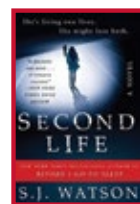
By S. J. Watson

This racy, tense suspense novel is set in England and fraught with nerve-wracking suspense. Make sure the edge of your seat is in good shape because it'll get a good workout.

Julia Plummer is part of a tangled family web that fills her with regret, guilt and sadness, and that's before she learns of her sister Kate's death in Paris. She and her husband are raising Kate's son, fourteen-year-old Connor, and have had him since he was very young, due to Kate's dissolute, unorganized lifestyle. As children, they were left to fend for themselves and Julia, the older sister, was always there for Kate. Until she had run away to Berlin while Kate was still young. Until she took her son from her. Until, she feels, she left her to die without her big sister.

Now, Julia wants to make up for everything and find Kate's killer. Exploring the online dating site Kate had been using before her murder has unintended consequences. Julia tries to pull away, but is lured by dark urges. She sinks deeper into a situation that she knows she should put a stop to, but is powerless. She's losing sight of what she needs to do to protect Connor, her husband, and herself. Buried secrets of the past can't stay buried now, she realizes.

This edgy mystery will keep you guessing and reading, and guessing again, well into the night. Reviewed by Kaye George, author of "Requiem in Red" ■



A PRIMARY DECISION

By Dr. Kevin Leman and Jeff Nesbit

Number three in *The Worthington Destiny* series, "A Primary Decision" will keep readers glued to the pages.

When this tale begins, the youngest member of the highly-influential Worthington family is under the gun. Sarah Worthington, a prominent lawyer in New York City, is about to run for the post of U.S. Attorney General. If she succeeds in getting past the harsh inspection of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sarah will be the first Worthington in seven generations to put herself in line to one day become President of the United States.

Sarah was always able to hold her own in her strong-willed family, consisting of three older brothers, but never did she imagine that she would be running for this office, this early in her political career.

As she answers the questions of this group of politicians who are fiercely digging into her past and present, she wonders for a moment if running was a mistake. After all, she and her family do have some secrets in their proverbial closets, but Sarah is determined to go ahead with her plans.

When it looks like many powerful people behind the scenes are about to bring the Worthington family down to its knees, the President of the U.S. orders her to close the investigation she's working on. Instead, she goes onward and upward, sometimes putting aside her prominent family in order to prosecute the President, himself.

Nothing will stop her as she climbs toward becoming the first woman in absolute power, which makes this even more interesting considering the fact that America is dealing with a "changing of the guard" as we speak. Will the first female President happen in our upcoming election? We shall see. But when it comes to this plot and these characters, readers will find the fiction a whole lot more fun than the facts on everyday TV.

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



THURSDAY'S CHILDREN

By Nicci French

"Thursday's Children" is a very good book, as it's a culmination of the past, present, and how our secrets can come back at any time to revisit us.

Frieda Klein is a psychotherapist who has agreed to take on a new client—the daughter of an old school friend from her hometown, Becky. Becky is a female who has had some serious trouble; she's lived through an attack that occurred in her own room in her own house while her mother was actually inside the house at the same time, and didn't realize what was going on. Her attacker left a warning: "Don't think of telling anyone. Nobody will believe you." Oddly enough, the criminal is right. No one believes Becky when she speaks about this horror, except for Frieda. Unfortunately, soon after this all comes to light, Becky is found hanging from a beam in her bedroom.

Frieda had not expected to ever be reminded of a violent incident that had been done to her, personally, when she was just sixteen and still living at home. She hasn't been back there in twenty-three years, but after Becky's demise, she returns to visit her ill mother and see if she can find out who harmed her all those years ago. Perhaps the same person is responsible for the attack on Becky. Frieda has many friends and contemporaries who support her as she travels back to her town to find out where everyone was and what they were doing on the night she was attacked, trying to put the pieces of an old crime together.

This is the fourth installment in the *Frieda Klein Mystery* series by Nicci French, and is full of familiar folks from previous books that readers will love to see once again. Drawn into the story immediately, you will wonder if the ghosts of the past can finally be put to rest, and if the bad guy/guys will be caught so that Frieda can finally find some peace.

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



MICHELANGELO'S GHOST

By Gigi Pandian

Jaya Jones, the adventurous historian/protagonist in Gigi Pandian's *Treasure Hunt Mystery* series, rarely has a problem that she can't handle. And she's always intrigued by artifacts and legends from the past, especially those involving India. So when Dr. Lilith Vine, a former mentor, contacts Jaya about lost works of art linking India to the Italian Renaissance and asks for her help in locating them, Jaya can't say no. Especially when Dr. Vine entrusts Jaya with three notebooks detailing the mysterious art, which seem to have a direct connection to the great Michelangelo.

When Jaya shows the notebooks to her on-again/off-again mysterious boyfriend, Lane Peters, an art historian who operates just shy of the law, he's unconvinced that they're genuine. Despite Lane's objections, Jaya perseveres, and soon becomes totally immersed in reading and deciphering the notebooks. But fate can derail even the best-laid plans, as Jaya finds out when faced with the sudden appearance of her only brother, Mahilan, who has traveled to San Francisco to introduce his sister to his new lady love, Ava. Jaya's initial reaction to Ava is a cool one, as Ava's is to her. In fact, Ava seems too good to be true. Their family dinner is cut short when Jaya receives a strange phone call from Dr. Vine, prompting Jaya to drive to her mentor's home.

Unfortunately, by the time Jaya arrives, Dr. Vine has died. The police rule it an accident, but Jaya suspects the death could have some connection with the notebooks, and shares her concern with Mahilan and, by extension, Ava. The unlikely trio of Jaya, Mahilan and Ava decide to visit Italy's Park of Monsters, where the mysterious artwork is supposedly hidden. They find themselves in the middle of a centuries-old ghost story.

"Michelangelo's Ghost" is the fourth in Gigi Pandian's *Treasure Hunt* mysteries, and like the others, draws the reader in from the first page to the final, breathtaking climax. This series just keeps getting better!

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

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

By B.A. Paris

This book proves that looks are most definitely deceiving.

Jack and Grace seem to have the perfect marriage. Jack is the ultimate Prince Charming who is the perfect, caring husband. Grace is the elegant, perfect housewife. Together they enjoy the perfect home life. Being a lawyer, Jack is a great provider and absolutely devoted. Although they do not have children as of yet, Jack and Grace are really looking forward to the day when the patter of little feet can be heard.

Their family is going to grow a bit, however, now that Millie, Grace's little sister who is afflicted with Down's syndrome, will be coming to live with them. Happiness is seen by everyone who comes upon this couple, yet 'behind closed doors' what really happens is more nightmare than fairytale.

Told from Grace's point of view, the story moves back and forth between one year ago and present day. Disturbing, to say the least, readers will definitely be shaken as the story commences and they become immediately absorbed. The writing was incredible, and the pace is quick, offering up too many chills to count. Not since *War of the Roses* has this reader seen a marriage such as this one. Romance does not play a part. In fact, one line speaking about loving "fear" sums up the only romantic aspect belonging to one of the most prominent characters.

"Behind Closed Doors" screams: "Stay single!"

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

HARMONY

By Carolyn Parkhurst

Author Carolyn Parkhurst gives the reader a lot more than the slow-but-sure disastrous times that the Hammond family walks into when they give up their life in Washington, D.C., to move to a camp in New Hampshire run by Autism counselor, Scott Bean.

The Hammond family consists of husband and wife Alexandra and Josh, and their two daughters, Tilly and Iris. Iris is eleven years old and tells the story of what happens through her own eyes. It seems that each family at the camp has one child who is “different.” Iris relates to this although they are different in very different ways. Iris is the “normal” one, and when she hears her mother describe her as ‘NT’ she hopes that means “Natural Talent.” What it does mean, however, is that Iris is “neurotypical” or normal compared to sister. The parents have tried everything they can to help their daughter, Tilly, who is of genius quality but is said to be un-diagnosable.

Written from three different angles—Alexandra, and her outlook on the situation, the main ideas coming from Iris, and Tilly’s view—the parents sell everything they own to bring their family to this camp called Harmony. Readers get to know the child behavior expert Scott Bean who tries to help children who are different or suffer from Autism. However, when the family settles in they learn that their new mentor in the woods will not help anything...he will simply push them to the limits of their sanity.

As the story moves along, some readers will not be able to put the book down as they see clearly the strength, love and bonds of a real family and how they survive the improbable.

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

THE CANDIDATE

By Lis Wiehl with Sebastian Stuart

Investigative journalist, Erica Sparks, is one hundred percent sure that it’s in her job description to introduce the candidates for the upcoming presidential election to the voters; she will do this on her show, *The Erica Sparks Effect*. This is more than just another beg for good ratings, since she’s been told repeatedly by her bosses that she can’t go on forever talking about past investigations and expect to earn and keep a large following of viewers.

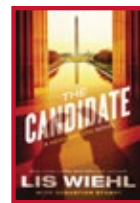
Now, while covering the final Democratic debate featuring Senator Mike Ortiz and Governor Fred Buchanan, a bomb explodes sending Erica into shock along with her audience. Recovering from the horror, she feels in her journalistic bones that she must live up to her title and find out whether this was a random act of violence or something far worse.

Erica is certain that Senator Ortiz’s wife, Celeste Pierce Ortiz, is keeping far more information to herself than she’s sharing with the population. When the two of them are together they begin to talk, and when this happens Erica believes that she has the upper hand. This is one of those beliefs that turns out to be untrue.

Another thing that’s new in Erica’s life is the fact that she has won full-time custody of her daughter, and is knee-deep into looking for someone to hire that can be a part of their lives, help her out at home, and take care of the child when she’s on the job. Greg, her fiancé, is currently working in Australia as she tries valiantly to uncover what Celeste’s secrets are, while keeping her daughter safe as she exposes a dangerous villain.

For those who love to read about the law and the fictional world of politicians, this is a fantastic suspense with a well-written plot and a great heroine who knows her business.

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



THE DIVA SERVES HIGH TEA

By Krista Davis



Two of my all-time favorite fictional protagonists are at it again in “The Diva Serves High Tea,” the latest in the *Domestic Diva Mystery* series penned by Krista Davis. In this tenth book, domestic high priestess Natasha (no last name necessary—there’s only one Natasha) and special event and party planner Sophie Winston are both excited (for entirely different reasons) about two new businesses in the Old Town section of Arlington, Virginia that they call home. The Parlour is a charming tea shop serving all things tea and crumpet-related, while directly across the street is a new, very upscale antiques shop run by the charming and handsome Robert Johnson. I’ll give you three guesses which store is Natasha’s favorite, and the first two don’t count. Let’s just say that the domestic high priestess who only likes chrome, glass, and sleek lines suddenly develops a taste for all things of a more “historic” vintage.

Things really start to heat up when Sophie, out for an evening stroll with dog Daisy, finds the handsome and mysterious Robert dying in his home. His last word to Sophie is “Rosie,” and Sophie has no idea what/who that is. At first, it appears that Robert has died as the result of a fall, but further tests reveal that he is a victim of food poisoning. Botulism, to be precise. When it’s revealed that Robert ate at The Parlour the day he died, the police immediately shut the tea shop down so they can investigate.

While the always dramatic Natasha is wailing about the lost love that could have been, the always curious Sophie suspects there was a lot more going on in the dapper Robert’s life than anyone knew about. And sets out to find out what really happened to him, as well as identify the mysterious “Rosie.”

“The Diva Serves High Tea” is a delightful read, a real treat for lovers of cozy mysteries. I loved it!

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

UNRAVELED

By Reavis Z. Wortham

“Unraveled” is number six in the *Red River Mystery* series, which continues to bring extreme entertainment to the reader.

This time we start out in the small Northeast Texas community of Center Springs, a town that saw a list of troubles during the 1960’s—from murder to bank robbery and back again.

Things began to calm down in 1968, but the Clay family and the Mayfield family, who have had a long history of feuding, come to life once again and soon find themselves ready to explode. There is a fatal car accident involving Maggie Mayfield; her passenger, also dead, was Mayor Frank Clay.

Fourteen-year-old Top Parker lives with his grandparents, Constable Ned Parker and Miss Becky, near the Red River. Top finds himself caught up in this situation, the accident involving the young African-American driver and the Caucasian mayor. With both killed, bigotry and questions flow like water from a tap about how, why and who’s responsible for the car going over a dam after missing a turn in the road. The families go after one another, each wanting the others to pay dearly.

A man calling himself “The Wraith” is also a part of this crime; a man who slithers around town breaking into houses and watching the Parker family for some unknown reason.

When Sheriff Cody Parker finds himself a possible suspect in the killings of a number of residents in town, he removes himself from the investigation.

Readers will watch closely as each branch of this tree is explained. The plot comes together perfectly as a battlefield reminiscent of the infamous Hatfields and McCoys appears. The killer is unexpectedly exposed, and the characters in Red River remain strong, intriguing and a bit frightening all at the same time.

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





STRONG COLD DEAD

By Jon Land

It's no secret that I'm a big fan of Jon Land's writing and even more so, his *Caitlin Strong* series. When I began writing this review, I decided to write from a different perspective. Bear with me.

First, I need to explain what makes Land's writing so special. He doesn't just pen novels, he weaves and intertwines independent stories that, frankly, have you scratching your head at times, wondering, "What do any of these have in common?" It's at just that point when he knits these stories together with such precision that they explode off the pages in a combustible collage of an unexpected, yet inevitable climax.

With each installment of the *Caitlin Strong* series, Land ups his game. His protagonist is a female Texas Ranger with a propensity for finding trouble. Caitlin's last name, Strong, personifies her in every way. Caitlin is strong in strength, strong in tradition, and maybe most important, she has a strong moral compass. With each book, Land reaches back through history, using one or more of Caitlin's Texas Ranger ancestors for the purpose of depth and analogy, and then pairs the historical rendering with a storyline he has plucked out of today's headlines, using Strong and her friends, Cort Wesley, and Paz among others to solve the crises, while causing you to think, "What if?" Brilliant.

In "Strong Cold Dead," we find Caitlin trying to help her friend, Cort Wesley Masters' son, Dylan, out of another mess. This storyline soon gets weaved into a much bigger plot involving ISIS. The best thing about the series is the underlying moral questions that bubble beneath the surface. With every turn of the page, the moral epicenter grows until it, like the convergence of the storylines, erupts like a volcano in a way that leaves you fist-pumping the air as you turn the last page.

If you only read one book this fall, read "Strong Cold Dead"! It's that good.

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

DEATH AMONG RUBIES

By R.J. Koreto

The main character in this second installment of a very enjoyable series is Lady Frances Ffolkes. Charm, intelligence, wealth—this is a female who is deeply invested in the women's suffrage movement. But, like the dear she is, takes time out to solve the killing of an old friend.

An investigation begins ever so slightly when Lady Frances finds out that two of her friends, Gwendolyn and Thomasina, have been the recipients of some pretty tough and vicious threats. Frances immediately gets her back up, so to speak, and travels with them to a place called Kestrel's Eyrie. This is the quirky, beautiful and, in a way, frightening estate owned by Gwendolyn's family. Lady Frances is determined to find the culprit who is threatening them, yet when they get to Eyrie she soon receives a much more dangerous investigation that will need to take center stage. A powerful man in the world of politics, Gwendolyn's father, is found murdered. The weapon being a stunning ruby dagger that belonged to him.

Lady Frances and her helpful maid, June Mallow, jump right into the hunt as they interrogate the estate's guests. Everyone from a Turkish diplomat who likes to disappear into the night like a vampire, to an heiress from the U.S. of A. who secretly harbors a desire to become the mistress of the estate, are part of the cast of suspects. As the case develops, however, it is Lady Frances's passion for seeking the truth that may lead a menace straight to her.

Author R.J. Koreto has stated that the Edwardian era is exciting, a mystery, a time of intelligence that is completely engrossing to this reader. Even after only two written, it's easy to see that Koreto has definitely made a mark in the writing world: He is a superb writer of the beloved upstairs/downstairs mystery.

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



CLOCK AND DAGGER

By Julianne Holmes

Ruth Clagan has inherited her grandfather's clock shop called, Cog and Sprocket. Yet what Ruth doesn't know is that time may just be running out.

Beckett Green is the owner of the book shop located directly across the street from Ruth, and he's using his time to make all kinds of trouble for her and all the other business owners in the small town of Orchard, Massachusetts. You see, Beckett is not just selling books, he's also selling a little bit of whatever is being sold by all the rest of the shops, and that includes clocks.

Ruth has just hired a new watchmaker, Mark Pine, and with upcoming events to be held in the shop that include; an open house, a birthday party along with a New Year's Eve bash, and the official opening of the clock shop, she has a lot of work to do. Sadly, the night of the open house, Ruth finds Mark dead in her friend Ben's barbershop. Along with most of the small town's population, Ruth joins with them in order to solve the crime and see if Beckett Green was the person who went way too far.

These *Clock Shop Mysteries* offer fresh, new stories that will appeal to all cozy readers. Main character Ruth, and her step-grandmother Caroline, are two very fascinating folks, and the little tidbits that come along with clock-making and repairing are fun to learn about. Mystery, romance...the town of Orchard has the "feel" of Jessica Fletcher's Cabot Cove paradise.

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

MISS JULIA LAYS DOWN THE LAW

By Ann B. Ross

After fifteen previous books starring the amazing character, Miss Julia, author Ann B. Ross continues to knock them out of the park.

This time around, Julia is highly upset after attending a coffee meeting at the home of a newcomer in town, Connie Clayborn. Connie has offended the town's coffee drinking group with complaints about their town and how she proposes to fix it all.

Julia and her friends have not taken Connie to task yet, but they have done some grumbling on their own with their like-minded friends and have tried their best to avoid the newcomer at all costs. However, Julia's pastor—after he swears her to secrecy—requests that she go and see Connie and ask her to apologize to his own wife, Emma Sue Ledbetter, who suffers from migraine headaches and low self-esteem. Very much against her will, Julia agrees and goes to Connie's where she finds the woman unable to offer an apology. Why? Because Connie is dead in her kitchen.

After asking the gated community guard to call the police, Julia returns to her house and finds out that she has become suspect number one. The police have already heard all about Julia's major dislike of Connie, but she doesn't want to break her promise to a man of God by telling the police the reason why she visited the woman. She keeps it confidential, but she wants to speak with the pastor who now seems to be avoiding her. In other words, Miss Julia must leave the snooping to herself and solve the crime, or she may just end up in prison.

This book is a delight for cozy fans who appreciate the fact that Miss Julia is a real steel magnolia from the south. And her polite ways, words and means used to find Connie's killer and deal with the law, are pure entertainment. This is one series that can definitely withstand at least sixteen more installments!

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



THE BLACK WIDOW

By Daniel Silva

Daniel Silva's celebrated character, Gabriel Allon, is back.

Gabriel, spy as well as art restorer, has been around for some time and is about to become the Chief of Israel's secret intelligence service. Of course, on the evening before he is to be promoted to his new job, ISIS detonates a huge bomb in Paris and the French government wants Gabriel to eliminate the bomber before the sick terrorist has the chance to plant another one. The bomber is no easy kill, however; he is a mastermind who goes by the name of Saladin.

No one seems to know who the man truly is, or they do and they're far too afraid to tell. But no matter where one looks, they can find no identification, nor even what nationality he happens to be. Saladin is protected by very secretive software, and his network runs in total silence, leaving his enemies in the dust.

Gabriel has no option but to place an agent in the most dangerous terrorist group that has ever been known. His choice is an extraordinary young doctor who's as brave as she is lovely. Gabriel has asked her to pose as an ISIS recruit. She is to watch and wait, like a human Black Widow out for blood, until the time is right to open the flood gates and tell him who Saladin is and what his next move might be.

Everyone who loves to read has been entertained by the books of Daniel Silva. His first three were hands-down fantastic, and then along came Gabriel Allon to play in the spy game. "The Black Widow" is a fabulous suspense/thriller that definitely showcases this author's skill and imagination, and will garner even more praise from the millions of Silva fans.

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

A STUDY IN SCARLET WOMEN

By Sherry Thomas

Charlotte Holmes's parents want her to be respectable, which means not scaring off potential husbands with her brilliant mind. Sadly, as she's a society woman in Victorian England, people rarely get to see the real her. But when she gets going, Charlotte does have a way of scaring the opposite sex with her powerful opinions and logic.

What she decides to do is live independently, out from under her parents' control, so she no longer has to worry about marriage. Creating a plan to take herself "off the market," Charlotte makes a mistake. Instead of being left alone, she actually gets herself into trouble socially. She does end up with her freedom, and nothing else but the clothes on her back.

Soon, three upstanding members of society are found dead. Using her brilliance, Charlotte writes to the police under the alias of Sherlock, and points out the things related to each death, citing that poison was most likely the cause. Her words cast suspicion on the wrong people and she must now use her many abilities to find out the identity of the real killer... and fast.

"A Study in Scarlet Women" is such a good story, and the idea of Charlotte calling herself Sherlock is a fun thing to do. Author Sherry Thomas didn't just insert Charlotte into Sherlock's area of expertise, she made a character completely different from the well-known man. Cute and blonde, Charlotte doesn't have Sherlock's scorn for everyone. And because she is a lady in Victorian England, Charlotte has to be creative in her investigation in order to preserve the illusion of Sherlock Holmes both to the man on the street and the police. The various characters introduced are quite interesting and the plotlines are great. This is the first in the *New Lady Sherlock* series, and if this is any clue, Charlotte and her continuing adventures will be thrilling to read.

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



TANGLED WEBS

By Irene Hannon

"Tangled Webs" is the next up in the *Men of Valor* series by author Irene Hannon, and is a fantastic romantic suspense.



Former Army Ranger Finn McGregor needs a little quiet time. He chooses to go into the woods in order to find calm, peace and enjoy the solitude. Finn has been suffering from the ill effects of PTSD, so the secluded cabin seems to be the perfect place to regroup, rethink the future, and take some time away from his very overprotective brothers. Of course, as with any romantic suspense, what Finn finds is a big mess that has nothing to do with peace when he crosses paths with his new neighbor—a woman who is being harassed by some unknown enemy.

Dana Lewis is a romance book editor. She has also come to this peaceful spot to heal from injuries she sustained after taking a fall. Dana has inherited her grandfather's cabin located very near to the one Finn is staying at.

The two of them meet one frightening night when Dana lets out a scream and Finn goes running to her aid. It turns out that the horrific sound was nothing more than a bad dream, but there's more here than meets the eye. Soon they begin to figure out that someone is using dangerous mischief to scare Dana away from her cabin, and Finn is using his military skills and training to see that she isn't hurt by this unknown phantom. As the problems continue and grow even more frightening, Dana and Finn realize that they are able to give each other courage at a time in their lives when they need it the most.

Hannon does her usual awesome writing job, as the two main characters take readers on an action-packed journey where it's quickly learned that people will do anything to guard their secrets.

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

THRICE THE BRINDED CAT HATH MEW'D

By Alan Bradley

For those readers who've never read about Flavia de Luce, this young lady is one of crime fiction's most charming and creative trackers. She has grown up in a broken down old mansion with two older sisters, and both of them, in their own way, are mean to her. Her father, a man who plays the same tune over and over again regarding the past, is preoccupied with passing memories of her mother—a woman who died strangely in the Himalayas when Flavia was an infant. Flavia's safe haven has always been her fascination with chemistry, an interest that has come in handy whenever an unexplained death occurs in the village of Bishop's Lacey, which happens often and without warning.

