

MYSTERY & SUSPENSE

MAGAZINE

N°11 - SUMMER 2023

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THRILLERS FOR TEENS

Suspenseful
reads that are
at the top of
their class.

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**Feature: Fantasy Novels
that are Actually Thrillers**
.....

**Author Q&As: J.A. Jance, Robert Dugoni,
Megan Abbott & Kara Thomas**
.....

Feature: Hunger in Horror
.....

Short Fiction: "Stone of Heaven"
.....

**Reviews: *Forgotten War*,
Panther Gap, and more**





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EDITOR'S COLUMN

Take a deep dive into the minds of your favorite authors as they share their secrets behind crafting the perfect mystery, thriller, horror, or crime novel.



Sam Boush
Editor-in-Chief

This time of year has always been magical, and we're here to celebrate the summer season with you in the best way we know—by delving into the thrilling, enigmatic world of mystery.

Our team has meticulously curated a selection of interviews, reviews, and features that are perfect for long, sun-drenched days and cool, starry nights. Take a deep dive into the minds of your favorite authors as they share their inspirations and secrets behind crafting the perfect mystery, thriller, horror, or crime novel. Whether you prefer to lounge poolside or hide out in the comfort of an air-conditioned room, we promise that our summer edition will keep you entertained and captivated.

In this issue, we're excited to introduce exclusive interviews with best-selling authors Megan Abbott, J.A. Jance, Robert Dugoni, and Kara Thomas. We also present articles ranging from thriller topics like "Two Fantasy Novels that Are Actually Thrillers" and "Thrillers for Teens," to horror topics like "The Boogeymen of Suspense" and "Hunger for Horror." Not to mention an original murder mystery short story, "Stone of Heaven."

We hope that our summer edition not only delights your senses but also encourages you to explore the mysteries that abound in the world around us. After all, summer is a time for discovery, transformation, and the unveiling of hidden secrets.

Happy reading,
Sam

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Lessons from Raymond Chandler



From creative word choice to punchy dialogue, the novels and stories of Raymond Chandler still hold their own kind of magic.

BY LAURA KELLY ROBB

It's no secret that Raymond Chandler's mystery novels weren't known for their plots. The stories could meander, dally, and double back on themselves. In *The Big Sleep*, the lead character, private eye Phillip Marlowe, solves what seems to be the central mystery halfway into the book, and without clear motivation Marlowe takes on a new assignment.

Far from sinking Chandler as a writer, his plots served him well. The what and why were but vehicles for his who: his desperate run-aways, cops with a past, lovelorn felons, and the colorful list goes on. Readers loved his characters and Chandler will remain in the pantheon because of it. To get to an understanding of how he captured his readership, a look at three of his novels, *The Big Sleep*, *Lady in the Lake*, and *Farewell My Lovely*, can teach a reader about his magic. Chandler made his characters unforgettable in a variety of ways.

SURPRISE WORD CHOICES

While Chandler needed plain vocabulary just like the rest of us to get characters from point A to point B, he also was able to surprise with uncanny comparisons and unpredictable descriptions. He left little white space for pedestrian sentences.

In the following, Marlowe approaches Joe Brody for the first time in *The Big Sleep*:

He brought a cigarette from behind the door and tucked it between his lips and drew a little smoke from it. The smoke came towards me in a lazy, contemptuous puff and behind it words in a cool, unhurried voice that had no more inflection than the voice of a faro dealer.

The trick of attaching the adjective “contemptuous” to the smoke, and not the person, draws a more subtle picture of the character and in the process makes us like Marlowe more for not slapping a label on a person he had yet to meet.

Later in the book, Marlowe finds Vivian Regan recklessly gambling at a roulette table, and he overhears two gentlemen onlookers who stepped away from the table to discuss the stakes:

“It gives me the itch,” the other one said. “She’s betting a grand at a crack. She can’t lose.” They put their beaks in their drinks, gurgled swiftly, and went back.

Chandler uses the words “beaks” and “gurgled” to suggest these men are chattering like birds, enchanted by the excitement of money. The description lets the reader know the gossipy nature of her social circle and her impact on otherwise sophisticated players. Chandler had a tremendous talent for creating a three-dimensional scene.

PUNCHING UP THE DIALOGUE

Dialogue helps a writer move a story forward and helps define the characters by giving them a distinctive voice. Chandler used the normal tags, like *he said* or *she said*, but also often substituted more varied verbs along with a phrase of comparison or description to convey the attitude of the speaker.

In *Farewell My Lovely*, Lindsay Marriott greets Phillip Marlowe:

“Oh, yes. Let me see, your name is—” he paused and frowned in the effort of memory. The effect was as phony as the pedigree of a used car ... He opened the door wide with a fingertip, as though opening the door himself dirtied him a little.

And similarly, from *The Lady in the Lake*, when Marlowe surprises Mrs. Fallbrook:

“Why you perfectly loathsome man,” she squawked. “Don’t you dare touch me! Don’t you take a single step towards me! I won’t stay in this house another minute with you. How dare you be so insulting—” She caught her voice and snapped it in mid-air like a rubber band.