Now it is Christmastime, and Flavia, all of twelve years old, is sailing home to England after being expelled from Miss Bodycote's Female Academy in Canada. Unfortunately, instead of a festive homecoming, she is met at the docks with bad news. Her father is ill and a hospital visit will have to wait as he is resting and cannot be disturbed.

Now that she's home, Flavia is off to run an errand for the vicar's wife. Flavia jumps on her bike (AKA: Gladys) to deliver a message to a solitary woodcarver. Yet, when she finds the door partly open and enters, she sees the man's body hanging upside down on the back of his bedroom door. The only living creature in the house is a cat that shows very little interest in the scene, but Flavia is eager at the prospect of a new investigation. It's amazing what the discovery of a corpse can do for Flavia's spirits, and readers will learn once and for all that curiosity definitely does not kill this cat.

Bradley has put together another wonderful hunt for a killer. Flavia's situation, brains, and the small village all come together to draw you in so you truly get lost in the story.

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





THE QUEEN'S ACCOMPLICE

By Susan Elia MacNeal

Beginning in England in the year 1942, all part of the WWII generation (or readers who are fascinated by WWII subject matter) will remember that the Nazi's persistent bombing raids slowed down during this time, yet London's blackouts continued.

Under the cover of darkness there's a madman who is murdering young women. He is destroying them, leaving their bodies to resemble those of the infamous Jack the Ripper victims.

However, this person has also been targeting particular women, females who are reporting for duty to be spies and wanting to work for Winston Churchill's group who are working abroad. These very brave women are a vital part of the war effort.

Maggie Hope has returned to England from America to continue her intelligence work and has been requested to lead this particular case; the MI-5 officers know they need the special skills belonging to Agent Hope to catch the killer who has been dubbed, "The Blackout Beast."

Maggie takes on the biggest challenge of her life, to find a killer who seems to be enamored with the most horrific murderer to ever walk London's streets. Thus, a trap is set with Britain and the U.S. joining forces to fight the Nazi's in London. However, once this killer places Maggie in his sights, Buckingham Palace will have a difficult time protecting their number one spy.

A statement was written by Hitler, himself, that explicitly showed what he thought about the female race: "A society in which women are taught anything but the management of a family, the care of men, and the creation of the future generations is a society which is on its way out. The historian can peg the point where a society begins its sharpest decline at the instant when women begin to take part, on an equal footing with men."

Yet even though the Nazi kingpin has these thoughts, stopping Agent Hope will be yet another war he's not prepared to fight. Definitely a 5-star read!

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

BADLANDS

By C. J. Box

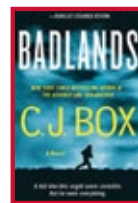
Day One of this thriller starts with a crash-bang, whipping the reader between North Dakota and North Carolina—propelling us, relentlessly, into a breathtaking tale of death, greed, and fear. Days Two, Three, and the rest keep us barreling along.

Cassie Dewell takes a new job and finds herself thrust into a place filled with nasty, brutish people, some of whom live short lives. Besides her tough new job as deputy sheriff in the aptly named town of Grimstad, she has other problems. She is maybe the only person who can identify a serial killer called the Lizard King, so she travels briefly to North Carolina to interview him. He attacks her in the interrogation room, tries to strangle her, and almost kills her. After she returns north, she learns there may not be enough evidence to keep him in jail. If there isn't, she's in a great deal of danger.

Meanwhile, back in the cold north winter, a twelve-year-old boy, Kyle Westergaard, is the one the reader fears for the most. He's a true innocent, a bit slow mentally and unable to speak clearly. He rarely does speak and only a few people can understand him. But he knows everything that is going on. The trouble starts the day he sees too much on his early morning paper route, the worst route because it's the farthest one out. When he sneaks over and picks up a bundle from the site of a car wreck, he becomes the unwitting target of rival factions who want that bundle, all of them vicious people.

The town of Grimstad is a real place and it did experience the oil boom described here, which serves as background and impetus for dirty deeds. The cold Northern Plains winter permeates these pages. You may have to read this with a sweater on. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

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



THE 7TH CANON

By Robert Dugoni

Father Thomas Martin, a priest who runs a shelter for homeless young men, is about to become the prime suspect in the death of one of the boys he looks after.

When Father Martin is unable to locate one of his kids, he decides that the boy has left on his own and stops looking. Not long after, however, the man of god is on his way to the basement to fix a fuse when he stumbles upon the boy's body. The young man has been stabbed to death.

Attorney Peter Donley, who has only been in practice for three years and is working in his uncle's law firm, is looking to move on to a dream job elsewhere. This final case lands in his lap due to the fact that his uncle has just had a heart attack and can't take on the job of defending Father Martin. So Peter has to set his dream job on the back burner and take on the case.

Along with PI Frank Ross, Donley sets out to find the truth and meets up with some very shady characters, including; a crooked DA who is looking for headlines all for himself, and an extremely vicious homicide cop who's looking for revenge. He is intent on settling a few scores in the process, so everybody has their own agenda. But as Ross and Donley discover the secrets and lies that will help free Father Martin, Donley must risk his own life to save his client.

As always, Dugoni has given the reader another gem of a story, full of action-packed scenes, intelligent plotlines, and very real characters. It is always an extreme pleasure to read a Robert Dugoni work.

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

THE LAST GOOD GIRL

By Allison Leotta

At the beginning of this story, readers meet featured player, Anna Curtis. Anna is a prosecuting attorney who finds herself at the beginning of a national headline story. The story involves a freshman girl at a very high status university who disappeared, after she filed charges against a young man from a powerful fraternity.

Emily Shapiro is the freshman whose gone missing; last seen leaving a bar that was located near Sigma Pi, a secret fraternity known on campus by the hideous title of 'The Rape Factory.'

Suspect number one in Emily's disappearance is Dylan Highsmith. This son of a high powered politician in the state of Michigan is being watched by the law, but so far the only clues are some surveillance pictures that have been pieced together of Emily's departure from the bar and a shot of Dylan running down the street after her.

Anna is on the case when she discovers a video diary Emily kept during her first few months at school, exposing the history she had with Dylan and the fact that she accused him of rape right before she disappeared. Emily's plight garners media attention immediately and massive support from Title IX activists all over the country. But sadly, Anna's investigation has come up against a brick wall and now she's just looking for a way she can locate the girl alive and well. Being without a body, even more anger is thrown her way from people who tell Anna not to ruin the name of an 'innocent young man on campus' when she has no real proof that anything has even happened.

This is an exceptionally good story uncovering the deep, dark secrets of a small town. Offering up some terrific trial scenes, the story shows the effects the trial has on both families and the men and women who sit on both sides of the proverbial fence.

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



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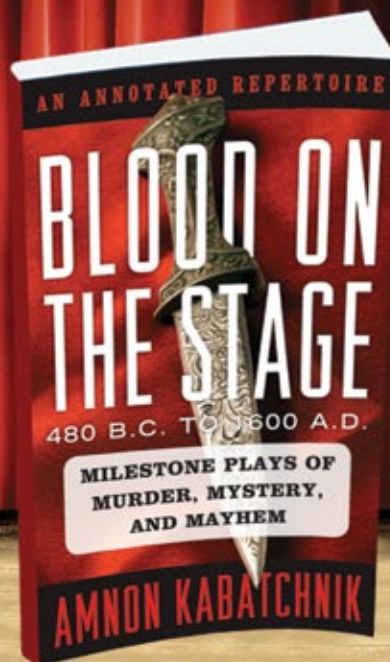
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Runner-Up

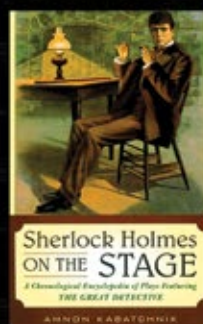
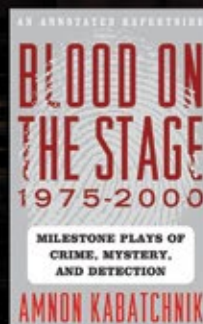
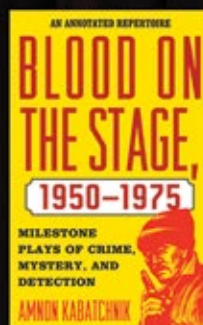
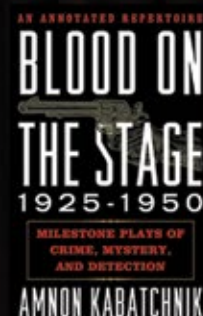
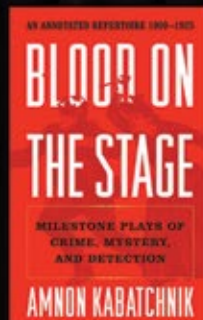
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NIGHT SHIFT: A NOVEL OF MIDNIGHT, TEXAS

By Charlene Harris

This is one of those great moments for readers, as we head back to a small town that has a whole lot of tales to tell. I, for one, fell head over heels for this locale from the minute I saw the map of all the businesses and homes set where Davy Highway meets Witch Light Road. And this, book number three, is a definite winner.

Midnight is home to a very curious populace; some are humans with special traits and some are definitely not human, in spite of their appearances. However, when the main crossroads begin to attract folks determined to commit suicide—the psychic, the witch, the vampire, the shape shifters, the angels, and their human friends learn Midnight has become the address of a strong and powerful demon.

The very stunning Sylvester Ravenwing has hit town in order to take over the management of Gas N Go, but there seems to be another reason he's arrived on the scene.

Fiji Cavanaugh's hateful older sister, Kiki, also turns up out of the blue which is the last thing Fiji needs right now.

Vampire Lemuel Bridger is working on an Etruscan translation of the old vamp books found in Midnight's local Pawn Shop. He hopes to find out what, exactly, is suddenly making the whole town ill—what's sparking the wave of weapons to fly off the shelves of the shop as people race to commit suicide. When Lemuel eventually finds that someone's virginity has to be sacrificed in order to stop a sacrifice of a deadlier kind, some of the odd inhabitants of the town become a bit more excited than others.

As always with Midnight, the paths connect and a fantastic ending is written. From suicides to attempted murder; from backstories to magical killings, this book has it all. Hopefully, the author will one day take us back to Midnight, because it was a whole lot of fun to visit!

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

WE COULD BE BEAUTIFUL

By Swan Huntley

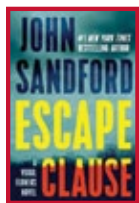
Forty-three-year-old Catherine West is frantic to find love. Born into wealth, she accepts eighty thousand dollars a month from her trust fund and sometimes works in the store that she owns. But what she really does is spend her time getting massages, going shopping and attending charity events. She often thinks seriously of those who are less fortunate, but also believes that her own problems are just as difficult as the ones poverty-stricken people must deal with on a daily basis; a trait that does not make her likable.

Catherine is recovering from her latest break-up; her fiancé left her for an older and even wealthier woman. While recovering from the broken heart, she meets William Stockton at an art exhibit and thinks that she has finally found her perfect man. Trouble is, he seems too good to be true. Wanting love, Catherine is blinded by her feelings and determined to build a life with him. She wants children and, at her age, “the hourglass was running out of sand.” Unfortunately, there is something about stately Stockton that's really wrong, especially when just the mention of his name causes Catherine's own mother to fall ill.

Even with the unsettling signs, such as her mom not wanting to speak with the man, and William becoming alarmed when Catherine innocently sifts through his pile of childhood photos, Catherine gets engaged ... and her world slowly gets turned on end as truths come out of nowhere.

This book is a terrific read, very elegant and a classic page-turner about a woman who is trapped in a “Gilded Cage” of her own creation. A great narrative that will provide any reader escape and a whole lot of fun as they mingle with Manhattan's famous upper crust.

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



ESCAPE CLAUSE

By John Sandford

A new book by John Sandford is always a treat, and when the book features Virgil Flowers of Minnesota's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the treat grows even more amazing.

In this particular story, Virgil is looking for some really big cats (tigers, to be exact) stolen from a zoo. It seems there is a reason behind the theft of the tigers: It is the law all over the world that it is illegal to deal with medicines that are the result of animal deaths.

California mobster, Zhang Min, ignores this law when he decides to hire Winston Peck VI, a medical doctor who was barred from practicing, to steal a pair of tigers from the Minnesota Zoo and kill them, mining their bodies for any remedies they might possess to cure all manner of illnesses.

The theft is carried out by three of the dumbest robbers you can think of. Unfortunately, they do succeed and one of the cats comes to an ungodly end. The thieves must act fast and Virgil knows that he and his cohorts do not have a lot of time.

With all this going on, Virgil's girlfriend Frankie Nobles is entertaining her sister, Sparkle. Sparkle's doing research for her thesis on migrant workers at a canning factory. Unfortunately, Sparkle's research puts her in the path of many who do not want anyone peering into their backgrounds. When Frankie is mistaken for her sister, Virgil takes on two jobs. He must use his intelligence to resolve the tiger kidnapping, while also taking out his revenge on whoever hurt his love.

Other plots weave their way into this story, including animal rights activist's taking their anger out on a dealer. Readers are still highly lucky to have Virgil Flowers for a hero, but many fans will state that one killing in this story was not necessary. It brought about a disgusting moment that is never found in Sandford books, and may just stop people from reading the entire novel.

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

MARKED FOR LIFE

By Emelie Schepp

This is the beginning of a trilogy from an author who has fashioned an exceptional novel; a tale that takes the reader down a path of ultimate crime that will be talked about many times in the future.

To begin, we meet Prosecutor Jana Berzelius, who is about to lead an investigation into the shooting death of Hans Juhlen, a man who sat on the Swedish Migration and Relocation Board. Juhlen's wife found his body in their home and most of the clues are pointing straight at her as being the murderer. Some clues that stand out are a pile of threatening letters, and large amounts of cash that have been withdrawn on a monthly basis. The odd clue, however, are fingerprints that belong to a child found in the home—a child whose body turns up on a beach only a few days later.

As the case develops, it starts to unearth some very long ago memories of Jana's childhood, a life she does not remember until she was about nine years old and woke up in a hospital. Adopted by a wealthy couple, she grew up with a father who was a famous prosecutor and a mother who was a very cold individual.

Jana is now a smart lawyer and very aloof with her co-workers. But as Jana and her team are on the trail of a human-trafficking outfit, Jana begins to remember snippets of her early years, most especially one that perhaps links her life to the life of the man who was just killed. Add in a strange looking tattoo that turns up on the child's neck, and Jana's early days that have been blocked out come creeping up to drive her crazy.

This is a very fast paced, dark thriller. The author has done a great job with the characters, and readers will want to continue reading this trilogy to see how these cliff-hangers are going to play out.

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

THE MASQUERADING MAGICIAN

By Gigi Pandian

Zoe Faust is ready for anything, now that she's grown comfortable with her life, her new home in Portland, Oregon, and the gourmet-cooking, living, breathing stone gargoyle named Dorian Robert-Houdin, who was brought back to life by a famous French magician.

Zoe has had the last 300 years or so to prepare for life as she knows it now, thanks to the Elixir of Life and her intelligent, skillful practice of alchemy—a power that transforms and enchants, somewhat like an early type of chemistry.

She is upset, however, with her boyfriend, Max, who has just returned home from a family visit in China and is keeping his distance from her. But this night Zoe is to attend a magic show with Max. The visiting performers, Prometheus and Persephone, seem to be ordinary state magicians but Zoe's friend, Brixton, thinks that Prometheus looks a little familiar. Zoe puts Brixton's suspicions out of her mind, needing to concentrate on learning the secrets of Dorian's alchemy books and not listen to the schemes and tall tales of a teenage boy.

Dorian is having problems because he hasn't been able to turn into human form and is worried that he will become trapped in stone. He and Zoe are certain that the alchemy books hold the secrets they need to save him, and are hoping that another alchemist/magician might help. Sadly, when Zoe goes to a second showing of the magicians she needs, tragedy strikes and she's suddenly well-aware that something extremely bad is being done to out-of-town magicians coming into Portland.

This is a fine, whimsical, paranormal book that includes alchemy research and magicians' tricks. This plot certainly holds your attention with the oddities, set during a time of robberies and murders taking place in Portland, Oregon's past.

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

THE GRAVEYARD OF HESPERIDES

By Lindsey Davis

On a hot summer day in Rome, AD 89, readers are introduced to Flavia Albia. Her adopted father, Marcus Didius Falco, just happens to be an informer, a career that Flavia has taken over. But on this one day, Flavia has far more important things to worry about as her life is turned upside down.

Flavia's boyfriend of sorts, Tiberius Manlius Faustus, has moved in and has also decided they should get married immediately. On top of that, her supposed beloved's workers, people who have been trying to fix up an old bar called the Garden of the Hesperides, stumble upon human remains buried in the backyard. There were rumors for many years that the previous owner killed a bar maid and these are probably her remains, but nothing is that simple.

Flavia soon finds herself buried by two monumental situations. The first is her looming marriage to Tiberius. She has been reluctant to trust others in the past, as she had a difficult time as a young girl, but has to decide if Tiberius is her perfect mate and partner in crime in Rome. Her second project is to help restore the bar. It's difficult as she feels a bit out of her league, and these missing remains set her off on an investigation to not only learn more, but also to get her away from having to plan nuptials that she's not even sure she wants to have.

As Flavia moves forward, more bones come to the surface, and she finds herself standing on a precipice that could make her the next stack of bones to be buried.

The location is perfect, the characters are entertaining and extremely memorable. Davis has done a brilliant job of bringing Ancient Rome to life, as mysteries unfold behind every column. Definitely a 5-Star read!

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



THE HOUSE OF SECRETS

By Brad Meltzer and Tod Goldberg

This is a brilliant, *brilliant* thriller that readers will be unable to put down.

We begin with Hazel Nash as a six-year-old child being told a story by her father, Jack Nash. Jack told her about a small bible that was once the property of Benedict Arnold and was found inside... the body of a dead man. Jack happens to be the host of America's favorite conspiracy TV show, "The House of Secrets." When Hazel was young her father told her a slew of tall tales, but the one regarding Benedict Arnold's bible was her absolute favorite.

Years later, Hazel suffers amnesia from a car crash. She's told her father died in the accident and her brother was injured, but she remembers nothing. Soon visited by a man from the FBI, he questions Hazel about things she's unable to answer. It seems that there has been a dead man found in very strange circumstances, and inside him is a bible that once belonged to Benedict Arnold. What's even stranger is that the FBI states Hazel's father had met with this man recently.

While alive, Jack loved chasing down conspiracy theories and had been joined by his son, Skip, before his death. Hazel questions Skip in her search to find out more about the past and what she's forgotten about the family. She has nothing to do with her father's business but is strong-minded and strong-willed. As are, Skip and the FBI. They're anxious to know how much of Hazel's memory has actually been wiped out, and if she remembers anything about this mysterious bible. Turns out, that six-year-old learned quite a bit regarding a tale that has now become a present-day murder.

No doubt about it, this is an excellent thriller for a full afternoon of reading. Much like all of Meltzer's books, and a big high-five to co-author Tod Goldberg on this one, the conspiracy, the history, the secrets... all come together to produce a perfect read!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of "The Angel Chronicles" and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by *Suspense Publishing* ■

THE WEAVER FISH

By Robert Edson

"The Weaver Fish" has an interesting beginning when Edvard Tossentern, a linguist at Cambridge who had been presumed dead after a balloon crash, reappears. He is very much alive, telling the story of how he walked out of a remote swamp, gravely ill. At first he's not recognized by his colleagues, but soon they are elated that he's alive. They become further excited at Edvard's discovery of a rare giant bird. However, this discovery just happens to toss them all into the path of an international crime ring.

Set on the island nation of Ferendes in the South China Sea, contact is made with some strange things like, the piranha-type Weaver Fish, giant Condors, and an infamous tornado-proof "Reckles" Texan hat.

Each chapter moves on to deliver a new part of the adventure that all interweave together in ways you will not imagine. From an unusually designed London building where the dead body of a Soviet Embassy attaché was found in 1963; to portions of an interview featuring Aeronautical Engineer Walter Reckles, the author of a book on surviving a midair collision who states that passengers will be able to fly on "aircraft fragments, such as a wing, back to Earth."

Although the entirety of the story cannot be explained (you really do have to read every word to completely understand the plot), all the ideas from hurricane-proof hats to a bird of prey that is definitely not what it seems to be, are amazing. Add into it a thrilling subplot with ties to illegal Chinese logging, and "The Weaver Fish" earns a definite nomination for being the most unique novel ever written.

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





RECKLESS CREED

By Alex Kava

Readers, get ready for a new installment of this amazing author's *Ryder Creed* stories featuring Creed's search and rescue dogs, along with FBI Agent Maggie O'Dell, who all find themselves (yet again) in the middle of an extremely suspenseful and weird case.

It seems that there has been an outbreak of bird flu; humans are dying at the hands of perhaps other people who may be intentionally infecting them with the disease. Or, is it something else? In the city of Chicago, a man falls from a nineteenth-story hotel room. In New York City, a sick tourist battles to complete a horrible mission. And in Alabama, Creed and his dog Grace find the body of a young woman who went missing in a National Forest. Turns out, she had filled her pockets with stones, walked into the river and drowned.

Now, FBI profiler Maggie O'Dell, Ryder Creed and his canines have to figure out who is running this show and stop the killing of others before more lives are destroyed in incredibly odd ways. Soon they are on the path of a scientist who has released the deadly virus into the wind. Whether or not he works alone and whether or not he will stop before this flu travels far and wide is anyone's guess. The dogs are needed, and it's up to Creed and his partner Jason to train these wonderful creatures to sniff out the virus before mankind comes to an absolute end.

The author, Alex Kava, is a bestseller, and the *Ryder Creed* books (there have been two thus far titled, "Silent Creed" and "Breaking Creed") are absolutely phenomenal. Now, with this newest plot, Kava has made sure to focus on that engaging, action-packed writing with every page.

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

SHOOT 'EM UP

By Janey Mack

Maisie McGrane is a tough cookie. Coming from a family that consists of five older brothers is tough enough, but on top of that, Maisie's family members are all one hundred percent Irish cops and lawyers who came from the streets of Chicago. All of her bros give her a hard time, but they're always determined to keep her safe. Unfortunately, the latter sometimes isn't helpful.

Maisie's father got her kicked out of the police academy, which should have spoiled all her dreams of becoming a cop like him. But Maisie is not a gal who lets something like that keep her down. She works and earns her cop rights, talking her way into working deep undercover as the girl of mob boss Stannislav Renko. Renko has been smuggled out to Serbia by Maisie's real boyfriend, Hank Bannon, and Maisie's gone on to her next assignment. Of course, she has to recover from the injuries she took from this first assignment. But while rehabbing, she's sidetracked by the shooting of Cash, one of her brothers.

As Maisie's determined to get justice for Cash, she ends up falling further into the complicated drug world. She wishes that she had Hank's calm way of talking her through things as she soon gets in over her head. But sadly, Hank seems to have disappeared and Maisie has to deal with fast-talker Lee Sharpe, a DEA agent who wants to place himself into her latest assignment. Seems he's had his eye on Maisie romantically and wants to take care of her, much like her family. But her family is threatening to tell all and make sure everyone knows that she's a cop as a way to keep her safe. In other words, Maisie has to rush to keep one step ahead of the druggies and her new partner, before her family blows her cover and everyone goes down.

Readers of mystery and suspense who are not yet fans of Maisie will be very, very soon.

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



THE SHARK

By Mary Burton

I believe romantic suspense lovers are going to be thrilled with Mary Burton's new series, *The Forgotten Files*.

The first installment, "The Shark," is centered around Riley Tatum, a Virginia State Trooper who has worked exceedingly hard to get her life back on track. After running away from home as a teenager and getting herself into a nightmarish situation, she was lucky to have survived.

She now specializes in 'tracking' with her faithful dog, Cooper, and is adopting a troubled teen named Hannah. Her life has finally stabilized, until she finds a murdered prostitute with a hand of playing cards on her person, who also happens to bear a striking resemblance to Riley, herself.

To complicate matters, Clay Bowman, a man Riley once had tender feelings for, has insinuated himself into her investigation, believing Riley is the target of a serial killer known as "The Shark."

Hoping to keep her troubled past from becoming public knowledge, Riley reluctantly teams up with Bowman to discover who it is playing high-stakes poker games with the lives of young women.

This story is a traditional romantic suspense novel, but will also appeal to thriller fans. The plot is very disturbing, featuring some of the most depraved bad guys I've encountered in recent memory. The plot twists shocked me so hard I nearly lost my breath! This one may not be for the faint of heart, as there are forensic details and the story is pretty dark. However, Riley is a fantastic character and her tenacity is inspiring. I enjoyed Bowman's more low key approach, but bristled on occasion when he made decisions without consulting Riley. However, the two ended up working together quite well, and made a good team.

The romance is slow to build, and while it is not the prominent thread in the story, it is a nice second-chance-at-love story which gave me hope that Riley will finally have a chance at having a real family and some long overdue happiness. "4-stars"!

Reviewed by Julie Whiteley ■

THE ENGLISH BOYS

By Julia Thomas

"The English Boys" is a real gem set in modern-day England where lifelong friends and actors, Daniel Richardson and Hugh Ashley-Hunt, meet up with a young woman while on vacation. They invite Ms. Burke to come back to the town where they are living while shooting a new movie. Soon, she is given a small role in the picture.

Daniel is attracted to her right away but she has her eye on the handsome and very wealthy, Hugh. Despite the problem of both of them being after her, the men remain friends. Things move along swiftly, and soon, Hugh and the girl are engaged and ready to marry at Westminster Abbey. Sadly, the girl is found dead before she can say 'I do,' being the victim of a stabbing. All the guests are questioned by the police but no suspects are found.

As Daniel watches the pain that Hugh is going through he meets with Ms. Burke's sister, a medical student, and returns to Wales with her in an attempt to try and dig up something that will allow him to figure out who may have wanted her gone.

There they find a journal, and as Daniel starts to look through it, he finds that it's mostly a normal diary of a young girl's life. But when he comes to the end and finds that she wanted revenge on the person who stole her carefree youth, an entire sinister plan is discovered.

Meanwhile, back in London, a killer is beginning to get a bit anxious when he realizes that Chief Inspector Murray is putting two and two together in order to get him. Was he helping the dead girl? Was he in on part of the plan? Or was he the one she was seeking revenge on?

This is an excellent mystery and readers are in for quite a surprise at the end.

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

THE PARIS LIBRARIAN

By Mark Pryor

Hugo Marston, a former FBI agent who is now working at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, receives a call from Paul Rogers, the Director of the American Library in Paris. It seems there is about to be a book sale that may interest Hugo, seeing as he's a collector of signed first editions. Heading straight to him, Hugo asks Paul's assistant to let him into a locked basement room where Paul is supposedly working on his own novel. Unfortunately, when Hugo sees him, Paul has suddenly died.

Despite every appearance of being a natural death, Hugo has a bad feeling about the situation and he shares it with Lt. Camille Larens. But, even with his concerns, the police wrap up the case and tag it as "death from natural causes."

Not backing down, Hugo noses around the library and discovers rumors in regards to some letters recently donated by an American actress, Isabelle Severin. Some of the letters are being kept secret from the public, the reason for this being that the ninety-year-old former actress had aided the French Resistance during frequent trips to France toward the end of World War II. If this weren't dramatic enough, there is also a legend afoot that the "Isabelle Severin Collection" contains a dagger that she used to kill an SS officer back in 1944.

This second little tidbit makes Hugo rummage further into the library stacks until he finally comes to the conclusion that his friend's present day murder has links to a decades-old crime.

This is number six in Pryor's series of Hugo Marston novels, and this is one author that continues to offer fantastic plots. He keeps exactly to the traditions of Paris, and has had wonderful success in writing about the American Library. It would be thrilling to walk through that "secret door" in the American Library and see the world living in this great author's brain!

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

THE NIGHT THE RICH MEN BURNED

By Malcolm Mackay

Set in the shadowy underworld of Glasgow, this is the latest novel from the brilliant mind behind the *Glasgow Trilogy*, and tells the story of a group of very devious characters that run an illegal debt collection operation.

Introduced is a genuine cast of self-made bad guys counting their newly acquired money, combined with bosses and members of the old guard who are trying to keep their powerful hold and win out over the new guard.

Main characters, Alex Glass and Oliver Peterkinney, are friends who are young men and on the make, playing a very dangerous game. However, their work in the debt collection business takes them down very different roads. When this story first begins, Oliver and Alex are both jobless nineteen year olds. They consent to beat up a man for moneylender, Marty Jones, whose claim to fame is throwing wild parties. Sadly, Alex's attention is taken away immediately by a woman named Ella. He is quickly tossed into the world of alcoholism by his sad attempts to impress her. But while Alex turns down a dark path, Oliver works hard and branches out into his own collection business. Rising to the top, he's soon living the "Life of Riley" while his friend goes to the dogs.

As some of the older criminals struggle to keep their well-earned places in a changing world, hardhearted guys like Billy Patterson and kids like Oliver start staking claims. Thus, a fantastic story is born that shows the brutal strategies of the bosses versus the brutality of the men who work for them; men who plot to not only get to the top of the mountain but also push others off when they get there.

Although Mackay has only been a published crime author for a short time, his large reader base was born with the amazing *Glasgow Trilogy*. Here, with this standalone piece, he has not let anyone down. This is an excellent piece of writing!

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



TIER ONE

By Brian Andrews and Jeffrey Wilson

John Dempsey is a former Navy SEAL, part of the "best of the best" who was a member of Tier One and referred to as Jack Kemper. He now takes his orders directly from the White House. Leader of Task Force Ember, a secret operations unit that was utilized to go after a group of Iranian terrorists, Dempsey is looking for revenge against an attack that killed two SEAL teams. After Dempsey and his team track the terrorists around the world and back, the Task Force discovers that the next target to be hit will be none other than UN headquarters in New York City.

Without giving too much away, as this plot is extremely interesting, Dempsey must find a way to remain the perfect soldier, following orders and stopping a terrorist. But at the same time he must balance the "soldier" in him with the man and friend who wants nothing more than absolute justice for his comrades-in-arms that met their deaths.

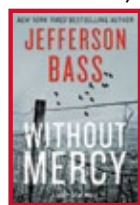
The concepts of bloodthirsty and following orders are a bit fuzzy for Dempsey, but this first book of what will become a three-part story remains as perfect as it can be without revealing too much data.

Military terms are right on the money, so much so that there is a glossary of terminology at the end of the novel. Focusing on Dempsey's fight against VEVAK (Iran's Intelligence Agency), readers are given an action-packed adventure from cover to cover. Once again the SEALs reputation shines (as well it should) as these writers never miss a chance to make them the supreme heroes of our country.

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

WITHOUT MERCY

By Jefferson Bass



The *Body Farm* series adds another suspenseful, thought-provoking, and all-out-awesome title to its list.

Dr. Bill Brockton, forensic anthropologist, is back. For those who are unaware, he's a man who has spent the better part of his life solving murders. Dr. Brockton, like all "absent-minded professors," depends on his assistant, Miranda Lovelady, for just about everything. Right now the doctor is in a bit of a snit because Miranda will probably leave his employ when she's finished her doctorate.

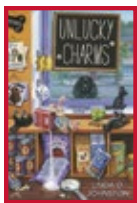
But it's back to business at hand when a pile of human bones (minus the skull) is discovered in a remote area. God knows the doctor has helped solve a tremendous amount of cases, but this one is extremely emotional. The victim was found chained to a tree; footprints showed that the victim had worn a path around it, desperately pacing during what looks like weeks of confinement.

Dr. Bill and Miranda take the bones back to The Body Farm, a combination of morgue, lab and classroom. With other specialists aiding in the discovery, they soon learn that the male was around 25 years of age and of Middle Eastern lineage. When they find out his identity, the clues point to the man's murder as being a monstrous hate crime.

During this investigation, Brockton receives news that the serial killer, Nick Satterfield, has escaped from prison and is looking to get revenge. As the doctor knows, Satterfield is capable of any act of violence, so in order to stop the psycho Brockton decides to make himself an easy target.

This is a popular series and "Jefferson Bass" (the writing team of Jon Jefferson and Dr. Bill Bass) continues to balance the worlds of anthropology and forensics perfectly, creating tales of suspense that are unforgettable. Hopefully, this series will continue for a great many years to come.

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



UNLUCKY CHARMS

By Linda O. Johnston

Rory Chasen makes her home in Destiny, California, which is an odd place where getting and keeping good luck is focused upon by the people who live there. It's here that you can find heads-up pennies on the sidewalks, everyone knocking on wood, and fingers being crossed are as ordinary as buying a cup of coffee.

Rory is the manager of The Lucky Dog, a shop that specializes in lucky items for pets. She has recently created her own line of products and hopes that they will be a success. She is just about to bring to her shop some stuffed rabbits with great big feet when, unfortunately, someone decides to reverse the good luck in Destiny by robbing local businesses and stealing good luck items from the shelves, replacing them with items that are as unlucky as you can get. The most likely person who might be trying to change the luck of the town is Flora Curtival, a real estate agent who is always complaining.

However, Flora is soon found murdered: you might say her luck ran out. One of Rory's toy rabbits is found with the body which takes Rory to suspect number one. Not only does she need good luck to escape this horrible mess, she needs all the luck in the world while trying to determine who really killed the vandal, and if Flora was even the vandal in the first place.

"Unlucky Charms" is a very interesting read telling of a town built on superstitions. The many characters are a whole lot of fun and completely believable, which is not a surprise considering that author Linda O. Johnston has always been a complete and utter gem.

From her *Pet Rescue Mysteries* and *Pet-Sitter Mysteries* to her *Barkery & Biscuits Mysteries*, and these, the *Superstition Mysteries*, this is one author who has a great gift for telling a great tale that both humans and animals can enjoy.

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

LIAR, LIAR

By M.J. Arlidge

"Liar, Liar" is the fourth book in this series featuring very cool, Detective Inspector Helen Grace.

This time out, there have been six fires set over a 24-hour period and people are dying horrible deaths due to the outbreak. What's worse, the law can find absolutely no motives for the flames as Grace and her team arrive at the scenes of the crimes. There is, of course, panic in the streets; the citizens of the community and the families of the victims are screaming for justice. When a witness is finally found, she swears it's one of the area's very own firefighters doing the horrific deeds, but no one knows whether the witness can be trusted.

When Helen and her team are called to the scene of yet another fire, it's pretty clear that nothing was an accident, and it becomes a race against time to stop the firebug before he or she does it again.

The story picks up quickly for the second half of the book, and readers will be in shock when they find out who the culprit is, bringing even more new readers to the doorstep of Helen Grace. To anyone who has not read any of these mesmerizing stories as of yet, it's a fact that you're missing a lot. Each one of the previous books is a standalone but reading them in order will bring a lot more to your life as the pressure mounts and buildings burn.

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



THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF STONES

By M.J. Rose

It's always such a pleasure to read an M.J. Rose work. And, as always when it comes to this author, this is one story you do *not* want to miss!

Set against an interesting time period that I particularly love, when the Romanov Dynasty was collapsing and the sounds and dangers of WWI filled the streets, we're introduced to a young girl by the name of Opaline Duplessi.

Opaline has a job that is sad at times, yet in her own very unique way she is vital to the war effort. It is her trench timepieces that are sent to the warriors at the front. What she also does is create mourning jewelry for the women who have lost their beloved sons, and true loves to the endless battles.

Walking through the stunning Palais Royal in Paris, Opaline spends most of her time in a workshop buried inside. But not only is she a jewelry maker, she also has a special power—she can translate messages from the beyond. The power is known as lithomancy. What it allows Opaline to do is read certain gemstones and hear the words of soldiers. One day, however, her power leads her on a new path. A message comes but is aimed directly at her.

With more than a touch of romance, as well as a feeling of danger and mysticism, readers go along with Opaline as she heads out on a mission. She will travel from her home in Paris to reach the exiled Roman dowager empress in order to tell her what has become of her family: the ill-fated Tsar Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra (granddaughter of Queen Victoria), and their children. But Opaline's mission has many folds, including a passionate love that literally causes you to be swept away.

There are many adjectives to use when it comes to describing this writer's amazing tales, but the one that always comes to my mind is "mesmerizing."

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, Author of "The Angel Chronicles" and "The Charlatan's Crown," published by *Suspense Publishing* ■

THE LAST ONE

By Alexandra Oliva

As this story commences, a reality show, much like TV's *Survivor*, is going on. The contestants on TV are stranded in a very remote location with not much more than the clothes on their backs and, in the end, the last survivor will walk home with a million dollars.

A dozen contestants are sent into the wilderness to participate. What is sprung upon them at first are a group of challenges that take the contestants through some not-so-frightening wilderness training, earning prizes.

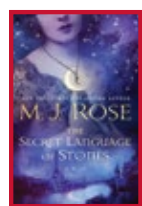
Watchers are introduced to the contestants by titles, not real names. Such as, "Asian Chick" and "Air Force." However, one young lady stands out; she's referred to as "Zoo." A nice gal, Zoo is a strong-minded woman and determined to be the last one standing.

She somewhat stumbled into the survival/reality TV show and needs to prove herself to the others, trying to learn skills she definitely wasn't born with. As Zoo travels on her own, through the woods, she comes up against things that she believes are set-ups created to throw her off-course. But the setting is actually shifting. In the "real" world, there has been a pandemic that has killed a considerable amount of the world's population.

Zoo staggers for miles, not recognizing her surroundings as she tries to learn more survival training. But the show seems to be mixing with another world that looks more and more like Judgment Day, and her survival on a TV show may be the least of her worries.

This is a truly great read written by an author with a wonderful, powerful imagination. Readers will not be able to put this down as they find themselves clenching the book in their hands, wondering if Zoo will make it through to the end...or if the "end" has already begun. This is Alexandra Oliva's first novel, yet it feels like it must be her thousandth considering the skill and amazing talent she's brought forth on these pages.

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





UNREASONABLE DOUBT

By Vicki Delany

Walter Desmond is a man who paid for a crime that he did not commit. He has spent twenty-five years in prison for said crime, and it now seems very clear that the police hid the evidence that would have set Walter free long ago. Walter's lawyer is suing the province now for five million dollars and the Trafalgar police force, most of whom weren't even there when the murder occurred, are told to treat Walter as they would treat anyone else. But everyone wants to know why... *why* would the recently exonerated man consider going back to the scene of the crime, his hometown of Trafalgar, British Columbia?

The now unsolved cold case is given over to Sergeant John Winters. When he and Chief Constable Paul Keller pay a visit to the victim's family, the members are still thinking that Walter might just be guilty despite all the evidence to the contrary. The town is divided and the one police officer from that time simply won't believe that his friends and co-workers jailed the wrong man.

One of the two arresting officers is dead under what is soon to become "suspicious circumstances," and the other, who is retired, wants nothing to do with the police now that this murder case has been reopened. Also, Walter's new life as a free man is very short and certainly not sweet with the onset of a series of violent attacks on local women. It falls to Constable Molly Smith and Sergeant Winters to solve the case... once and for all.

Delany tells the tale of a small town in the mountains, and the many plots that come together and turn into a very good conclusion. She does a wonderful job in providing a very unpleasant look at old-boy, small-town cops that remind us all that some folks don't get what they deserve in the long run.

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

THE DISCOURTESY OF DEATH

By William Brodrick

"The Discourtesy of Death" is a new mystery featuring Father Anselm, who was formerly a barrister and is now a monk living at the Larkwood Priory in England.

One day, the Prior gives Father Anselm, who has made a name for himself as a part-time detective, an anonymous letter that accuses a man named Peter Henderson of killing his disabled wife, Jenny, two years prior. The author of the letter might be Jenny's father, former Army Captain Michael Goodwin, whose self-chosen career path is to take revenge on Henderson who, it just so happens, is due to be released from prison.

Father Anselm is pulled into the investigation of the death of Jenny—once a ballerina who became paralyzed from a fall and later suffered with cancer. The death of Jenny might be a mercy killing, as Father Anselm digs into the past actions and motives of her father who is absolutely sure that Peter Henderson killed his little girl in cold blood.

The story is good, as it hops from mercy killing to murder, but if the reader is looking for a constant edge-of-your-chair thriller, this isn't it. What the story does is build slowly, leading the reader alongside Anselm and his sidekick Mitch, as they work to discover the truth. The two faux detectives use all the skills they have to investigate this highly difficult case. Anselm remains a great character, using the moral uncertainties each major character faces by utilizing his understanding and wisdom of human beings to uncover a murderer.

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



MEG: NIGHTSTALKERS

By Steve Alten

"MEG: Nightstalkers" is number five in the incredible series by Steve Alten, and it's as awesome as the previous four!

For readers who are wondering who MEG is, it is the nickname given to the Megalodon, which was a species of shark that lived more than two million years ago. Let's just say MEG makes its present day cousin, the Great White, look like a precious guppy. As the first book of this series is soon to be a movie, it's time to hop aboard and follow the underwater adventures of former U.S. Navy deep sea diver Jonas Taylor and family.

We begin by following a terrifying situation that is already in progress, starring Lizzy and Bela, two gigantic Megalodon sisters who escaped from the marine area owned by the Taylor and Tanaka families. These gargantuan beings have been invading the coast ever since they broke free from captivity and are now roaming in the Salish Sea off British Columbia.

As Jonas Taylor is trying to find out how to recapture the Megs, or kill them, his son David is up to his neck trying to deal with a prehistoric sea monster of his own. After witnessing, up close and personal, his girlfriend Kaylie's very grisly death, he agreed to join the hunt for the creature responsible for her killing, which just happens to be a 120-foot, hundred-ton Liopleurodon that escaped from its refuge in the Panthalassa Sea. Although David is obsessed with night terrors after witnessing Kaylie's death, he is about to risk his life trying to entice the Liopleurodon into the fleet's nets.

Will the Megs and Liopleurodon unite? Is this perhaps an uprising of prehistoric creatures from the bottom of the sea? Can't say, you have GOT to read it to find out. This book is told so well that even a newcomer to the series will have no problem catching up. And you will all give thanks that these beings are long gone... or *are* they?

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

UNTIMELY DEMISE: A MISCELLANY OF MURDER

By William Dylan Powell

(Illustrated by Alex Kalomeris)

Although we live in a time of violence where every day crimes appear on the news, this is a book that reaches into the various ways to commit murder and comes up with a list that most would never even think of... or believe.

Separated into sections, readers will certainly find some comical, others horrible, and even others beyond interesting... especially if the career of Medical Examiner is something you wish to have in the future.

Each section is set up so that the process of the particular "cause of death" is written out in one paragraph. After that, readers get a brief section that lists little-known facts regarding the "type" of weapon used, or brief snippets of true crimes where this particular cause of death was used throughout history, or even some pop culture references.

In the "Killer Moves" section, everything that has to do with martial arts techniques are listed; from Filipino Stick Attack to Haymaker.

In the "Pernicious Poisons" category, causes of death are listed involving deadly toxic substances used in murders.

"Murder Most Strange" categorizes the oddest murder methods that can be used, utilizing everything from the javelin to the spear gun; while "Thug Life" offers up unique ways gangsters and mafias use to off their victims. "Fatal Firearms" details gun play; "Slasher Madness" goes into detail regarding swords, knives and a variety of blades; and "Sneaky Sabotage" takes a look at murders set up to be viewed as accidents, from plane "malfunctions" to pacemaker "problems."

The author lists some certainly unique ways to kill, from using a toilet to a belt buckle in order to take care of business. For those who are interested in the macabre ways of a killer or love a good detective mystery when all the clues come to light, this is one book that will grant you a look into "365 dastardly ways to off your foe."

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

By Jeff Ayers



I thought I would take a look at two summer movies that were both enjoyable, yet seemed to get lost this summer.

I have to mention *Star Trek Beyond* (Action/Adventure/Sci-Fi PG-13). I was a bit surprised that the movie came out in July rather than September 8th, which is the official day the original series premiered 50 years ago. In addition, I know several people who stayed far away from this latest entry due to their dislike of the last one, *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. I agree it was disappointing that it was not an original take, but a remake of arguably the best film in the franchise, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. Still, it was an enjoyable thrill ride. *Star Trek Beyond* is not only the best film since the reboot in 2009, it is also the best film in the entire *Star Trek* franchise since *Star Trek: First Contact*.

Captain Kirk and the crew of the Enterprise are three years into their five-year mission exploring deep space. They visit a massive Starbase called Yorktown, and they soon meet an alien who begs for assistance in rescuing her crew from a planet just beyond a nearby nebula. Sensors cannot probe that far, so Kirk leads the Enterprise on a rescue mission. Of course it is a massive trap! The ship gets destroyed in the battle, and the crew gets taken to a nearby planet where an alien named Krall has a bold plan to destroy the Federation once and for all.

As a major *Trek* fan, I will admit I'm sick and tired of the Enterprise being destroyed on screen. Also, the action scenes are somewhat blurry, and the villain's motivations are weak until the end. Krall's final revelation is cool, but is still somewhat disappointing. With all of those issues aside, I loved this movie. This is the first time with the new timeline films that I felt I was watching an episode (with a bigger budget) of the original series. The characters were perfect, and I felt at home and comfortable. It was refreshing and geektastic to see my favorite characters speaking, acting, and reacting exactly like they do when I fondly look back on my favorite moments from watching the series when I was growing up. This movie was a love letter to the diehard fans, and it's a shame that a lot of those fans that would love this movie stayed away.

There are factions of fans who loathe the new movies, and some of them are quite vocal. I say give this one a chance without any prior filters, and you will enjoy it. *Star Trek* is still around after 50 years, and a new show is premiering in January. Name me one other franchise that has lasted 50 years, spawned several shows, and 13 films. *Star Trek* lives, and I'm thankful.

The other movie I wish got more attention this summer was *The Nice Guys* (Action/Comedy/Crime R), directed by the awesome Shane Black (his previous directing gigs were *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, and *Iron Man 3*). Ryan Gosling plays Holland Marsh, a down on his luck Private Investigator in 1977. He takes care of his precocious teenage daughter Holly, and is looking for cases just to pay the bills. Russell Crowe plays Jackson Healy, an enforcer who takes on cases that guarantee a paycheck plus an opportunity to beat up someone. It's 1977, and the car crash of a famous porn actress leads the two of them to reluctantly team up to find a missing girl and uncover the truth behind several suspicious deaths with ties to the actress.