The word “squawked” suggests an image of a nervous, perhaps unsteady woman, but Chandler adds the part about her voice snapping to heighten our suspicion. Is Mrs. Fallbrook alarmed and caught off guard, or is she in the midst of a well-controlled performance?

Occasionally, Chandler would shade a speaker’s attitude with a phrase simply put, as here from a dialogue with Lindsay Marriott in *Farewell, My Lovely*:

He gave me a quick, darting frown.

Chandler often darted around the use of an adverb in favor of a more subtle description, and in that way conveyed less conviction and more impression. The reader accompanies Marlowe in his investigation rather than being led by the nose.

HYPERBOLE AND HUMOR

Chandler had a wonderful touch for the splashiest aspects of his characters. He seemed to have fun with the outstanding and unusual people Marlowe would run into in his investigations.

In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Marlowe sees a picture of the prominent Mrs. Grayle:

It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window.

From the same novel, Chandler describes his entry into Lindsay Marriott’s home:

The carpet almost tickled my ankles.

In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe confronts Joe Brody, whom he suspects of stealing a cache of pornography in order to run his own rental business:

“It’s no racket for bums,” I told Brody almost affectionately. “It takes a smooth worker like you, Joe. You’ve got to get confidence and keep it. People who spend their money for second-hand sex jags are as nervous as dowagers who can’t find the rest room.”

The risk of using humor is that not all jokes age well. What Chandler chose to underline or exaggerate are aspects we may no longer find as humorous as did people in the ’30s and ’40s. The lesson is double-edged, but I appreciated Chandler for taking enough runs at a clever line that many of them still stick.

THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL SETTING

Chandler described the surroundings in his stories in a way that supported his characters and made them more believable. His descriptions of the surroundings often injected tension and foreboding into a scene, making the desperate acts of his players seem likely and, at times, rational.

In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe conspires to ask for help to fix a flat on a dark night from the men he has been tracking. He is in the suspect’s garage and things are not going well. The garage door opens:

Feet crunched outside and the door was pushed open. The light hit pencils of rain and made silver wires of them. Art trundled two muddy flats in sullenly, kicked the door shut, let one of the flats fall over on its side. He looked at me savagely.

Chandler has a knack for making the reader believe that danger is around every corner. In *Lady in the Lake*, Marlowe believes he is alone in a suspect’s home:

In the silence time passed. It passed in the dry whirr of the electric clock on the mantel, in the far-off toot of an auto horn on Aster Drive, in the hornet drone of a plane over the foothills across the canyon, in the sudden lurch and growl of the electric refrigerator in the kitchen ... I started along the rug towards the archway in the back. A hand in a glove appeared on the slope of the white metal railing, at the edge of the archway, where the stairs went down. It appeared and stopped.



In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Marlowe takes a ride to the outskirts of Los Angeles with the strange henchman of a potential client:

Then there were no more houses, just the still dark foothills with an early star or two above them, and the concrete ribbon of road and a sheer drop on one side into a tangle of scrub oak and manzanita where sometimes you can hear the call of the quails if you stop and keep still and wait. On the other side of the road was a raw clay bank at the edge of which a few unbeatable wild flowers hung on like naughty children that won’t go to bed.

In that passage, the reader is made to feel the character’s regret at agreeing to take a ride with the henchmen as he looks out the window and considers what is probably his last view of a beloved landscape.

Any reader or writer who wonders how the masters delivered one satisfying read after another won’t go wrong taking a slow stroll through the novels and stories of Raymond Chandler.



About the author

Laura Kelly Robb writes mystery and suspense novels. *The Laguna Shores Research Club*, published by TouchPoint Press in 2022, tells the story of an artist in St. Augustine whose search for her neighbor’s killer reveals a web of corruption. A sequel is expected in 2024. A fan of history, outdoor sports, and yoga, Laura lives on the Georgia coast and takes a break from the heat each summer in the San Juan Islands. She loves to hear from readers at Laura@laurakellyrobb.com.



J.A. Jance
New York Times bestselling author
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J.A. Jance

Judith Ann Jance is the top 10 *New York Times* best-selling author of the Joanna Brady series; the J. P. Beaumont series; three interrelated thrillers featuring the Walker family; and *Edge of Evil*, the first in a series featuring Ali Reynolds. Born in South Dakota and brought up in Bisbee, Arizona, Jance lives with her husband in Seattle, Washington, and Tucson, Arizona.

INTERVIEW BY ELISE COOPER

Q. Rumor has it you had a hard time writing this story. Is that true?

J.A.: This book took a whole year to write. In 2022 I was working on it. After writing nine chapters I handed the draft over to my husband, Bill. He handed it back to me and said, “I cannot read this. It is a mess.” He is a very brave man. I re-read what I had written, and he was correct, it was a mess. What was wrong is that the bad guy had not appeared in the first quarter of the book. There was no foundation in the first draft. I did a complete rewrite. Bill, my agent, and my new editor all liked the new story.

Q. In this book, Ali Reynolds is not endangered?

J.A.: Yes. This is unusual. I wanted to show how it takes a village of law enforcement officers to solve a crime.