What makes this movie stand out is the terrific acting by the leads, especially Angourie Rice, who plays the teenage daughter. The script is bouncy and the dialogue is crisp and snappy. It is also completely unpredictable even when it's obvious what is going to happen next. This movie is extremely refreshing as it mixes a compelling crime drama from the 1970's with the humorous buddy cop genre that was popular in the 80s. ■



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

GET CAUGHT UP IN THE ACTION, DANGER, AND ROMANCE

Spotting flashing blue lights at a familiar restaurant, bodyguard Katie stops to investigate, only to discover that owner Daniel Matthews has become the target of someone who will go to any lengths to put him out of business. Daniel's not convinced that a bodyguard—and a female one at that—is necessary. Daniel and Katie team up to figure out who's behind the intimidation and threats—before a would-be killer strikes again.

LynetteEason.com  



Featured Artist

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*

Kadri Umbleja

An Artist of Many Passions

COUP DE GRACE



Many artists agree that a beautiful location is needed for their creative passion to thrive. Estonia is one locale that does just that, and plays home to one artist who strives (and succeeds) in delivering “out of this world” works of art, as well as others inspired by real life events that touch her soul. Kadri Umbleja is her name, and the need to create has been a part of her since almost the very beginning.

A woman with many passions, however, Kadri is also a scientist. Now just finishing her PhD, her leap into the world of Computer Science was born from her father’s suggestion and background. Chosen by *Estonian Forbes* as one of the “Top 30 under 30 Estonians” for her contribution to the world of science, Kadri’s success in the artistic realm also continues to grow on a daily basis.

Her travels have granted her not only pictures, but also experience with various cultures. When Kadri discovered the digital art world, that experience definitely came in handy. With her art being published in many places, Kadri has also worked steadily with children’s charity groups to design promotional materials, and created the entire design for two musicals in Estonia.

Kind enough to take a break from her extremely busy schedule, Kadri sat down with *Suspense Magazine* and talked about everything from art to science...and then some.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Last time we spoke, you were studying for your Master’s Degree in Computer Science. Can you tell readers what led you to wanting to expand into the digital realm?

Kadri Umbleja (K.U.): Yes, I am still in Computer Science, now just finishing my PhD. To be honest, I always felt comfortable around computers but I never imagined I would enrol in the university in that field. I always wanted to be an actress, then I considered gene technology, but just before I had to come to a decision it was my father—who also comes from a computer science background—who recommended the field to me and I went with his suggestion. I never have had to regret that choice. You do not see many female students or even less scientists in CS, but there are so many things that a person can contribute, and the genre is not important. I actually have done a lot of outreach programs lately—gone to schools to talk about what CS is and encourage girls to enrol on STEM curriculums. I have done hundreds of programming workshops with Lego Mindstorms for children of all age groups. Some don’t like it—that’s fine. But if at least one person leaves with a spark in their eye for the field than I feel I have done my part, just like my father did when he gave that one push to me.

S. MAG.: By taking lessons with a famous graphic artist, then going on to work in classical mediums as well as sculptures, you have worked and been educated in a variety of artistic genres. When did you “discover” photo-manipulations, and what are the reasons why that particular medium became your favorite?

K.U.: I actually discovered photo-manipulations around the same time I enrolled in the university. It was a friend of mine from school who was trying to learn how to paint digitally. I was not very good at it, so I was very happy when I found photo-manipulations and found that I was good at that. I like it because I will be using photos—everything is “real,” in “propositions” there, so I do not have to worry about that. (What was always my biggest problem with classical mediums—things looked almost “real” but they weren’t). I also, very quickly, found that despite the photos being of real people and real things, I can combine them, change the colors to change the moods and stories, and by doing it create a lot of “unreal” situations and scenery; I can create magic and fairy tales. The freedom this particular medium gives me was the reason I fell for it. But, yes, at one point you do start to realize that there are other kinds of limitations;



TRUE LOVE KNOWS
NO SEASON



SHADOWS OF THE VEIL OF SECRETS



specifically, you are limited by the photos you can get your hands on.

S. MAG.: There has to be some relaxing downtime for all creative types. What are your other interests; or, perhaps, favorite hobbies that you like to partake in?

K.U.: *I am a huge role player (LARP—live action role play). I have done this for more than 10 years. In some ways, it is also quite an artistic pastime—you make your costumes, you do improvised acting. I just love that it gives me a chance to relax, try different situations, and play different characters. Also, lately I have discovered the international LARP scene so I have participated in events outside my own country. It has been amazing—different approaches, a lot of amazing people and a chance to travel.*

I also read a lot. That has been something I have done since I learned how to read. I just swallow book after book. I love fantasy and sci-fi. My recent favourites are “Luna” by Ian McDonald and “Lightless” by C.A. Higgins. I also enjoy classical adventure stories from a time when the world was still unknown and there were a lot of explorations being done. At one point, I think, I read almost everything I could get my hands on about discovering the South Pole.

S. MAG.: Growing up in the country of Estonia in Northern Europe, can you describe the places or perhaps scenic areas that work beautifully to inspire you? Are there other countries among your favorites that bring inspiration to your craft?

K.U.: *You are totally right—Estonia is very scenic and a very beautiful country. Totally flat, sadly, so whenever I go anywhere and see a mountain, I am always amazed. I think the forests (and here, there are a lot of them) have inspired me a lot in my art. I do feel that most of the time, in my art, I try to go to places that are further away from my “usual” surroundings. So I like creating fantasy settings, maybe even a little “out of this world.”*

Also, Ireland, where I spent time during my studies has probably inspired me a lot. The nature there is just amazing. I have actually used some of the photos I took during my stay there in my art. Some of those places are just unbelievable, almost like fairy tales themselves. There is a forest park, Tollymore, in the north that I have used a great deal in my art. And it has not only been me who loves the forest there; it is amazing. Game of Thrones actually shot a lot of scenes for their first season there.

S. MAG.: Are there other artists in your family? Is the love for “creating” an inherited trait, perhaps?

K.U.: *My mother actually has much stronger and more formal artistic education than me—she studied in a special art class that had a lot of artistic activities that covered different mediums. She loves painting flowers. So I think my love for art comes from my mother who did a lot of drawing and painting when I was younger. I always wanted to be able to paint as realistic flowers as she did.*

S. MAG.: Having been doing this for so long, what would be your advice to a new artist just starting out?

K.U.: *No one will become good overnight. It will take time. A lot of the “becoming good” process is in practicing. I have just started to do more digital paintings. I have tried it at one point or another during all those years in digital art. It has never worked. Now, finally, more than 10 years since my first try, I start to think I am getting somewhere. So patience is very important. Also, different art styles complement each other. Like for the digital painting—taking classical art classes for the last 3 years has helped me a lot. It just gave me the feeling of propositions that I can now apply in the digital medium. Also photo-manipulations has helped me there—the knowledge of creating highlights and shadows.*

Also, if you start, you may get a lot of not so good comments. The negative feedback is especially hard, seeing as you have poured your heart and soul into the piece. You just have to ignore those comments and keep practicing. Even if you improve, the negative comments will be there somewhere because there are those people who just want to hurt others. So do not let that tear you down.

I have also been teaching Photoshop and digital art now in my university for three years. I always tell my students that there are tons of resources on the internet. Some may work for you, some not. But it is very eye-opening to try them. And usually all the artists are very friendly—so if you have a specific question, just email them and, if they can, they will most likely answer you.

S. MAG.: Are there difficulties you find during the process? What is the Kadri Umbleja “way” to get from idea to actual creation?

K.U.: *The biggest problem for me is time. I have tons of ideas and lots of shots I have taken during my travels and I would love to use them all. But there are so many other responsibilities. When I started with my art, I was a student. So, if I was not in*



lectures or doing home tasks, I had tons of time to do art. Now I am a scientist and lecturer. I have a family. I am finishing my studies. So there are many responsibilities that have to come before I can actually just sit down and do art.

I also like to start and finish work in the same day; to be able to keep the same feeling and motivation that drew me to it in the first place. As my manipulations tend to take 10 hours or more, it is even harder to find a whole day where I can just concentrate on my art. It has happened so often, when I start a work because something speaks to me very strongly, only to have to leave it and not be able to come back with the same emotion that first guided me.

S. MAG.: Do you have a particular personal favorite among your pieces? If so, can you tell us what that would be, and what about it makes it special to you?

K.U.: There are actually quite a few pieces I love very much. I think I love my early works more; even though I might not have had as good of a skill back then, I had a lot of original ideas. I think the more you get into the community, the more it affects and inspires you. It's a good thing, but it may also have a few drawbacks.

I love "A Sailor's Hymn" from my very early days. The model I used there is just perfect for the emotion I felt. It was one of those works that just came to me and I am very happy with the result. It has the longing, loneliness...all the emotions I wished to achieve.

Also from the early days, I love "Requiem Aeternam." Again, there are some technical parts I could do so much better now but the feeling is there. I never feel good at having my own art on my walls, but this print actually hangs in the living room and I feel comfortable having it there.

From the later images, I think "Operation 'Clockwork'" is one that I am very proud of. It is a very detailed image, very technical, lots of small details, and took many hours of work. But the result was worth it. I always love when I look at the image, remember the hours spent with it, and feel happy because the result was all worth it.

S. MAG.: Do you have a favorite artist? Who would that be and why does their work inspire you? In addition, if you could sit down and ask them one question, what would that be?

K.U.: It's so hard to bring out just one person. There are many artists, both classical and some contemporary I really like. I love Dutch landscapes, especially with that period where they had that very intense shadow and light emphasis. I like Turner romantic landscapes. I like impressionism.

I love Alan Lee watercolours, to name someone more contemporary. His "Lord of the Rings" paintings are breath taking. If I could meet him, I would definitely ask how can he make his works so light but still have so many and such bright colors? I love watercolour medium, but I never manage to keep the lightness.

S. MAG.: Is there another medium you wish to explore? What can fans expect from your future endeavors?

K.U.: I think I am getting into costume making currently and into the world of cosplay. I actually just completed my first time in a convention and won as the judges' favorite. So I think it is an encouraging start. I am quite eager to try more and see where that leads me.

We would like to thank Kadri Umbleja for taking time out to visit with us. To learn more about her and set eyes on her stunning works of art, visit <http://iardacil.deviantart.com>. ■

JONAS SAUL

GOING STRONG AT BOOK 17

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Photo Credit: Provided by Author



In doing some research I found an author that I can't believe we haven't covered before. Author Jonas Saul just released the seventeenth book in his *Sara Roberts* series called "The Pact." However, that's not the only thing that Jonas Saul has written. Even though for many authors that would be a heck of a career, he also has *The Mafia Trilogy*, *Jake Wood* series, a couple of standalones and let's throw in a horror book. Yeah, Jonas has been working hard to bring some great books to the genre.

Jonas has been writing for over two decades and has thirty novels and over fifty short stories to his credit. At times, he has outranked Stephen King and Dean Koontz on the Top 100 Author chart on Amazon. He recently gave a two-hour speech to a creative writing class at the Okanagan College in Kelowna, B.C., and did a reading on stage at the Okanagan Valley Writers' Festival in Penticton, B.C.

Jonas has traveled extensively to scout settings for his thrillers. After three years in Greece, one year in Italy, and almost six months in Denmark and Hungary, Jonas brings rich cultural diversity to his novels. Currently he's in Canada for one year, then back to Europe for more research and touring.

His *Sarah Roberts* series and the *Jake Wood* series have both been optioned in Hollywood.

Let's take a look inside the latest book, "The Pact," and then you can check out his interview that we did with him.

Sarah Roberts has lost her ability to hear her sister's messages. All forms of communication with Vivian are gone. Unless Sarah fulfills a pact with Vivian, one she knows nothing about, their ties will remain severed forever.

In a time capsule Vivian prepared almost twenty-five years ago, when she was still alive, prophecies and documents await Sarah. Several of the documents are addressed to people Vivian thought Sarah might know in the future. When Sarah's father mails these documents, Sarah's world is flipped upside-down. Instead of Sarah hearing her sister and performing tasks, Sarah's friends are the ones hearing Vivian's words through the letters she wrote to them years ago.

Back then, Vivian hadn't been clear on what each person should do to save Sarah's life. Since the near future affects Sarah personally, Vivian cannot intervene and communicate with her directly.

The future becomes the enemy and the only way to stop it is to cease moving forward to die. Sarah fights to stay alive without any spiritual guidance, something she has never done before, which becomes her undoing when she walks into a trap she cannot walk away from, and no one is there to save her.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): "The Pact" is your latest Sarah Roberts thriller. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

Jonas Saul (J.S.): With "The Pact," I wanted to do something completely different. Throughout the series, Sarah receives messages—prophecies—from her dead sister, Vivian. In "The Pact," I turned that on its head. I had Vivian leave a time capsule behind to be

opened twenty-five years after her death.

Inside this time capsule were letters to people in Sarah's life currently. Her father mailed these letters not knowing their contents. Vivian saw what was going to happen all those years ago and now, through her letters, instructs Sarah's inner circle on what to do to save Sarah's life. In "The Pact," Vivian isn't talking to Sarah. She's talking to Sarah's family and colleagues.

I love how it translated to the page and, thankfully, so did the readers. "The Pact" released June 30, 2016 and as of now has over fifty 5-star reviews on Amazon.com.

S. MAG.: Now that you have reached seventeen books in the series, who is Sarah Roberts now?

J.S.: Sarah began as an innocent eighteen-year-old girl, unsure of the world around her, lonely, and lacking confidence in "Dark Visions," Book One. Today, she's a crime-fighting badass, martial arts and weapons trained, sassy, cunning woman who finds balancing her love life with her vigilante exploits a more difficult task than expected.

Readers around the world have fallen for Sarah, calling her the female Jason Bourne, or Jack Reacher. One reader said, "Sarah Roberts is one in a million. If you're her friend, she'll crawl through Hell to protect you. If you're her enemy, she'll send you there."

S. MAG.: Keeping a series fresh for this long is a challenge for any author. What is your trick?

J.S.: I carefully manage Sarah's character arc. Who she was in the first few books has changed because of the experiences she's had to endure.

Sarah matured throughout the series. Sarah grew up—twenty-six years old now—in a way no one would wish upon their most-hated enemy. She's been locked up, held hostage, sexually assaulted, and had to kill to stay alive. She's fought serial killers, street gangs, human traffickers, psychopaths, rogue government agents, and even computer hackers throughout the series. Each event changed her in some way. Maintaining her humanity throughout the series has been a challenge. There were points when she wanted out of the vigilante business. She couldn't deal with the underworld any longer. It was all too consuming, too dark. Then there were times when she got pissed off enough—that underworld fight was all she wanted.

Finding her core, maintaining a piece of her while allowing her to grow into who she is today, has been my biggest challenge, but also what keeps the series fresh. After reading the first few books, watching Sarah grow became the highlight for many readers.

S. MAG.: Looking back in the series, are there one or two characters that stand out and could possibly have their own story?

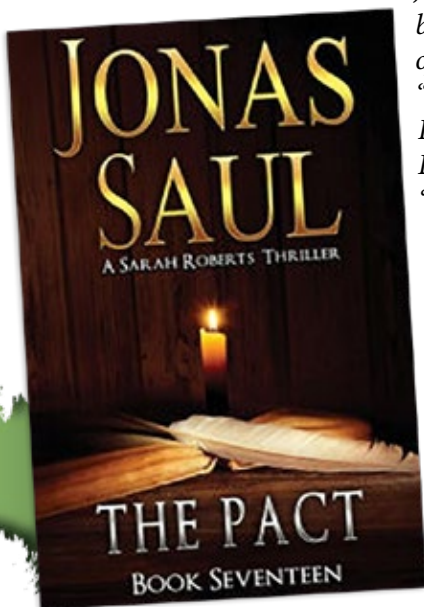
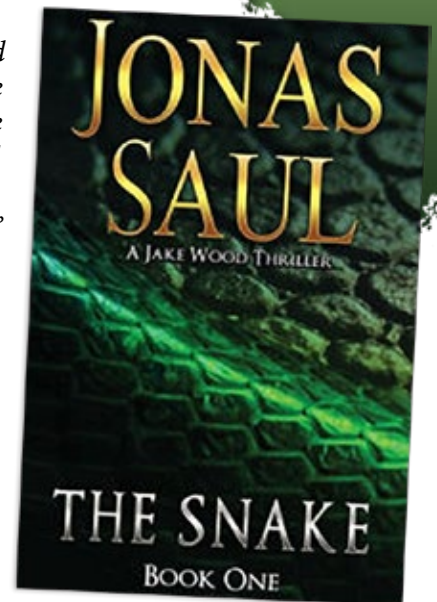
J.S.: Funny that question should come up because this is exactly what has happened. Sarah's boyfriend, Aaron Stevens, has his own story. It's a novel I wrote called "The Specter." Also, one of Sarah's closest confidants, Darwin Kostas and his wife, Rosina, have their own stories—"The Mafia Trilogy." Lastly, we meet Drake Bellamy in "The Hostage," Sarah Roberts Book Four. In "The Victim," Book Five, Drake is presumed dead. He returns in "Losing Sarah," Book Sixteen, with a new name and a new identity. Drake Bellamy has his own novel called "The Threat."

Looking back, I realize that I've always been writing the Sarah Roberts series, even if I wasn't writing one of the numbered titles in the series itself.

S. MAG.: When you look at the "canvas" with each new book, what is the one thing that scares you?

J.S.: Being able to outdo the previous book scares me some. Being able to manage Sarah's life, to manage the tension and the plot long enough to sustain another winning novel in the series. Three books in a series, sure. Seven or eight books in a series can become daunting. Fifteen books? Twenty? Okay, the fear rises with each title.

The funny thing is that kind of fear doesn't immobilize me. It challenges me. It sets



me up. Ultimately, it motivates me to fill that blank screen with text. Words that lead me—and the reader—on a journey. On an inside look into Sarah and what's happening to her at any given time. For that, I'm grateful. Because of reader response to this series, I've decided to write book after book until the readers lose interest or I hit fifty installments. My goal is to end at Book Fifty in the Sarah Roberts series. I have plans for Sarah's pregnancy, her baby, and many more adventures down the road.

S. MAG.: Why was Sarah the perfect character to lead your series?

J.S.: Sarah started as an automatic writer in Book One. She would black out and write prophetic notes. When she awoke, she would respond to these messages from the Other Side. Now, in the current novels, the note sender—her sister Vivian—just speaks to Sarah in her head. They've evolved their communication to this place and it's still evolving. I have new plans for the next novel, "The Terror," Book Eighteen, as their evolution reaches new heights.

Sarah was the perfect character to lead the series because of her vulnerability. Her loss, her tenderness, but also her ability to call people out on their shit. She has an uncanny ability to see through people and understand their motivations.

When I was fourteen, I lost my brother. His death was hard for me to deal with at that young age. Years later, he would visit me in dreams. He would talk to me. There were several times when what he said came true, and short of citing those incidents here, it was my dead brother that inspired me to write the Sarah Roberts series and have Sarah's dead sister working through her. The theme of these novels is hope, and Sarah's out there fighting for the underdog at all costs.

S. MAG.: Do you have a certain order in which the books should be read?

J.S.: Each book is written in a way that each story is separate. The main characters, Sarah, Parkman, and Aaron, continue throughout the series, but the stories stay isolated per book.

My advice, though, is to start at "Dark Visions," Book One, so you can meet the young Sarah and grow with her to the current novel. This series thrives because of Sarah and who she is. By starting at the beginning, a reader will be able to connect better with her as she goes through the stages in her life that a lot of people can relate to. To date, since 2011, over 1.3 million copies of the Sarah Roberts series have been downloaded in e-book alone, with that number increasing monthly.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word and your least favorite word, and why?

J.S.: I love words like octothorp (the pound sign), or words like jocund, abrogate, vitiate, malefic, vituperate, and obdurate. Really, any word that is rarely seen in commercial fiction today. I try to add several of these words into each novel I write. I dislike common words like very, little, suddenly, and nice. In my opinion, these words can suck the tension and seriousness right out of a scene.

S. MAG.: What is on your DVR right now?

J.S.: Right now I'm watching Ray Donovan. An excellent show about a "fixer" who can fix anything but his family. I'm also lost in the world of Mr. Robot and Better Call Saul. In the past, I've loved Sons of Anarchy, The Sopranos, and Breaking Bad.

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

J.S.: The next three Sarah Roberts books are outlined. Book Eighteen, "The Terror," will be available by November. Followed by Book Nineteen, "The Chase," and finally, "The Betrayal," Book Twenty, will release Spring 2017.

"The Target," Book Two of my Jake Wood series will also be out this winter. Both the Jake Wood and Sarah Roberts series have been optioned for Film/TV.

In August, I signed with Gandolfo Helin & Fountain, a literary and dramatic rights agency. Within days of signing the contract for representation, I was meeting with a publisher interested in a substantial print deal for the Sarah Roberts series. More details on that to come as soon as I can announce them.

I'd like to take a moment to thank you for this opportunity and wish Suspense Magazine all the best in the future. It's been an honor working with you.

We would like to thank Jonas for taking the time to talk with us. For more information on his work please visit his website at www.jonassaul.com. ■

RICHARD CHIZMAR

THE FOUNDER OF CEMETERY DANCE TALKS STEPHEN KING & MORE

Interview by Robin Lindzer
Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Richard Chizmar is the founder/publisher of *Cemetery Dance* magazine and the Cemetery Dance Publications book imprint. He has edited more than 30 anthologies and his fiction has appeared in dozens of publications, including *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and "The Year's 25 Finest Crime and Mystery Stories." He has won two World Fantasy awards, four International Horror Guild awards, and the HWA's Board of Trustees award.

Chizmar (in collaboration with Johnathon Schaech) has also written screenplays and teleplays for United Artists, Sony Screen Gems, Lions Gate, Showtime, NBC, and many other companies. Chizmar is the creator/writer of "Stephen King Revisited," and his third short story collection, "A Long December," is due in 2016 from Subterranean Press.

Robin Lindzer (R.L.): What was your inspiration behind "A Long December," a collection of short stories scheduled for release October 31, 2016?

Richard Chizmar (R.C.): *It was just time. After a long break away from the form, I had started writing short stories again in 2014. It felt terrific to be back at it, and one day I looked up from the keyboard and realized I had something like eight or nine new stories due to be published in the next year. That surprised me.*

My first collection, "Midnight Promises," had been published way back in 1996, and there had been a short follow-up two years later with "Monsters and Other Stories"—but nothing since. That also surprised me—almost twenty years and no new collection?

So, it was time. Bill Schafer at Subterranean Press had asked me for a collection probably ten years earlier, so he was my first stop. To my delight and gratitude, he immediately said yes and sent me a contract. I spent a month organizing the contents and writing story notes, another month writing the title novella (a story I have always wanted to tell), and "A Long December" was born.

Thirty-five stories spanning almost twenty-five years of my life. As I said in one of my story notes: That's all I've ever tried to do—take something meaningful to me (a person, a place, a moment in time) and tell a good story about it. An honest story.

All the stories in "A Long December" might not be good or interesting (that's up to you, and I do hope the majority of them pleased you in some way), but they are honest. They are my truth, and the best I could do each time I sat down and put pen to paper.

R.L.: As a busy editor and publisher of *Cemetery Dance* magazine, the owner of Cemetery Dance Publications, the co-founder of Chesapeake Films, and a devoted family man, how do you find the time to write your own stories?

R.C.: *It's difficult, and for a variety of reasons. As I mentioned earlier, for the better part of a decade I didn't find time to write my own stories. Instead, I focused on the publishing business and adapting other writers' works into films and being a father. I*

didn't write a single new short story for almost ten years. That's hard to admit and downright bizarre when I look back on it.

It's even harder to admit the reason for this break, because I don't really have one. Not a good one, anyway. I didn't have writer's block. My imagination wasn't dried up. Editors were still asking me for stories. Sure, I was busy, but everyone is busy; that's just an excuse (for me, at least). I guess I was just distracted and focused on other things in life—and at some point, I thankfully woke up and realized that writing short stories made me happy and I missed it. A lot.

When I sat down to write *Last Words* (the first new story after all those years), I was terrified that I wouldn't remember how. I'm telling you, folks, sheer almost crippling terror. But somehow it all came back to me and I finished the story—and these last couple years have been the most productive and happiest writing period of my entire life.

I'm not sure that even answers your question (sorry!), but the bottom line is this: writing truly makes me happy, so now I make the time.

R.L.: What does a typical day in your writing life look like?

R.C.: With two sons in school and a publishing business to run, I'm not sure I have a typical day—and that's often a good thing. I think the lack of a structured schedule keeps me on my toes and helps to keep things fresh and new. It's hard to feel burned out or bored when you are working on so many different things and bouncing around someplace different every week.

On the other hand, it can be very frustrating when I'm in the middle of an important writing project and even worse if I'm behind schedule. If I have a single week without several school events to attend or phone conferences to participate in or mountains of business emails to answer, it's a miracle. Real life just refuses to behave and take a back seat to make-believe.

As for my optimal daily routine when the real world is behaving, I try to get most of my writing done in the mornings before the phone starts ringing and the world gets too busy. When I'm really cranking on a project, I often return to it again at night, but I find my best work comes in smaller doses—around 1,000-2,000 words a day.

R.L.: What got you interested in writing and how old were you when you wrote your first story?

R.C.: I grew up surrounded by books. My father always had a book with him. Usually old thrillers or spy novels or John D. MacDonald's from the swap shelf at our local library. He tore through a couple of those each week. If he took my friends and me fishing or down to the baseball field to have batting practice, he'd usually sit in the car or on the bleachers and keep an eye on us—over the top of one of those old paperbacks. He also read a lot of magazines, as did my mother. My sisters were also big readers, which explains how I came to read all those

Sidney Sheldon novels at an impressionable age.

Because of this environment at home, reading quickly became a huge part of my childhood. The library became one of my favorite places in the world, an absolute equal to the baseball diamond and the local fishing creek. I spent hours there.

Eventually, my love of reading transformed into an interest in writing. I was probably only nine or ten at the time, and my first attempts were clumsy war stories where I was the hero and clumsy monster stories, where coincidentally, I was also the hero. Handwritten at the desk by the window in my second-floor bedroom. Initially, I only showed those stories to my parents. Their enthusiasm and encouragement eventually led to me sharing my stories with a handful of neighborhood friends. Their enthusiasm (sprinkled with a lot more colorful language and praise) only served to make me want to tell more stories. Bigger stories. Better stories.

That was the start of it for me.

R.L.: Is there any one specific part of writing that you like best?

R.C.: I love creating the characters. Getting to know them from the inside out, and growing to love or even hate them. It's a kind of magic that made me fall in love with reading—and writing—in the first place.

I also love those happy accidents in plotting when pieces you didn't even see as being related somehow fit together, perfectly into place, later in the story. Readers and reviewers compliment you for the genius plotting and storytelling—and you just nod your head and smile and think: if they only knew.

I also like taking things from real life—people, places, moments, thoughts, no matter how small—and interjecting them into a story, memorializing them, even if just for myself. There is a power there, the writer as God, and I like that. I guess we all do.

R.L.: Since you began *Cemetery Dance* magazine in 1988, you've worked with many well-known authors. What is it like, being able to edit and publish some of your favorites?

R.C.: It's simply a dream come true. Remember, I was the kid who always had a tattered old paperback with me. In my book bag. In my locker at school. In the back pocket of my jeans. Eventually, in the back seat of my first car and my second car and my third car...

Many of those books are long forgotten now (and the better for it), but many of the others were absolute treasures by writers such as; Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, Stephen King, Dean Koontz, John Saul, Peter Straub, Robert McCammon, Bill Pronzini, Ed Gorman, Lawrence Sanders, and the list goes on and on.

To grow up and actually work with all these fine authors,

to meet many of them, to actually become friends with many of them, is almost inconceivable to me. I'll never forget—or take for granted—all the special moments. I know exactly how fortunate I am to be doing what I do, and I try to remind myself of that each and every day.

R.L.: What interests you the most about dark fantasy and horror?

R.C.: *I love the freedom it allows. The boundaries of the genre are pretty much governed only by the depth of the writer's imagination. That's simply not the case with many other genres. There is something wonderful and almost childlike about that mindset. We all start out with these big, crazy, amazing thoughts and ideas in our heads, and then as we grow older we're taught that these thoughts and ideas are too big, too crazy, too amazing and unrealistic. We're told to settle down and follow the rules. It's the way the world works.*

I adore that about dark fantasy and horror. The lack of rules and boundaries. The celebration of imagination and daring. That's what keeps me coming back to it.

R.L.: Stephen King says in "On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft," "If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot." As an instructor of writing yourself, what is your best advice to budding authors?

R.C.: *Well, I've definitely stolen Steve's advice because I always tell beginning writers the exact same thing—read as much as you can and write as much as you can. Immerse yourself in it.*

I mainly just speak to "embracing the process." Writing is a tough gig, as anyone reading this magazine probably knows. It's hard work. It's lonely work. It's slow work, no matter how quickly you lay down the words. And it's filled with rejection.

I tell rookie writers to realize and accept this ahead of time...and embrace it. Look at it as earning your stripes, just as all their favorite writers had to do before them. Every restart, every rewrite, every rejection letter—it's all part of the process in which they have chosen to participate.

But so are that first acceptance letter and that first publication date and contributor copy waiting in the mailbox. Sure, it's usually a long, hard road to get there—but the journey is well worth it if writing is what you truly wish to do.

R.L.: What led you to start *Cemetery Dance* magazine while you were still in college?

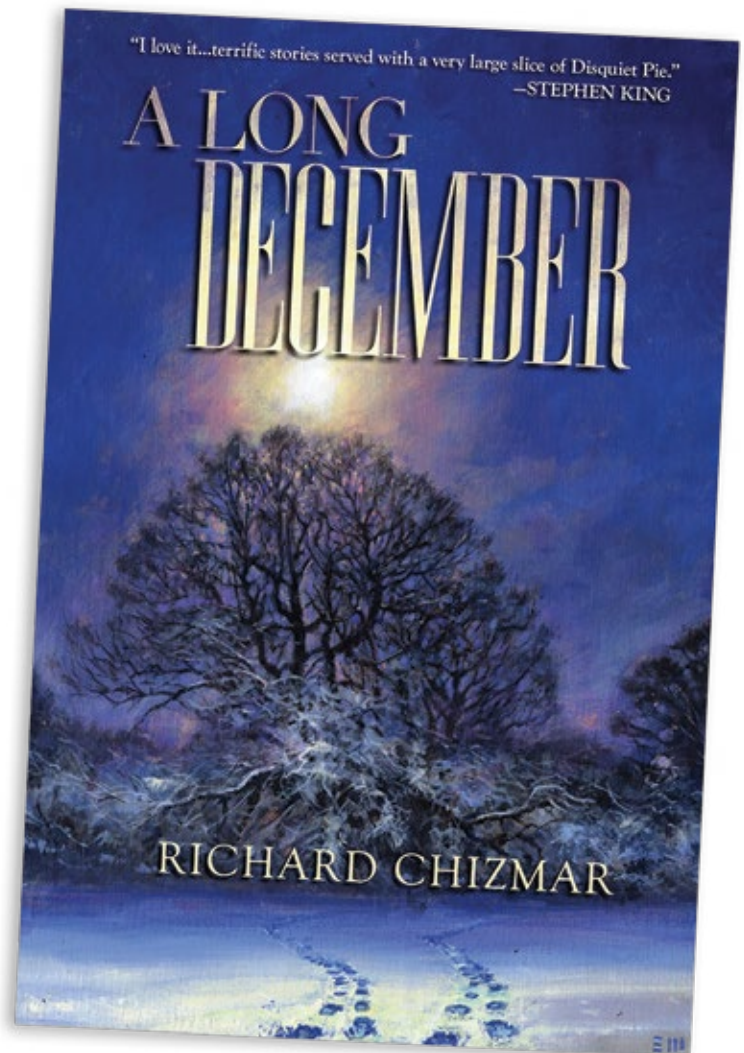
R.C.: *I had been writing and selling my own horror and suspense stories for a couple of years then. Mostly to*

independently-run, small press magazines. Well, some of these publications definitely stretched the true definition of "magazine." When my contributor copies showed up in the mail, I was often unimpressed and would often think: hmmm, I can do better than this.

*A short time later, once I found out that my favorite horror magazine, Dave Silva's *The Horror Show*, was pretty much a one-man operation when it came to design and layout and production, I decided to put my money where my mouth was.*

*I accepted a handful of those credit cards the big companies shower upon college students—I always used to tell reporters that I financed *Cemetery Dance* on 21% interest because it was the only way I could—and used the bulk of a student loan to take out advertisements in *The Horror Show* and *The Twilight Zone*. I spent the summer of 1988 reading submissions and harassing Dave Silva for advice and published the first issue of *Cemetery Dance* in December 1988. I've never looked back since.*

I realize now that I was too dumb and hard-headed and brave to know better. That's an often-times dangerous combination—but it sure worked for me. Did I mention how grateful I am?



R.L.: Since you began *Cemetery Dance* magazine and Cemetery Dance Publications, what are some of the biggest changes (good and bad) in the dark fantasy and horror industry that you've seen?

R.C.: Good changes: the rise of the internet and the ability to directly reach readers. Back when I started my business, we had a mailing list of maybe 300-400 readers compiled on an ancient database and each time we wanted to promote a new book, we printed the names out on mailing labels and hit the post office. Costly and time-consuming. Now, thanks to the internet and our website and email mailing lists, we can hit a button and reach over 20,000 individual readers. Of course, it's Brian and Kate Freeman and Mindy Jarusek who work all this technological voodoo. I'm pretty much still stuck back in the 90's.

Bad changes: the demise of so many brick-and-mortar bookstores and so many of those small press and semi-pro magazines I was submitting stories to back in the 90's (magazines such as; *The Horror Show*, *Deathrealm*, *Grue*, *Midnight Graffiti*, *2AM*, and dozens of others). Pick up any of the first twenty or so issues of *Cemetery Dance* and scan the advertisements. So many wonderful publications, and now they're all gone.

Good and Bad changes: Self publishing. Done right, it's smart and inviting and a legitimate alternative to old-school publishing. Done wrong, it's a nightmare (and not the good kind of nightmare).

R.L.: What type of story makes it past the slush pile at *Cemetery Dance* magazine?

RC: Good ones! I know, I know, sounds like a smart aleck answer, but it's really not. I have never really had a prototypical "Cemetery Dance type" story. Over the last almost thirty years, I've published subtle, graphic, period pieces, contemporary, horror, crime, mystery, suspense, even a sprinkling of dark fantasy and science fiction; you name it and if it has a dark underbelly and is a good story, I've published it in the magazine.

I love stories. Give me interesting characters, a strong narrative drive, and I'm yours for the taking. Until recent years, *Cemetery Dance* magazine had always been my own personal playground, and I simply bought what I liked. No great mystery there. Now that I have fine editors such as Brian Freeman and Norman Prentiss working with me, it's more of a committee affair. But we all share the same basic sensibilities when it comes to storytelling, so I think the transition has been pretty seamless.

R.L.: You've co-written several screenplays with Johnathon Schaeck. What is your favorite and why?

R.C.: Ironically (well, not so much in Hollywood), my favorites are probably a couple of adaptations that were never produced—"Black House" by Stephen King and Peter Straub, and "From a Buick 8" by Stephen King.

Akiva Goldsman (A Beautiful Mind, Cinderella Man) approached the two of us about adapting "Black House" (the sequel to the bestselling "The Talisman") into a tight, self-contained 120-page script that didn't go too deeply into the whole Dark Tower mythology. He liked our writing and knew we would handle the material with great care and respect.

"Black House" ended up being the most challenging and demanding script we ever wrote together. At times, I wasn't even sure it was possible, or that we were up to the task. But I was wrong. In the end, and just before deadline, we turned in 120 pages of a story that a) was very faithful to the book, and b) we were very proud of.

Akiva read it and loved it. I still remember the phone call he made to us from overseas. He said he had read the script on a train somewhere in Europe—he was over there working on *The DaVinci Code* at the time—and he said it felt like Stephen King was sitting in the seat next to him on the train. That was a very good day.

Shortly after, Steven Spielberg and Dreamworks started talking about bringing *The Talisman* back from the dead—and that threw a wrench in the whole process. For a time, there was talk of both films being produced, and then whispers of a television series. None of it ever happened.

As for "From a Buick 8," the novel—a wonderful father-and-son story about the mysteries of life masquerading as a creepy creature book—is a personal favorite of mine and the theme hits very close to my heart. John and I optioned the book from Steve, had a blast writing the script, and came very close to making the film happen with several production companies and studios (including Tom Hanks' excellent Playtone Entertainment). Sadly, and for a variety of frustrating Hollywood reasons (nonsense), it never happened.

R.L.: Besides dark fiction and horror, what other genre(s) do you read for enjoyment?

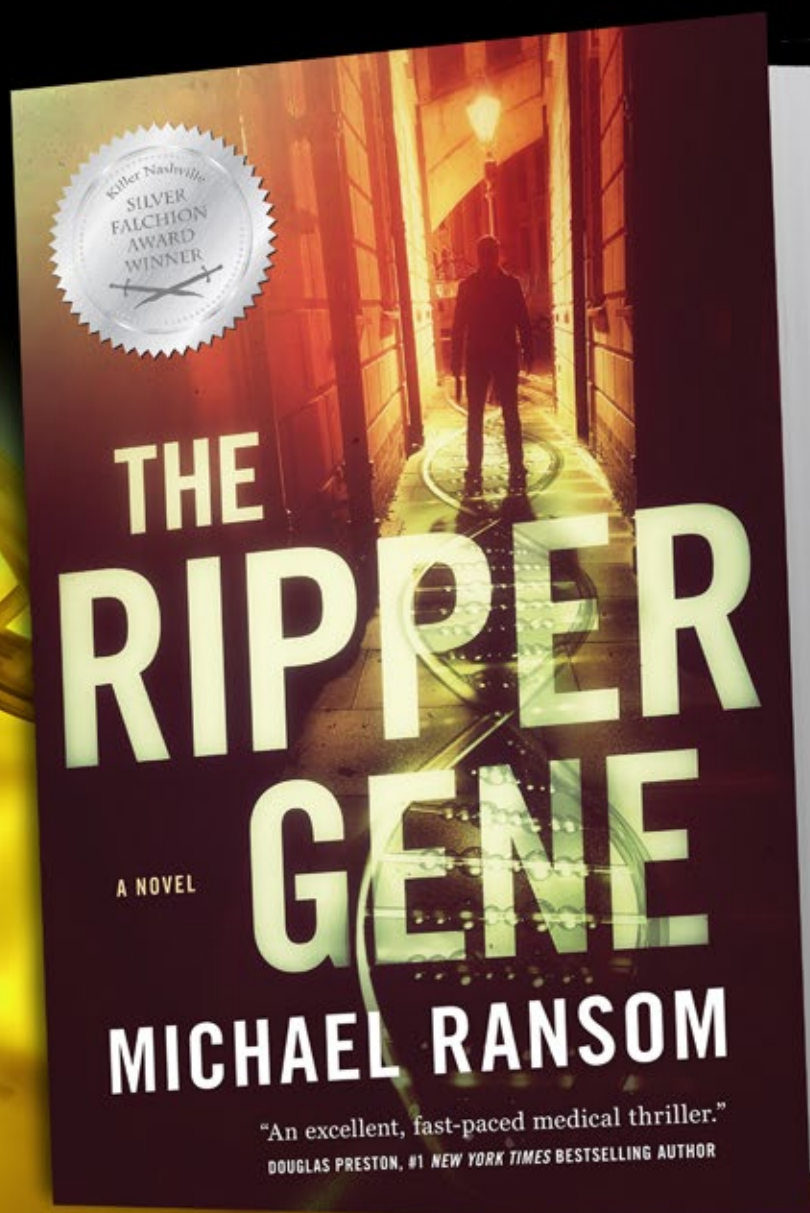
R.C.: I read a lot of history, particularly military history, some biographies, the occasional non-fiction book about Mount Everest or George Armstrong Custer or big wave surfing (honest-to-God obsessions of mine), some current event titles, some mainstream fiction, the back of cereal boxes, pretty much anything I can get my hands on. And I always run, never walk, to the bookstore each time a new John Sandford novel is published.

We'd like to thank Richard for talking with us. To follow his work, go to www.cemeterydance.com/richard-chizmar.html. ■

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IS YOUR PSYCHO KILLER JUST ...Psycho?

By Dennis Palumbo

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



Ray Bradbury once said, “There is only one type of story in the world—*your* story.”

In other words, all writing is autobiographical. No matter how seemingly removed in time and space from the reality of your own life, you’re writing about yourself. Even your impulse to tell a particular story arises from an aspect of your interior world.

Case in point: My series of mystery thrillers feature a psychologist who consults with the Pittsburgh Police. This character, Daniel Rinaldi, is Italian-American, was born and raised in the Steel City, and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh. As did I.

Of course, my crime novels are works of fiction, so there are definitely points at which Rinaldi and I part company. For one thing, he was an amateur boxer in his youth. The other, even more obvious difference, is that Daniel Rinaldi is a lot braver and more resourceful than I am. Most of the dangerous situations he finds himself in would have me running for the hills!

So Daniel Rinaldi both *is* and *isn’t* me. As therapists, he and I are similar in our theoretical orientations and manner of doing therapy. His best friend, a paranoid schizophrenic, is even based on a patient at a private clinic with whom I was especially close. But, though we share these and other personal similarities, as a *character* Rinaldi clearly represents a fantasized version of me.

As do, I believe, *all* characters brought to life by their literary creator—even those that seem totally removed from who we *think* we are. I’m speaking here about the writing of villains. Particularly those that are portrayed as crazy, psychopathic, criminally disturbed.

I can’t tell you how often I’ve read thrillers in which the author’s depiction of a “psycho” killer is pure boiler-plate: unconvincing, unmotivated, without psychological depth or realism. Why is this? Especially when the writer’s *other* characters seem more rounded, realistic, subject to the usual panoply of feelings and motives?

In my view, it’s because these writers are denying Bradbury’s tenet about writing, which is that—however disguised—it is inevitably autobiographical.

By that I mean, crime writers often see their monstrous, unstoppable killer as being “out there” somewhere, beyond the realm of normal human behavior. A caricature of evil out of a child’s nightmare. Or, even worse, they often conjure a conveniently “crazy” killer who commits the crime merely *because* he’s crazy. Merely to horrify the reader. Merely as an excuse for gratuitous and graphic depictions of unspeakable acts. Merely as a bad guy heinous enough to have us rooting for the hero to finally stop him. In other words, the boogie-man.

I’ve often had writing patients, working on a violent crime thriller, complain that they just can’t get inside the head of their villain “because I’m not like that.”

Do *you* feel that way? Do you believe that because you’re a nice, kind, truthful person, you can’t really create a lying, vicious killer? A ruthless blackmailer? A greedy kidnapper?

Well, if so, I beg to differ.

For one thing, as a licensed psychotherapist for over 25 years, I’ve come to realize that people—common, everyday people—have *operatic* passions. That stoic guy bagging groceries at your local supermarket, that helpful lady at the pharmacy, the janitor at your kid’s school—all of them, if given the opportunity to relate their life stories, would stun you with the personal dramas each has endured. The heartbreaks and triumphs, the yearnings and dashed hopes. The hurts and shame and missed opportunities they’ve obsessed about since high school. The deaths and financial losses and mental illnesses with which their families have struggled.

As I say, operatic passions. Great loves and hates. Maybe buried now beneath years of quiet, conventional living. Beneath years of daily toil, paying the bills, driving the kids to school. But those passions are there, trust me. Otherwise soap operas

wouldn't be a staple of broadcasting in every corner of the world, in every culture. Otherwise viewers wouldn't be transfixed (often as a guilty secret) with reality TV, with true crime series' on cable networks, with gossip in all its forms.

Which brings me back to the crime writer, and what he or she is willing to acknowledge and explore. And, make no mistake, there's a bottomless well, a fathomless sea, a boundless horizon available, if you just have the courage to accept all that it contains. What do I mean by this?

Deep within each mystery writer lies the seeds of every kind of human. From a nun to a serial killer, a corporate tycoon to a migrant worker, a life-giver to a life-taker. If you can feel, you can imagine. And if you can imagine, then the possibilities—for good or evil—inherent in that which you've imagined are available to you.

Here's an example, crude but illustrative. Let's say you've always had a secret yearning to be respected. Perhaps this yearning began in childhood, when your siblings got all the glory in school or on the athletic field, and you felt ignored. Discounted. Invisible.

Imagine, then, that your villain—a terrifying serial killer, a sociopath who murders without remorse—has felt similarly discounted and invisible all his life. Rejected. Ignored.

Well, if you're this guy, one thing that definitely gets you some attention is leaving a swath of mutilated bodies in your wake. And if you're clever enough to continually elude the police, you probably feel a sense of pride. Of gratification. Of vindication. *Now* the world's respecting you, even if it's a respect based on fear. You're certainly not invisible anymore. At long last, you're getting the attention you deserve.

Luckily, regardless of how we were treated in childhood, most of us still grow up to be sane, rational citizens. Maybe our feelings are easily hurt, or we succumb too easily to envy or jealousy, but we're probably not going to do much about it. Certainly nothing criminal.

But in our fiction, we get to act out these feelings. As writers, we get to create villainous characters who do all sorts of bad things—and, I submit, the more relatable their motives, the more terrifying they are to the reader. The cold fact is, even a psychopath has his or her reasons. (David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, believed his neighbor was a demon, ordering him to kill through communicating via his pet dog. Mary Martin Speck, a nurse who killed twenty-three patients, claimed to be doing the Lord's work. Dennis Rader, the BTK Killer, felt a need to prove his superiority over those lesser beings trying to catch him.)

As I say, the reasons may be irrational, based on delusional beliefs or unfounded grandiosity, but they're reasons nonetheless. At least in the killer's mind.

Which means the brave writer has to visit that mind occasionally. Has to figure out some way to relate to that mind's desires, fears, beliefs, pain, ego.

I recall a group therapy session years ago, when I was an intern in clinical training, in which one of the members got furious at another. Over some real or imagined slight.

Regardless, she got to her feet and verbally attacked this second person.

After ten minutes of vituperative rage and name-calling, the woman finally calmed herself. Then, turning to the therapist who was running the group, she said sheepishly, "Wow, all that anger and rage...all that ugly hate...I'm so sorry. That wasn't me."

To which the therapist responded, "Yes it was. It isn't the whole truth of who you are, of course, but those dark feelings are in there. They're in everybody. They're as real in you as are your other feelings—your compassion, your generosity, your joy."

As John Fowles once wrote, in his novel "Daniel Martin," "Whole sight...or all the rest is desolation."

By which he meant that the totality of the human condition, the entire truth of our experience as people, has to be acknowledged if we're to live authentically. Just as, I believe, the totality of the human condition has to be explored and utilized by the writer seeking to create vivid, compelling, seriously terrifying villains.

So the next time you begin conceptualizing your crime story's villain, don't be afraid to mine your own feelings. Down deep, below the surface. It's where the motherlode of characterization, and all the narrative gold that results, lies hidden.

Just waiting for you, the writer, to bring it into the light. ■

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. Dennis Palumbo's articles have previously appeared on the PSYCHOLOGY TODAY website.

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

SPEND TIME WITH IT'S NOT *WAYWARD PINES*, IT'S "DARK MATTER" BLAKE CROUCH

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*
Photo Credit: Jesse Giddings



Bestselling author Blake Crouch returns with a book outside of his popular *Wayward Pines* series called "Dark Matter." Blake felt that this story needed to be told and didn't just want to put out another *Wayward Pines* book; he wanted to give his fans something different. We remember talking to Blake for the first time with his standalone book "Run." At that time, we knew that he was looking at an impressive career in this crazy business. And then he hit a home run with "Pines" and the rest is history.

Blake Crouch has sold over a million books and his work has been translated into more than twenty languages. Known for high-concept fiction with breakneck pacing and

groundbreaking genre cross-breeding, six of his books have hit the Kindle Top 10, and two have reached the #1 spot. His short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, including *Alfred Hitchcock*, *Ellery Queen*, *Cemetery Dance*, and "Thriller 2."

In 2013, his novel "Pines" was nominated for ITW's Best Paperback Original Thriller Award, and his *Wayward Pines* series has been made into a TV series which is currently airing on Fox International Channels, directed by M. Night Shyamalan and starring Matt Dillon, Juliette Lewis, Melissa Leo and Terrence Howard. He has been featured in *Time*, the *L.A. Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. Blake lives in Colorado.

Let's take a quick look inside his latest book, "Dark Matter," and then you'll hear from Blake himself in our interview below.

"Are you happy with your life?"

Those are the last words Jason Dessen hears before the masked abductor knocks him unconscious.

Before he awakens to find himself strapped to a gurney, surrounded by strangers in hazmat suits.

Before a man Jason's never met smiles down at him and says, "Welcome back, my friend."

In this world he's woken up to, Jason's life is not the one he knows. His wife is not his wife. His son was never born. And Jason is not an ordinary college physics professor, but a celebrated genius who has achieved something remarkable. Something impossible.

NO ONE SHOULD BE AFRAID TO CROSS GENRES.

Is it this world or the other that's the dream? And even if the home he remembers is real, how can Jason possibly make it back to the family he loves? The answers lie in a journey more wondrous and horrifying than anything he could've imagined—one that will force him to confront the darkest parts of himself even as he battles a terrifying, seemingly unbeatable foe.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): Talk about the launch of your two television series: *Wayward Pines* (FOX, Season 2) and *Good Behavior* (TNT).

Blake Crouch (B.C.): *It has been a crazy year! Wayward Pines and Good Behavior both went into production on their respective seasons in the spring of 2016. Wayward Pines premiered in late May this year, and Good Behavior will premiere in the fall. They are very different shows. Wayward Pines is high concept, science-based, summer entertainment. Good Behavior is a kind of female Breaking Bad, a lo-fi crime drama about a thief and addict (played by Michelle Dockery) where the character of Letty IS the concept.*

S. MAG.: What sparked the idea for “Dark Matter”?

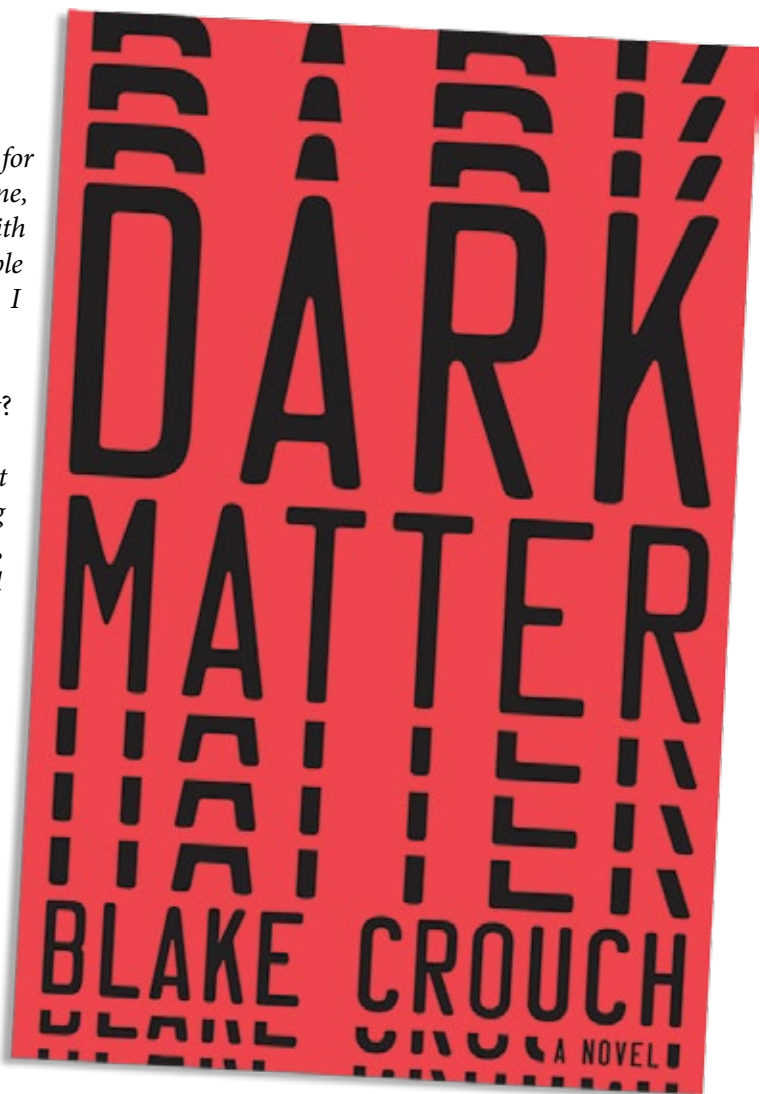
B.C.: *I've been wanting to write about quantum mechanics for almost a decade. It's been a slowly building obsession of mine, but I was always afraid of the high challenge bar associated with the research, and of making a very dense, incomprehensible field of science into the engine of a science fiction thriller. I guess I finally just psyched myself up to do it.*

S. MAG.: Memory is a recurring theme in your work. Why?

B.C.: *Hmm. I've never really thought about it. I think it must be because memory is, more than anything, the building blocks of our identity. I think memory of good times, or bad, are often the pivotal moments in my characters' emotional highs or lows.*

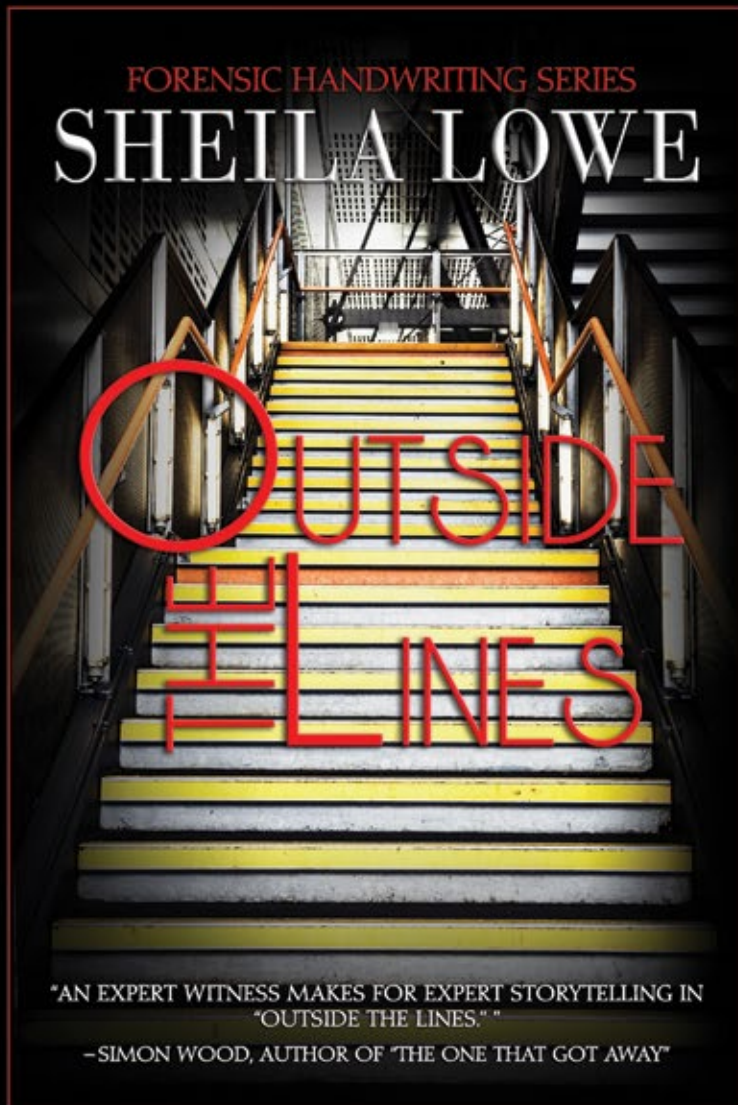
S. MAG.: What is the difference between a thriller and horror, in relation to your writing?

B.C.: *Interesting question. I started out writing horror with novels like “Desert Places” and “Locked Doors.” Not supernatural horror. Situational horror. Characters placed in utterly extreme scenarios that would break a real person. My use of horror has evolved in my writing over the last ten years so that I only use it sparingly now, in the tiniest doses. I look at a thriller as being a metric of pacing, and horror being a metric of how desperate and at the end of their rope a character is. I think the difference comes down to a fairly*



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terrific mystery is one you'll want
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subtle distinction: trying to survive a harrowing situation (thriller) vs. facing what appears to be certain death (horror).

S. MAG.: You also blend genres well. Is blending genres a good thing for beginning writers to do these days?

B.C.: *Thank you! I think the best thing a beginning writer can do is take a big swing with whatever idea has grabbed hold of them. No one should be afraid to cross genres.*

S. MAG.: Which comes first for you: concept or character?

B.C.: *I've created books both ways. I would say more often than not the concept takes hold of me first. For instance, in "Wayward Pines," I wanted to write about suspended animation and flash mutation set against a creepy, Twin Peaks-style town in Idaho. And the character of Secret Service Agent Ethan Burke formed organically from that premise. In "Dark Matter," it was all about quantum mechanics, so it seemed natural to me that my protagonist would be a physics professor.*

S. MAG.: Do you write what you want to read?

B.C.: *100%. And those are the best moments for me as a writer—when I'm working on a book and a character takes a turn I didn't see coming. Then it's like reading a book for the first time. That's honestly why I do it.*

S. MAG.: How do you feel about the state of the publishing industry today?

B.C.: *I think it's never been a better time to be a writer. When I started out, there was only one path for a writer to take and be taken seriously: traditional publishing. Today, there are viable options in independent publishing (through Kobo, ACX, and KDP), traditional publishing, and elsewhere. Having options, from the standpoint of a content creator, is always a positive thing.*

S. MAG.: What's next?

B.C.: *I'm planning to start on another novel in the not-too-distant future, but in the meantime, I'm taking a bit of a sabbatical. It has been a busy last two years!*

We would like to thank Blake for taking the time to talk with us. We also were able to get him on the radio show, *Beyond The Cover*, so check that out at: www.blogtalkradio.com/suspensemagazine. For more information on Blake and everything *Wayward Pines* visit his website at: www.blakecrouch.com. ■

Revisiting Poirot:

Sophie Hannah on “Closed Casket” & a Century of Agatha Christie’s Iconic Detective

Interview by John B. Valeri
Photo Credit: Phillipa Gedge



Sophie Hannah is an author of distinction by any measure. Her internationally bestselling psychological crime fiction has been published in 32 languages and 51 territories. In 2013, “The Carrier” won the Crime Thriller of the Year Award at the Specsavers National Book Awards. Prior to that, her novels, “The Point of Rescue” and “The Other Half Lives” (published as “The Wrong Mother” and “The Dead Lie Down” in the United States, respectively) were adapted for television and appeared on ITV1 in the UK under the series title “Case Sensitive” in 2011 and 2012. But in 2014, Hannah reached new creative heights when she resurrected the iconic character of Hercule Poirot in “The Monogram Murders” after being selected by Agatha Christie’s family and estate to do so.

“The Monogram Murders” was a global sensation and reached bestseller status in more than 15 countries. Now, Hannah is back

with a new whodunit, “Closed Casket” (William Morrow), which commemorates the 100th anniversary of Poirot’s creation in Dame Agatha Christie’s debut, “The Mysterious Affair at Styles.” Early praise has been enthusiastic, with *Publishers Weekly* noting: “...this endeavor confirms that the Queen of Crime’s legacy is in capable hands.” Further, *Booklist* awarded the title a starred review and praised: “...Hannah’s spot-on take on Agatha Christie’s milieu and writing moves toward an unpredictable and satisfying finale.”

Join the author as she reflects on a literary legacy...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): This year marks the 100th anniversary of Hercule Poirot’s creation. To what do you credit the Belgian detective’s enduring popularity—and can you recall your first introduction to him?

Sophie Hannah (S.H.): *The first Agatha Christie novel I read was a Miss Marple: “The Body in the Library.” I read it when I was twelve and was instantly hooked. I soon got my hands on a Poirot novel, “Murder on the Orient Express.” It was just SO ingenious: the kind of solution you’d never guess in a million years, but it makes total sense when you get to it. I couldn’t believe how clever that book was. I never looked back. As for Poirot’s enduring popularity, he endures because he is the best! He’s an effective, memorable caricature but also a real, three-dimensional character, and that’s a rare thing. He’s a vivid stereotype with his egg-shaped head and fussy quirks, but underneath there’s a real passion and commitment to justice, and a long and interesting life.*

J.B.V.: “Closed Casket” pays homage to Agatha Christie and her murderous arsenal. How do you balance celebrating that legacy with indulging your own creative identity—and what was the impetus for this particular story?

S.H.: *All fans of a detective who appears in a series of books, including me, want two things: reassuring familiarity and exciting new stories. The familiar part of my Poirot novels is Poirot himself! I was very careful not to change the character as written by Agatha Christie. I was determined not to alter a perfectly-created character or to undo any of Agatha Christie’s creative decisions. My role was to do what she can’t do anymore—to provide a new and exciting mystery for Poirot to solve. It’s very hard to discuss the inspiration for “Closed Casket” without spoilers—but I’ll try! There’s an ongoing argument throughout the novel about the value of psychological speculation as opposed to hard or physical evidence. That started life as a conversation I had with a friend*

about how impossible it would ever be to prove a particular thing that might or might not have happened. She said, 'Yeah, but, come on, we basically know'—and she was basing this on her knowledge of psychology. I, on the other hand, felt that I did not and never would have solid proof, so I could not claim to know. These two conflicting definitions of what it means to 'know' was a big driving force behind "Closed Casket."

J.B.V.: How does Edward Catchpool's narration help to give a fresh perspective on Poirot—and in what ways does the presence of Inspector Arthur Conree serve to shift their relationship dynamics?

S.H.: No one will ever write like Agatha Christie and I did not want my books to be pastiches. It seemed sensible to introduce a new character as narrator, who would have a fresh perspective on Poirot and, I thought, that would also explain any stylistic differences from the original Poirot books. Catchpool is a police inspector who is bright and full of potential, but he's not as accomplished a detective as Poirot. What they have is rather like a mentor/mentee relationship: Poirot makes a point of helping Catchpool learn how to put his skills to use. Inspector Conree is the opposite: a self-important nuisance, and as he tries to dominate the investigation he serves to bring Poirot and Catchpool closer together. They work together against the common enemy!

J.B.V.: As a longtime Christie devotee, can you take us inside the moment you learned that you'd been selected to resurrect Poirot? What does it mean to you personally to have been endorsed by the estate?

S.H.: It was the greatest honour ever! I didn't feel too nervous about it because I know Poirot so well, but I knew that I would have to get everything just right for Poirot, his creator and her family and many fans. Writing both books has been wonderful. I feel as if I'm working for something much more important than myself, and it's something I'm passionate about. The best part for me is that these books are helping to introduce new people to Agatha Christie's books and characters. Lots of people who'd never got round to reading her before now have done so—my husband and brother-in-law, to name but two!

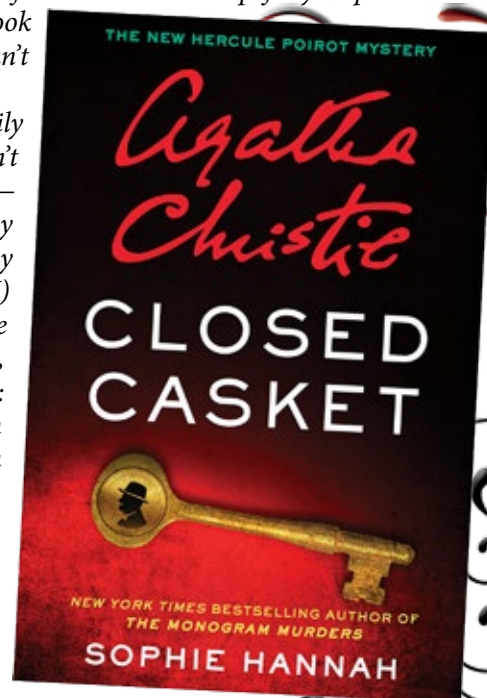
J.B.V.: In your opinion, which of Dame Agatha's books constitute "essential reading"—and is there a particular title of your own that you think her fans would most enjoy?

S.H.: They all constitute essential reading! But I'll recommend three for different reasons. "Murder on the Orient Express" has that brilliant, ingenious solution. "After the Funeral" is what I'd call the best 'all-rounder' as a novel: it has the perfect balance of character and plot, and the ending is psychologically fascinating. "Sleeping Murder" has the most baffling and addictive opening hook I can think of: a woman who has only just arrived in England walks into an empty house and has an incredibly vivid image of a dead woman at the bottom of the stairs. She even knows the woman's name, but nobody else knows what she's talking about.

I think and hope that Christie fans will enjoy "Closed Casket." It has a mystery-and-solution combination that I'm really delighted with. The concept is incredibly simple—you can summarise the solution in four words—but hopefully impossible to guess. It works perfectly for Poirot. I'm convinced that Agatha would have written a book with the same central concept if she'd thought of it! Though, without hard evidence, I can't ever prove that...

I think Christie fans might like my other books because they are pretty heavily influenced by the Queen of Crime in their approach to storytelling. Like Agatha, I can't resist the kind of plot hooks that show the reader a glimpse of an apparently impossible—or at least deeply surreal and outlandish—situation, and then as they read on, they discover how it is in fact eminently plausible for the seemingly impossible to be very real. For example, my novel "The Dead Lie Down" ("The Other Half Lives" in the UK) begins with a man confessing to the murder of a woman who...isn't dead! The police check out his story and find her alive and well and claiming never to have heard of him, but when they tell the man this, he shakes his head and tells them they're mistaken: whatever they think they know, they're wrong—he killed that very same woman seven years earlier. My more recent novel, "Kind of Cruel," begins with a woman having a hypnotherapy session for insomnia and, under hypnosis, she hears herself saying the words 'Kind, cruel, kind of cruel.' She has no idea what this means or why she's said it... and then she discovers that those very same words were the only clue left at the scene of a local unsolved murder...

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



REPORT FOR CHANGE:

The 2016 Sisters in Crime Publishing Summit Report on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Mystery Community

By Catriona McPherson
Press Photo Credit: Cathi Stoler



SPOILER ALERT!

Mystery publishing is tough. And it's very white. Add diversity of author or characters to the mix, and breaking into print gets even tougher.

Every year, Sisters in Crime carries out what we call a publishing summit report on some aspect of this caper we're all at. Recent reports have looked at e-publishing, the role of distributors, and brick-and-mortar bookstores.

Several important topics jostled for attention this year: indie-publishing; the YA market; making a living (without robbing banks) . . . But a couple of things, like pebbles in my shoe, led me to pitch the idea of tackling diversity, asking what life is like for writers of color (WOC), LGBTQ writers, and writers with disabilities (WWD) in our genre and—if it should turn out not to be perfect already—suggesting changes.

Those pebbles?

- the realization that when I moved to the US in 2010, I knew all about Ed McBain's 87th precinct, but I'd never heard of Eleanor Taylor Bland and her Marti MacAlister, the first African American female protagonist in a police procedural series. Why? I was mystified.
- the reader review that called a friend's book "soft porn"—because the lesbian heroine holds hands with her girlfriend—and demanded warnings on the jacket of such "alternative lifestyles."
- the experience of seeing a moderator who uses a wheelchair be forced to run a panel from the floor instead of the stage, invisible to the audience because the ramp was late, steep and rickety.

Thankfully, and not surprisingly, the SinC board gave enthusiastic approval to the plan and a team formed to carry out the work. Now, except for Frankie Bailey, mystery author, criminal justice professor and SinC's first African American president, you have never seen such a bunch of straight whites. That seemed like a drawback at the time, but it turned out strangely positive.

Because hardly any of us could speak to the issues from our own experience, the first step was to find wiser heads to help us understand what this report should be. We approached African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American writers and publishers. We approached LGBTQ writers and publishers. We approached writers, one of whom was also a publisher, with disabilities. We asked them all the same questions and then we listened. We listened and listened and listened, and the most surprising thing we heard was that the listening itself was a departure from depressing norms; that the listening itself was part of the work that needed to be done.

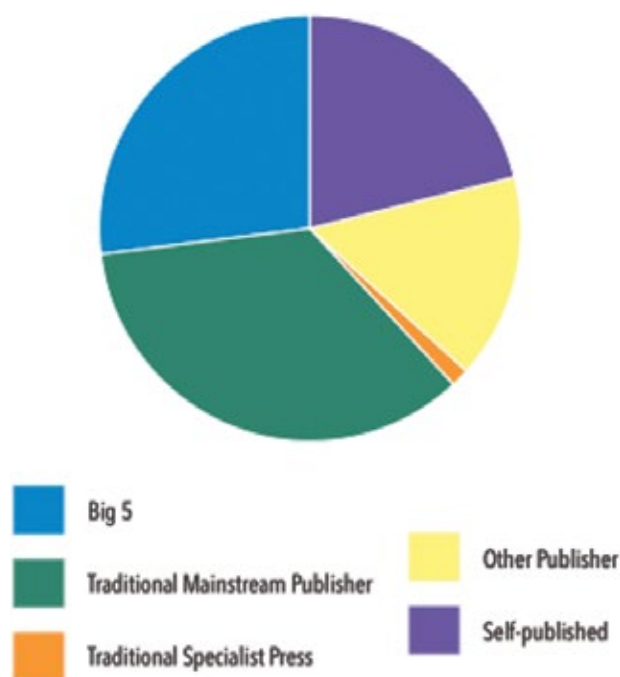
For a team who thought we'd be asking publishers—with our arms folded and brows drawn down—to account for themselves and their record on diversity, it was chastening to discover that SinC needed to take a long, hard, inward look.

But on the other hand, by the very act of asking, we had begun the process. And the next step was to ask some more and listen again: to hear our entire membership tell us who they are and what their publishing lives are like.

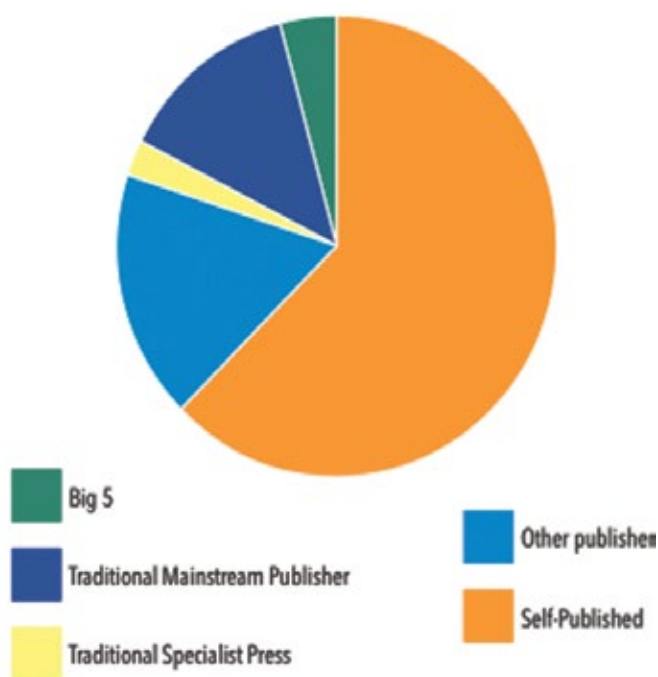
We designed a survey to do two things: establish our level of diversity and investigate whether people of color, people with disabilities and LGBTQ people have experiences different from those of writers in the dominant group (so for SinC that's straight, white, non-Latina, able-bodied, cis women).

To take just one question and just one group: let's look at who published our members' last book.

OVERALL



WRITERS OF COLOR



Of course, more and more authors are choosing to self-publish, since most authors are doing their own promotional work anyway and advances have dwindled towards invisibility. But as Steph Cha said in one of the clearest and straightest-talking moments of the listening phase: “Put bluntly, if people of color choose self-publishing freely, that’s fine. If they choose it after rejection from their first choice...that’s a ghetto.” And our interviews and invited comments on the survey strongly suggested that WWD, WOC and LGBTQ writers are just as likely to want a traditional publishing path as anyone else. But unconscious attitudes and biases create obstacles that mean they’re not as likely to find it.

So, there is a problem in mystery publishing. And there is no easy solution. As long as assistant jobs in editorial departments are low-paid and located in expensive cities, and as long as wealth still correlates as closely with race as it does in the US today, the task of diversifying publishing to help open the gates to all authors is a hefty challenge. We realize these conversations are happening in publishers’ board rooms as well. But talk isn’t enough. And it takes more than numbers. LGBTQ people are well-represented in US publishing and Asian Americans are over-represented (according to PW figures and US census data), but neither of these facts translates into an easy ride or even a fair deal for Asian American or LGBTQ writers. Real progress is going to take something else as well. It’s going to take *allies*.

The final section of *Report for Change* describes how allies—people who happen to have landed in powerful groups—can advocate and agitate for people in less powerful groups at every level. SinC’s national board, our chapters, and all of us as individuals in the mystery community can, with a little thought and some guidance, make a big difference.

Here’s just one example; We sometimes hear that it’s difficult to represent a true picture of US mystery writing because a typical event organizer, teacher planning guest lectures, or a librarian building a collection, simply does not know who is out there. As part of *Report for Change*, we have begun a list of diverse authors, to be hosted on the Sisters in Crime website and to be tended as it grows. *Frankie’s List* (named after its author, Frankie Bailey, against her protestations) is the part of this year’s publishing summit report we hope will live on until the happy day when it’s no longer necessary and young crime writers laugh to imagine that it ever was. Onward! ■

You can find the report online at: http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.sistersincrime.org/resource/resmgr/summit_report/SinC-Diversity-Report-2016-F.pdf

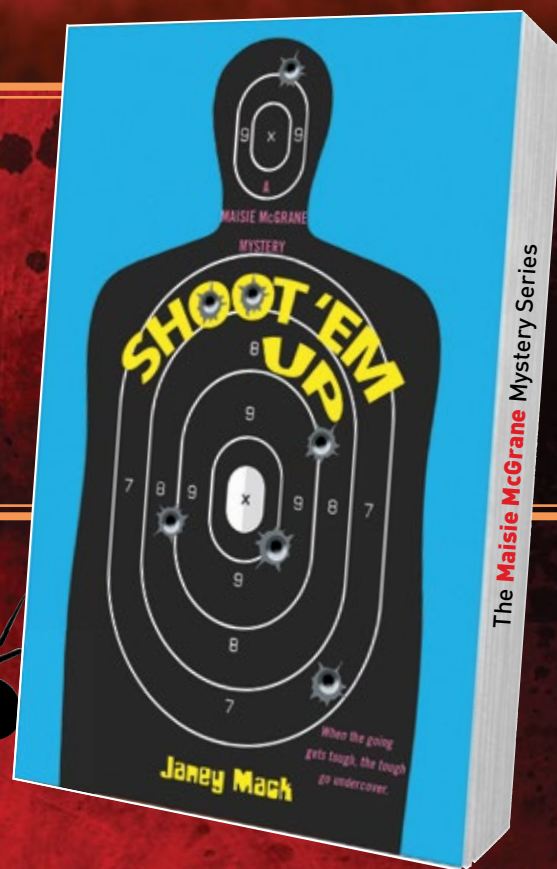
Catriona McPherson is the immediate past president of Sisters in Crime and led the team of seven who produced Report for Change. She is a multi-award-winning writer of historical mysteries and contemporary standalones, all set in her native Scotland. She immigrated to California in 2010. Learn more at www.catrionamcpherson.com.

Trick or...

Undercover cop Maisie McGrane is paired up with a new partner to go deep inside the mob who are running guns into Chicago. Now her meddling Chicago PD family is threatening to expose her true identity. Can she stay one step ahead of them, the cartel, and her new partner before her cover is shot?

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A serial killer believes he's ridding the world of evil witches as more women end up dead in Richmond, Virginia. As the body count rises, defense attorney Charlotte Wellington will have to face her own demons as she and Detective Daniel Rokov are drawn deeper into a case that's terrifyingly personal...

"Will have readers sleeping with the lights on."

—Publishers Weekly, Starred Review

Linda Castillo

is “Among the Wicked”

By Elise Cooper for *Suspense Magazine*
Photo Credit: Author Website



This book, “Among the Wicked,” is very realistic as Castillo blends glimpses of the Amish community within an intense and compelling storyline. Police Chief Kate Burkholder goes undercover as an Amish woman, essentially heading back to her roots. She is forced to confront her past life in a community that isolates itself, and within an unfamiliar environment, upstate New York. She infiltrates a reclusive Amish settlement to find answers behind a girl’s death. This unorthodox assignment with limited communication puts her in constant danger as she tries to find answers.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): How did you come about to write this series?

Linda Castillo (L.C.): *I began my career in 1999 as a romance-suspense writer, but this year I let my membership expire. While writing at the same time for Harlequin and Berkeley I kept getting the same comments from my editors, that I need to concentrate more on the relationship and less on the suspense. At that point I realized I was writing the wrong genre. I wanted to break out of romantic suspense and write a pure thriller. In 2005 I took a trip to Amish country, and after seeing an Amish buggy coming down the road, I knew then that I wanted my heroine to be Amish, immersing both the English and Amish world. What I wanted to do when I started writing this series was to be respectful to the Amish but also to depict them in a truthful way, sometimes imperfect. I needed to make sure Kate was sympathetic, but with flaws. I love the juxtaposition of wholesome versus the evil characters.*

E.C.: In some ways “Among the Wicked” seems a direct extension of “Sworn to Silence.” Do you agree?

L.C.: *These are my two favorite books. “Sworn to Silence,” the first book in the series, is where Kate Burkholder is born, created, and the setting of Painter’s Mill was conceived. In “Among the Wicked,” the recent book in the series, I finally wrote what I wanted to do for a long time, to put Kate back in the Amish life. Kate has to go back to this culture where she has many mixed feelings. Both books had winter settings that add atmosphere. From the first book to this last one I hope readers see growth between Kate and her two oldest siblings as they all struggle with her leaving and coming back to the fold in some way. I wanted to write a series*

where the protagonist is immersed and torn between two cultures that many times clash.

E.C.: Did you ever live among the Amish?

L.C.: No, but I travel to Amish country every year. A friend of mine, a librarian from Ohio, is one of these people who are friends with everybody. She set me up with an Amish family who I had dinner with. In another family an Amish gentleman showed me how the lights worked in the house, took me for a buggy ride, and even allowed me to drive it. This personal contact helped me in writing the Amish scenes on how they interacted and lived. I was lucky enough during my first book tour to meet the local curator of the Amish Mennonite Museum who took me on a tour. It was here I learned why they came to America in the late 1700s, early 1800s, because of the persecutions for what they believed. I also learned about the Amish through those who left the culture and while reading some great books.

E.C.: You write in your books some tidbits of their beliefs. Please explain.

L.C.: I try to include some of their belief system. This includes being a pacifist, not behaving in violence, believing in forgiveness, and not wanting to be worldly. They have a strong sense of family and community. They are connected in ways that mainstream American society is not. I write about the unwritten rules of not having a phone in their house, but being able to use a pay phone at the end of their block; or not driving a vehicle, but if they must go a long distance, being able to hire a driver. The contrast of old versus new is profound.

E.C.: You have Pennsylvania Dutch phrases in the book. How did you learn it?

L.C.: I learned it is not really Dutch but a variation of German. My library friend provided me with a Dutch to English, English to Dutch dictionary so I could hopefully conjugate my verbs properly. It is a very difficult language to find a lot of information on. Interestingly, at a book signing last year, a woman from Germany told me she could not understand the Amish German, but they could understand her German.

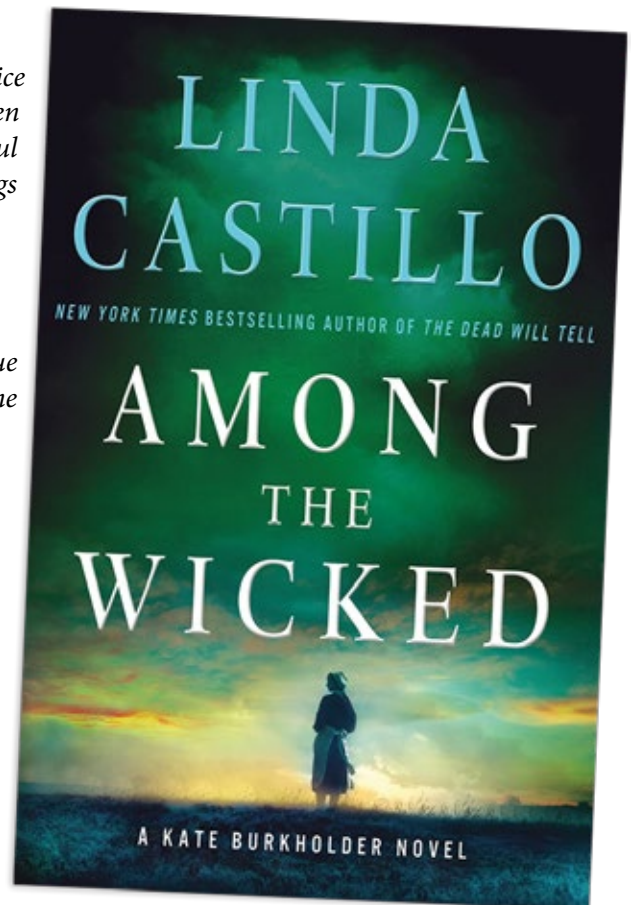
E.C.: How did you learn about the police?

L.C.: I made some very valuable contacts. I went to dinner with a police chief whose territory included Amish country. I'm a graduate of two citizen police academies where I had the opportunity to meet many wonderful officers and learn about what they do in a weekly class. I did ride-alongs in a large metropolitan city with both male and female officers.

E.C.: Did you role-play?

L.C.: I participated in a shoot/no shoot scenario. I was given a police issue plugged 45 revolver. A police officer and I ran through the halls of the

*“I love the
juxtaposition of
wholesome versus the
evil characters.”*





training facility, bursting through doors. I had no idea what kind of “crime scenario” I would encounter on the other side of the door. I had a split second to decide if the situation called for deadly force. I realized I would be the most inept police officer in the world. I entered this ladies restroom, and saw a man on top of a woman. He clearly had something black in his hand. I fired my weapon and shot him. He had this big grin on his face and held up his police badge. I got razzed for the rest of the course and they never let me live it down. The citizen police academies were an interesting experience and incredibly educational, and allowed me to get in the head of a police officer.

E.C.: The role-playing seems to relate to the Kate quote from this book, “Being a good cop, being careful and following the rules isn’t always enough. Cops will get hurt. Sometimes they die. Welcome to law enforcement.”

L.C.: *The one place she fits in is that she is a cop through and through. She was trying to get that point across. When I was at the police academies it really gave me a new perspective on the dangerous and difficult work police officers face every day, and the ability to write these police procedural scenes.*

E.C.: Do any Amish enjoy/dislike your books?

L.C.: *I met an Amish gentleman, a curator, who loved the second book. I did receive a letter from an Amish man living in Wisconsin. He had just finished reading the third book in the series and told me how offended he was. He hated the book so much he burned it. I never responded back and chalked it up to an experience.*

E.C.: “Sworn to Silence” was made into a Lifetime movie, *An Amish Murder*. It appeared to be a PG version of a serial killer, a simplistic version of your novel. What do you think?

L.C.: *As a writer it was really exciting to see it come to life. I enjoyed Neve Campbell as Kate. One of the things they did very well is capture the atmosphere of a small town and how the cold winter influenced the story. I knew that as a Lifetime movie the audience expects the plot to be a little softer. The book was definitely more hard edge with language and violence. This was supposed to be a pilot for four two-hour movies, but Neve pulled out. Currently, there has been interest by several production companies but nothing is in the works.*

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

L.C.: *My next book will feature Kate Burkholder. It is about an Amish man who was a neighbor and a friend to Kate when she was a young girl. Fast-forward to present time where he is in prison for killing his wife. But he escapes and there is an armed hostage standoff where Kate is involved. This affects her personally and we will see a glimpse into her past with the Amish culture. I will also be writing a true standalone that is more of a mystery. Set in Dallas, it involves a kidnapping. After that will be another Kate novel. The timeline for the next few books will probably be about nine months.*

We would like to thank Linda for taking the time to speak with us. For more information on Linda please visit her website www.lindacastillo.com. ■

CREAM

By Mark SaFranko

To anyone who ever encountered him, Eltenberger had always seemed a bit “off.” There was “just something about him,” as people like to say. His intense gray eyes seemed to bug out of his skull. His gait was full of odd little hitches. Instead of enunciating his words, he tended to mumble, as if to himself. But as is the case with many such individuals, being “off” didn’t prevent him from doing extremely well at his job. He did well enough, in fact, to support a wife who was out of gainful employment most of the time, pay the mortgage, meet the payments on a new SUV, and even manage two weeks’ vacation every summer. What went on between Eltenberger’s ears—as with most everyone else muddling through life—didn’t much affect how he functioned in the world.

He’d been at the company a few years now, and had worked himself into a solid position. He’d long had his eye on becoming manager of the graphic artists’ pool, both the permanents and the freelancers, and as far as he could see, there was no legitimate competition whatsoever from within the firm—which was a small company based on the eastern fringe of Albuquerque. If he faced a potential obstacle, it was that he was looked upon as somewhat difficult to work with. His boss, Tomgarten, unfailingly mentioned this to him during his annual reviews. And he had the sense, though no one ever came out and confirmed it directly, that his coworkers weren’t particularly enamored of him. Still, when the time came for a promotion, he had to figure that his was the name that would be announced. Results were what mattered, and he produced.

Until he realized that he faced a second, more serious obstruction: Bradley Schelling. Schelling, who’d been brought on a few months back as a temp and quickly became popular around the office, might indeed turn out to be his stiffest competition to win the vacant supervisor position when Amelia Hernandez retired at the end of April. Schelling was one of those jackasses—at home, Eltenberger referred to him as a blowhard—who made friends and allies of virtually everyone. He fluttered around the office like a gigantic butterfly, babbling like the garrulous disk jockey he once was, but whose work, in Eltenberger’s estimation, was decidedly subpar. He also couldn’t help but notice that Schelling was spending more and more time in Tomgarten’s office, door closed, prattling on and laughing with the boss as if they were best friends planning the takeover of the world. What made it all worse was that Schelling invariably emerged from those tête-à-têtes with a wide grin on his face, which could mean only one thing: he was the one who was going to nail Amelia Hernandez’s vacant job.

From that moment, Eltenberger could hardly contain his jealousy. And when he overheard Elise and Simone from Legal and Contracts whispering one afternoon that Schelling was probably going to be named manager of Graphic Arts, he was beside himself.

“What the hell does that idiot have that I don’t?” he grouched to his wife over dinner.

And she answered, “I don’t know,” while pouring herself more sangria, which Eltenberger knew she was addicted to even if she would never cop to it. Carole was so preoccupied, with drinking and picking up and caring for stray cats, mostly, that he suspected she scarcely paid attention to what he said anymore, so long as the bills were paid.

Fine by him. He didn’t really want to be involved in his wife’s petty concerns, just as he didn’t want her too involved in certain areas of his life. When the time came, if she was ever questioned by certain people, Carole would have no idea what they were talking about.

Eltenberger had hatched a plan. It had descended on him deep in the night, forming piece by piece like an automobile coming together on an assembly line, and he’d chewed it over, examined it this way and that until it made perfect sense, even in the bright light of the New Mexico morning.

When it was revised and polished, it went something like this...

Everybody in the office knew that Schelling was a caffeine addict, the worst in the place, accounting as it did for his obnoxious ebullience, and that he always made sure the refrigerator in the break room was stocked with his favorite creamer—a vanilla almond variety manufactured by a major company. Eltenberger had read on the public library’s computer, in the interest of not being traced, that sodium cyanide actually carried the taste of that particular nut. All he had to do was spike Schelling’s condiment with the stuff and the pain in his rear would be out of the picture altogether.

It was such a simple solution to his problem, Eltenberger was surprised it hadn't occurred to him earlier.

He studied as much as he could about the toxin: how to measure it, transport it, conceal it, and finally, and most importantly, how to make sure the quantity was powerful enough to be effective.

Eltenberger howled out loud. It was an insane plan. Utterly insane. You had to be wary of plans concocted in the middle of the night—they could be as crazy as dreams. But many times in life the crazy stuff was what worked, didn't it? Think of the Wright Brothers. A man on the moon. 9/11....

One thing was for certain. They would never be able to link the poison to him. He would make sure of that. And come hell or high water, he was going to be captain of the Graphic Arts department.

Eltenberger got into the office early every morning, almost always before anyone else, which was essential to his scheme. If he didn't deviate from his routine, he wouldn't draw attention to himself. And it had been wise of him to never express his dislike, his pure hatred of Schelling publicly, because they'd never be able to attach a motive to him.

It would be a simple matter to siphon the poison into Schelling's personal creamer when no one was looking, then sit back and watch it take effect. He took no chances: he tore off a paper towel and positioned it between his fingers and the loud, yellow-colored container when he injected the deadly substance.

That morning he peeked furtively from behind his credenza as Schelling hustled back and forth from the break room to his cubicle carrying his "Land Of Enchantment" mug until just before noon, when he suddenly announced, "I'm not feeling too good. I think I'm going to head home."

It was working.

Someone remarked that the flu was going around; another voice countered that it wasn't the flu, it was a virus. Then the conversation sputtered out, everyone went back to work, and Eltenberger peered over his cubicle wall just in time to catch the back of Schelling's head as it bobbed out the front doors and towards the parking lot.

Eltenberger forced himself to suppress the laugh bubbling up inside his belly. He knew he couldn't allow himself to relax just yet. His paramount concern now was removing that contaminated container from the fridge before someone else used it; people were famous around here for helping themselves to what wasn't theirs. If it wasn't necessary, he didn't want to create collateral damage, though it wouldn't be the worst thing to be rid of some of the other annoying chatterboxes infesting the place.

To his immense relief, no one else used the creamer before he was able to get it out of the refrigerator. When the break room was vacant, he poured the remaining liquid into the drain, rinsed the empty container and tossed it into the recycle receptacle, which would be emptied that evening by the janitorial crew.

To Eltenberger's surprise, Schelling took a few days to die. Once the news got around, there was much frantic discussion in the office over what could possibly have happened to him, since he'd been in fine health. Hell, he was one of those people who never even missed a day of work. It was a bizarre mystery to everyone who knew him.

Two days later, Tomgarten summoned Eltenberger into his office.

"Can you believe this shit?" The boss shook his head in consternation. "Schelling goes and kicks the bucket, and now I hear that his wife claims something is very fishy about what happened to him. According to her, he had a constitution of iron. He was the healthiest man in the world! Absolutely no reason whatsoever for him to go into convulsions and die."

"Convulsions...?"

Eltenberger feigned shock. When it began to sink in, he *was* shocked. It was as if up to this point, he really didn't believe that he'd committed murder. Not knowing what else to do or say, he sat there shaking his head. Secretly he was pleased that Schelling had suffered, but he was also anxious about events that might be, and probably were, unfolding beyond his control. How could he think something like this could ever work? He was as stupid as any other nincompoop who thought he could get away with the perfect crime.

Tomgarten leaned forward in his chair.

"He might have been poisoned," the boss whispered confidentially. "Can you believe it?"

"What?"

"I'm not kidding."

Eltenberger whispered, "No," with all the conviction he could muster.

"I got a call this morning from security that the police are about to invade our space and question everyone who knew Schelling. That means you and me and everybody else in here. As if we need that disruption, when we're facing so many deadlines! Something like this could cost me my job!"

"Really...?" muttered Eltenberger.

Tomgarten shook his head solemnly.

Eltenberger hoped that his own rising panic wouldn't show. "When, do you think?"

"When what?"

"The police..."

Tomgarten shrugged. He seemed distracted, as if he'd already moved on to thinking about something else. "I don't know. I wasn't told. Maybe they want to catch us all by surprise."

Eltenberger gulped. He hoped it wasn't audible. "W-why us?"

"Right!" Tomgarten exploded. "Everybody here loved Schelling, didn't they? Why would the cops even want to sniff around this place?"

The boss let out a small, tight chuckle. "Come to think of it, Eltenberger, you're about the only person in this company who didn't consider Schelling his closest friend."

Eltenberger felt himself blanch. What could he say to that? He'd just opened his mouth to deny the insinuation when Tomgarten hoisted his forefinger. "Listen, at the end of the month I'm going to promote you to manager of Graphic Arts—the entire department and all attendant responsibilities will be yours."

The noise Eltenberger made was something between a grunt and a moan. This was what he'd wanted all along; but now, suddenly, all the joy was gone from the reality he'd yearned for.

"Wow... Well, thanks for letting me know."

The boss raised his eyebrows. His employee's response was tepid, which apparently surprised him.

"Is there a problem? I'd have thought you'd be elated."

"Of course." Eltenberger suddenly got up to leave. "Of course I am..."

"One more thing," added Tomgarten. "And this is what I just can't...well, it's the goddamndest thing."

Eltenberger stood with the doorknob in his hand, waiting.

"Before you open that door... There's no way you would have known this, but I was just about to fire Schelling. The very next day after he got sick, in fact. Can you believe the coincidence? That guy spent more time flitting around the office BS-ing than he did working! In fact, his work was crap. It was a miracle he lasted here as long as he did. You were always the cream of the crop in that department, Eltenberger."

Eltenberger stared dumbly at his supervisor.

"But you, of all people, must have known that, right?"

Suddenly Eltenberger felt caught in a slowly encroaching, invisible vise grip.

The phone on Tomgarten's desk began to buzz. He glanced down at the digital display.

"Gotta take this. By the way, keep what I just told you between the two of us, okay? I wouldn't want anyone getting the wrong idea. We'll talk about the particulars of the promotion later—salary, bonuses, all the rest, once the Schelling situation blows over."

In a daze, Eltenberger pulled the door closed. When he looked up, there was a cluster of unfamiliar figures hovering near his cubicle. Two of the men were dressed in the dull blue uniforms of the beat policeman. Another pair were dressed in cheap, severe-looking suits. All four were staring in his direction.

Jesus...they were here already.

One of the suited men was exchanging words with Ellen Pettinson, whose cubicle was next to his.

Were they talking about him?

Eltenberger was frozen to the spot. He was suddenly at a loss for what to do. He couldn't very well bolt out the door with all eyes on him. Slowly, he made his way to his desk and sat in his swivel chair.

"Emmett Eltenberger," said one of the cops as the cluster closed in on him.

"Yes?"

"Got a few minutes to spare? We'd like to talk to you about Bradley Schelling."

"No problem," he lied. "No problem."

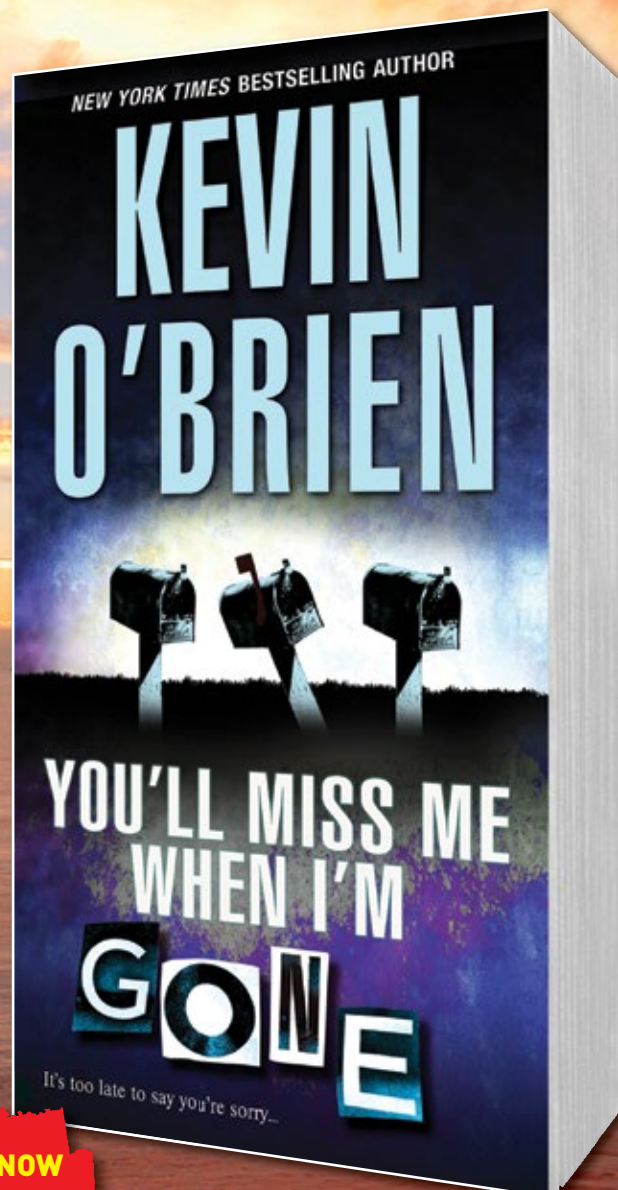
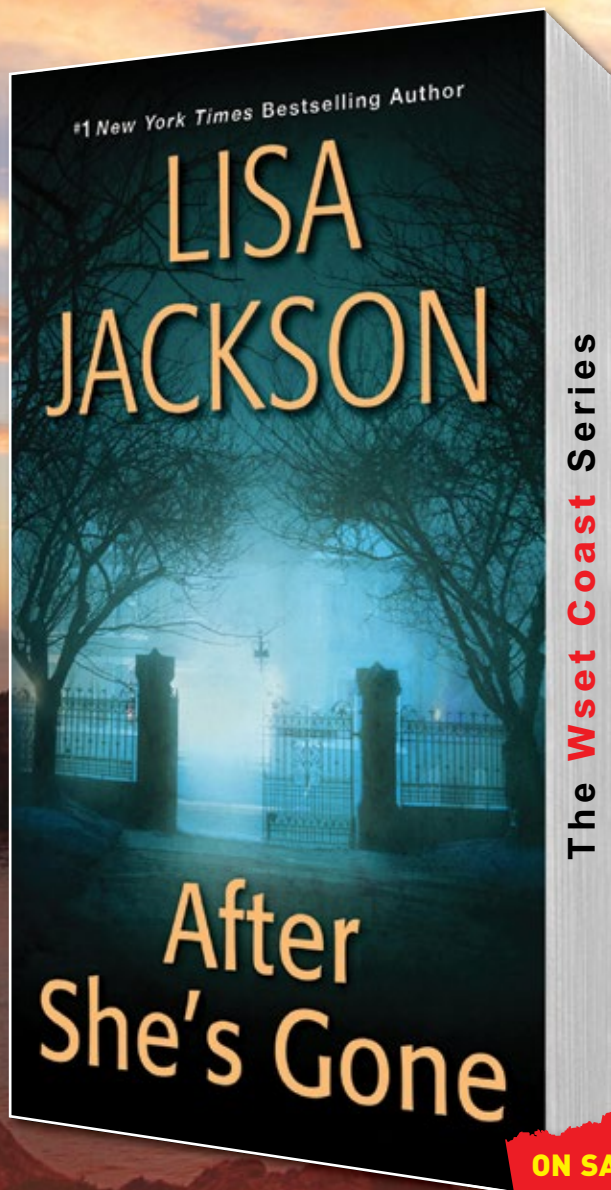
It took some doing, but he managed to hold himself together during that conversation, and subsequent interrogations by the police. What was most astonishing was that they could never manage to hang anything on him, though he had the distinct and dreadful impression that they wanted to. For a while he lived in constant fear of being arrested, but it never happened. Of course he regretted the stupidity of what he'd done, but it was too late for that now. At this point, not getting caught was all a matter of luck.

All he could hope for was that he'd stay lucky. For some reason he did. And he got even luckier: after taking over as manager of Graphic Arts, he steered a tight ship, kept his and his underlings noses to the grindstone, set records for company efficiency and profits, and for his efforts was named "Employee of the Year."

At the dinner where Eltenberger was feted, Tomgarten had this to say: "Despite the tragedy our company suffered last year with the death of Brad Schelling, Emmett Eltenberger proved himself more than equal to his new duties as manager of Graphic Arts. Which goes to prove what I've always believed: sooner or later the cream will rise to the top."

There was a smattering of applause. Eltenberger sat at his table with his proudly beaming wife, and smiled. Despite the terrible thing he'd done to secure his position, he couldn't deny that his boss was right. ■

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HE'S BACK:

Craig Johnson Talks Longmire

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*

Photo Credit: Chet Carlson



We got him back just for you. The creator of *Longmire*, author Craig Johnson, joins us to discuss his latest book, “An Obvious Fact,” along with a few other things. For those of you that don’t know Craig Johnson, you must have been living under a rock; he has now written a dozen *Longmire* books, with all of them hitting the bestseller list.

“The Cold Dish” was a Dilys Award finalist and the French edition won Le Prix du Polar Nouvel Observateur/BibliObs. “Death Without Company,” the Wyoming State Historical Association’s Book of the Year, won France’s Le Prix 813. “Another Man’s Moccasins” was the Western Writers of America’s Spur Award winner and the Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers’ Book of the Year, and “The Dark Horse,” the fifth in the series, was a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year. “Junkyard Dogs” won the Watson Award for a mystery novel with the best sidekick,

and “Hell is Empty,” selected by *Library Journal* as the Best Mystery of the Year, was a *New York Times* bestseller, as was “As the Crow Flies.” The *Walt Longmire* series is the basis for the hit Netflix drama, *Longmire*, starring Robert Taylor, Lou Diamond Phillips, and Katee Sackoff.

Let’s take a quick look inside his latest book and then see what Craig has to say.

In the midst of the largest motorcycle rally in the world, a young biker is run off the road and ends up in critical condition. When Sheriff Walt Longmire and his good friend Henry Standing Bear are called to Hulett, Wyoming—the nearest town to America’s first national monument, Devils Tower—to investigate, things start getting complicated. As competing biker gangs; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; a military-grade vehicle donated to the tiny local police force by a wealthy entrepreneur; and Lola, the real-life femme fatale and namesake for Henry’s ‘59 Thunderbird (and, by extension, Walt’s granddaughter) come into play, it rapidly becomes clear that there is more to get to the bottom of at this year’s Sturgis Motorcycle Rally than a bike accident. After all, in the words of Arthur Conan Doyle, whose Adventures of Sherlock Holmes the Bear won’t stop quoting, “There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.”

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): “An Obvious Fact” is your latest in the *Longmire* series; give us a little taste of what’s inside.

Craig Johnson (C.J.): “An Obvious Fact” takes place up in the northeast corner of Wyoming in Hulett, a town with a population of 396 and a police force of 1. Now with the crime rate we have on the high plains, one cop per four hundred citizens doesn’t sound bad, but Hulett has a sister city right across the border in South Dakota called Sturgis, which is the home of the largest motorcycle rally in the world—once a year a million bikers descend on the area and about fifty thousand of them detour into Wyoming to ride past Devils Tower, the nation’s first National Monument, and consequently through the tiny town of Hulett... Fifty thousand bikers in a town of four hundred and only one cop? That seemed like something in which Walt, Henry, and most especially Vic should be involved.

S. MAG.: *Longmire*, the TV series, can be seen on Netflix—how is the television show *Longmire* different from the *Longmire*

found in the books?

C.J.: *The Walt in the books is surprisingly similar to the Walt in the TV show, because the producers choose to acquire the novels, not because of the plots, but because of the characters. One difference, however, because Hollywood has to use real people, is physical size; Robert Taylor is a pretty good-sized fellow at 6-2 and about two-twenty, but the Walt in the books is 6-5 and two-fifty. The Walt in the books also copes with the tragedies of his job with a little more humor than the Walt in the TV show, because TV always needs conflict and has time restraints, but other than those few instances they're surprisingly alike.*

S. MAG.: Your setting in Wyoming is a place that many people never experience, why did you pick it?

C.J.: *I live there and built my ranch there twenty-five years ago, so I used the setting for Walt's world—it's an advantage, I think, to be able to be in his environment, to wake up surrounded by his landscape. Also, when I started writing the books there was a CSI effect that seemed to be pervading books and television that I thought kind of allowed the technology to rob the writing of its humanity—so I decided to focus more on character and place, and that's where Wyoming has an advantage.*

S. MAG.: When you think of the villain, what characteristics do you make sure they need to have?

C.J.: *Empathy. I think the "bad" characters have to be understandable and maybe even sympathetic or else you're just playing into the stereotypical clichés of good and evil.*

S. MAG.: With over a dozen books in the Longmire series, where do you suggest new fans start?

C.J.: *Anywhere, it really doesn't matter. I pride myself on writing each book as a standalone. Will the reader gain anything from starting at the beginning? Sure, but if you get into the books, it's just as easy to go back to the beginning after you try one that interests you.*

S. MAG.: Are we going to see a Vic Moretti spin off?

C.J.: *Never say never, but I think a lot of the attraction of characters like Vic and Henry are the fact that they don't have to carry the weight of the narrative and are more like guest stars, able to step into the books at any time and take center stage. I think they would lose something if I overburdened them.*

S. MAG.: What is your favorite word and least favorite word, and why?

C.J.: *Decent—because it's under used. He said/She said—because it's a cheap and lazy tag when introducing dialogue.*

S. MAG.: Fans already wonder how much input you have with the TV show, can you let us know how that works?

C.J.: *I'm a creative consultant, which means I discuss the season with the producers and then they send me the scripts and I line-edit. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we don't—but all in all it's a pretty great relationship.*

S. MAG.: How do you challenge yourself with each book to make your writing better?

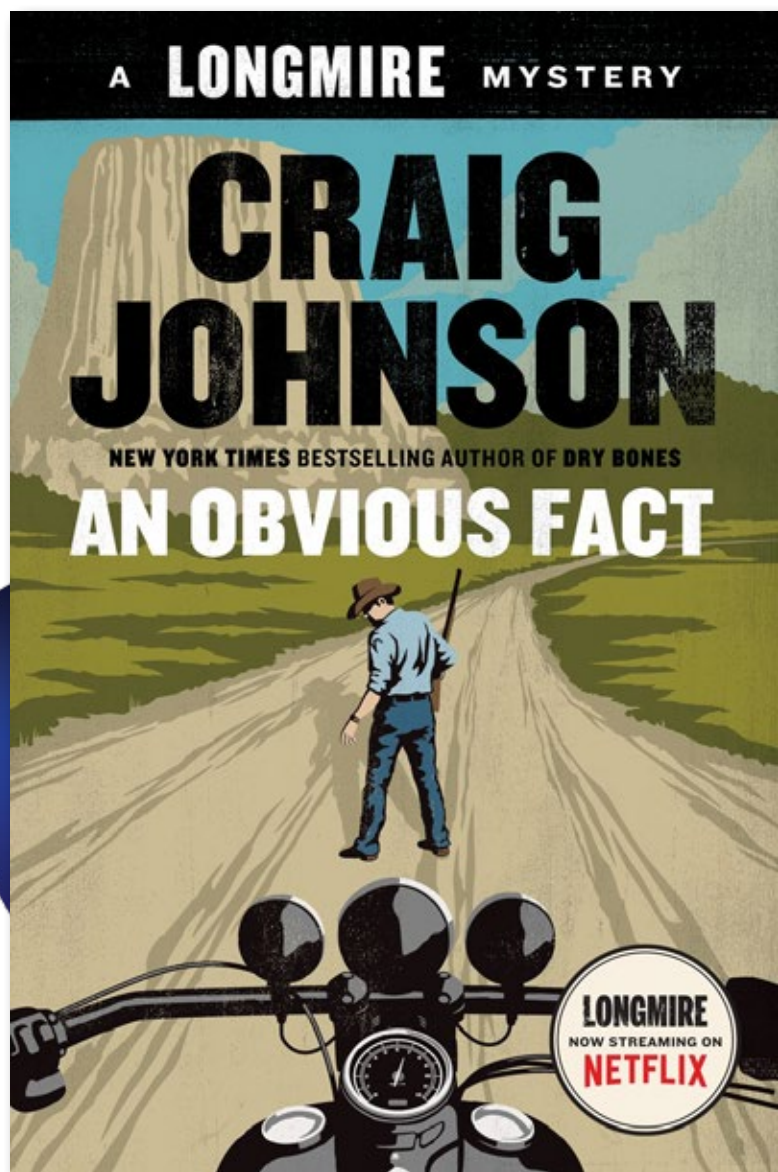


C.J.: *Try to be different—there are three ways to get formulaic or repetitious as a writer, you either get lazy, arrogant, or become a victim of your own success; to avoid those you have to challenge yourself with each book and try and do something different—no matter what the cost.*

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

C.J.: *"An Obvious Fact" was out September 13th along with the DVD release of Season 4 of Longmire, and Season 5 of Longmire debuted on Netflix on September 23rd. And the 2017 Longmire novel is called "The Western Star"—twenty-four armed Wyoming sheriffs on a train... At least when it starts.*

We would like to thank Craig for coming back and talking with us. For more information on Craig's work check out his website www.craigallenjohnson.com. ■



AN OBVIOUS FACT

By Craig Johnson

1

I tried to think how many times I'd knelt down on asphalt to read the signs, but I knew this was the first time I'd done it in Hulett. Located in the northeast corner of the Wyoming Black Hills, the town is best known for being the home of Devils Tower.

I looked at the macadam blend, the stones shining in the mix that was still wet from the early morning rain, and sighed. With the advent of antilock brakes, it was hard enough to properly estimate the speed of a vehicle involved in a traffic accident, never mind in the rain.

"Do you see anything?"

I nudged my hat farther back on my head and

turned to look at the large Indian leaning against the door of Lola, his Baltic blue '59 Thunderbird and my granddaughter's namesake. "How about you come over here and take a look for yourself?"

Henry Standing Bear didn't move and continued to study the large book in his hands. "I am on vacation."

I was kneeling at the apex of a sweeping curve on state route 24 where the road veered off toward Matho Tipila, the Cheyenne name for the first United States National Monument, so declared by Teddy Roosevelt in 1906.

"There is traffic coming."

I didn't hear anything, but that didn't mean he wasn't right, so I walked to the edge of the road and watched as a phalanx of motorcyclists came around the corner and descended toward us like a flock of disgruntled magpies.

They slowed—not for me, I wasn't in uniform—but because of the corpuscle-red Indian motorcycle with the modified KTM extended rear-axle dirt bike that roosted on the flatbed trailer behind the Thunderbird.

The leather-clad cyclists thumbed their horns and gave a collected thumbs-up to the Cheyenne Nation as he leaned there, looking as if he were negotiating a treaty, with his muscled arms folded over his chest, the first volume of Leslie S. Klinger's

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When robotics engineer and ex-Navy SEAL Matinicus "Matt" Hawkins gets a call asking him to survey a shipwreck off the coast of Spain, he jumps at the chance to dive on what may be an intact Minoan vessel, a discovery long considered the Holy Grail of underwater archeology. The find could rip the covers off the mysterious civilization that flourished thousands of years ago on the island of Crete.

But as he descends in his submersible to the ocean bottom with Greek archeologist Kalliste Kalchis, Hawkins soon learns that an invisible No Trespassing sign has been posted on the wreck and violators will be killed. Sinister forces quickly make it clear they will do anything to retrieve the ancient translating device he brings up from the deep.

Hawkins will have to use every mental and physical resource at his command to escape from the clone-like men in black with the blue-painted scalps, figure out how to get into a castle to rescue Kalliste from her long-fated death in the labyrinth, and outwit the monster guardian of the maze known as the Minotaur.

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The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories in one hand.

"You could have waved back."

He shook his head. "That would not fit with the tourist's stereotypical vision of the stoic, yet noble, savage."

I glanced at the book. "Is that mine?"

"Yes, I took it from your shelves. I did not think you would mind if I borrowed it."

I glanced back at Devils Tower crowding the horizon. The geologic area around the megalith is not of the same composition as the tower itself, and the belief is that about fifty to sixty million years ago, during the Paleogene period, an igneous intrusion forced its way up through the local sedimentary stone, some saying it was an ancient volcano, some saying it was a laccolith, an uncovered bulge that never made it to the surface. "You know how it got its name, right?"

"Yours or ours?"

I ignored him and started back toward the T-bird. "When Colonel Richard Irving Dodge led an expedition back in 1875, his interpreter got it wrong and referred to it as Bad God's Tower, which then became Devils Tower, without the apostrophe as per the geographic standard." I opened Lola's passenger door and eased in.

The Bear climbed into the driver's seat and studied me.

I reached back and stroked Dog's head. "You don't care."

"About what?"

"The apostrophe."

He hit the ignition on the big bird. "I care that a delegation of my people attempted to have the name restored to Bear Lodge National Historic Landmark, but your U.S. representative killed it. 'The name change will harm the tourist trade and bring economic hardship to area communities.'"

I knew the man he was talking about, and I had to admit that his nasal imitation was spot on. "But as an expert, what's your feeling on the apostrophe?"

He grunted and placed the book between us. "There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact." Pulling the vintage convertible into gear, he patted the book. "Sherlock Holmes."

"Did you borrow all three volumes?"

He pulled onto the vacant road. "Yes."

"Oh, brother." ■

The *Longmire* complete novel box set (11 volumes; trade paperback) is available now for \$176.

Excerpt from "An Obvious Fact" by Craig Johnson, published on September 13, 2016 by Viking, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. Copyright by Craig Johnson, 2016.

Why Do You Need Twitter?

By Lynne Constantine



When I give talks about Twitter, the question I encounter most often is “why”? Why do I need to tweet? Why is Twitter important? Why should I spend my time on it? There are around 313 million active users who could give you one reason or another. Before I can answer why *you* need Twitter, I would need to better understand your goals.

I work primarily with authors, so I’ll focus on the reason I, and many other authors, find Twitter an indispensable social media channel. First of all, did I mention 313 million users? Twitter is a virtually limitless source of opportunity and connection. Looking for a scientist to answer a research question? Send a few targeted tweets, and by the end of the day, you’ll likely have many to choose from. Are you seeking advice on finding an agent, vetting publishers, or finding a book designer?

Tweet out your question and authors from all over the world will share their experience with you. Every few months, there are literary agents who participate in Twitter pitch contests where they will favorite your tweet if they like the pitch, and you have the opportunity to send them your work. If you’re not on Twitter, you’re missing out.

Maybe you’ve been isolated in your writing room all day and just want a little socializing. Jump into a Twitter chat and join the conversation. You may end up making a few friends along the way. Gotten yet another rejection letter? Sympathy, empathy, and commiseration are in large supply when you have a community of authors on Twitter.

Have you noticed that I haven’t mentioned selling your book? That’s because Twitter is a *social* space, which means it’s for building relationships. In the long run, after you’ve gotten to know other authors, bloggers, and reviewers, you may find them retweeting your book tweets and even posting a review for you. But Twitter is the long game. Think of it like going to conferences—you wouldn’t expect to walk in your first time and have all the well-known authors rush over to speak to you. But after attending several times, and getting involved, you find yourself part of the group, receiving help with your career and later helping others. That’s what Twitter’s all about. Reciprocity. Sharing. Engaging. Participating.

I’ve made some great friends on Twitter who have given me advice, helped me with my marketing, reviewed my books, written articles on my books, and supported and encouraged me along my writing journey. I’ve even been fortunate to meet some of them in person at conferences.

Keep in mind that it does take time and strategy to build a network of followers that meet your individual goals. As with everything, you won’t become a pro overnight. But with a little sincerity and some effort, Twitter may become your favorite online place to hang out too.

For more advice on how to use Twitter more effectively, click <http://lynneconstantine.com/category/social-media/> ■

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

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

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