Q. You made the police officers come to life. Would you agree?

J.A.: These days the press has the police as bad, uncaring, and evil. A scene in the story really underscores how much the police characters in the books cared. I had goosebumps when I wrote it. The bad guy from the Arizona Highway Patrol is arrogant and an a-hole. But all the others are good and are lined up against evil. The vast majority are not bad. Part of the purpose of this book is to give their stories.

Q. How would you describe Frank Muñoz, the bad guy?

J.A.: He is resentful and has a motivation of revenge, to kill those who have wronged him. He is angry, dangerous, arrogant, an abuser, and corrupt.

Q. This book involves domestic violence. Tell us about that.

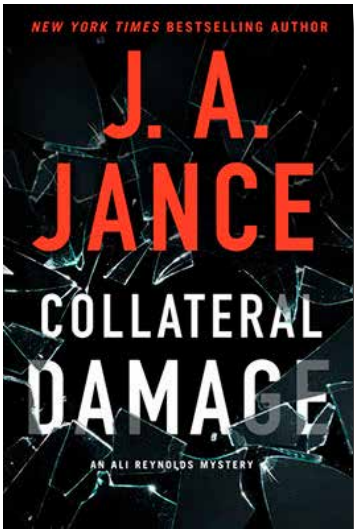
J.A.: It was the whole point of the book. The Dahlke House was made up, but based on my knowledge of domestic violence and the counselors. Often the people involved also have been abused. Domestic violence workers are heroes and are at risk. The guys who perpetrate domestic violence think it’s my way or the highway and anyone who gets in their way will be run over. The initial murder of Danielle had her husband as a suspect. The police cleared him and were able to give him his whole life back, totally exonerated. This is important because in solving long cold cases, justice is served, but also clears the names of those thought to be perpetrators but were not, getting rid of the suspicions hanging over their heads.

Q. What can you say about having different types of characters in your books?

J.A.: What makes a painting? The contrast. In my books, there are little pieces of lightness, such as Cami taking down that attorney in London. B. is somewhat MIA because he is in the hospital getting a shoulder replacement. Instead of using the saying, “Follow the evidence,” I follow the story.

Q. What about the next book?

J.A.: The Brady family shows up in the next Walker Family book due out next fall. In September it will number six, titled *Blessing of the Lost Girls*. It is set on a reservation. The stories and legends I learned as a storyteller on the reservation are weaved into the background. There will be missing and murdered indigenous girls, which I knew about since the early ’90s. Readers might want to look at my blog on my website.



J.A. Jance’s latest: *Collateral Damage*

Frank Muñoz, a disgraced former cop, is out on parole after twenty years. He is focused on revenge for those who helped to put him behind bars: The wife who abandoned him after his arrest, the mistress who ratted him out for abetting a money-laundering scheme, and the detectives who presided over his case all those years ago.

Ali and her husband B. Simpson are drawn into the situation when B’s airport shuttle is run off the road, with he and the driver, a retired detective, hospitalized. Was B. the target? Soon, Ali will have to race against time before all she loves becomes collateral damage.

Two Fantasy Novels that are Actually Thrillers

Why the Song of Ice and Fire and Wheel of Time series are also thrillers

Thrillers are defined by their suspenseful and intense plots. They often involve high stakes, danger, and a sense of urgency that keeps readers on the edge of their seats. While many thrillers are classified as mystery or crime novels, the genre is actually quite diverse and can encompass a wide range of narratives.

The A Song of Ice and Fire book series has captivated readers around the world. Written by George R.R. Martin, the series is set in the fictional world of Westeros and follows the political and personal struggles of various noble houses as they compete for power and control. While the series has often been categorized as fantasy, there is a strong argument to be made that it is actually a thriller.

NO ONE IS SAFE

To start with, the series is marked by a high level of tension and suspense. Throughout the books, readers are constantly on edge, wondering what will happen next. The stakes are high, and the consequences of each character's actions are often dire. One wrong move could lead to death, betrayal, or the loss of everything the characters hold dear. The sense of danger is palpable, and the reader is never quite sure who is safe and who isn't.

This is in part due to Martin's decision to break with convention and kill off major characters without warning or remorse. In traditional fantasy novels, the hero is often protected by plot armor, and readers can be reasonably sure that they will survive to the end of the book. In A Song of Ice and Fire, no one is safe. Even the most beloved and powerful characters can meet a sudden and unexpected end. This means that readers are constantly on edge, wondering who will be the next to fall.

The political intrigue and manipulation that characterizes the series also contributes to its thriller status. The plot is driven by the complex and ever-shifting alliances between the various noble houses of Westeros. Each house seeks to gain power and advantage over the others, and the intricate plotting and scheming can be just as thrilling as any high-speed chase or shoot-out.

At the heart of this intrigue is the battle for the Iron Throne, which is the ultimate prize for any aspiring ruler

in Westeros. The throne represents not only power but also legitimacy and prestige, and many of the characters will stop at nothing to claim it for themselves. This creates a sense of urgency and danger that is characteristic of the thriller genre.

THE TICKING CLOCK

The supernatural elements of the series also play a significant role in its thriller status. While there are dragons and magic, they are not the typical fantasy elements that one might expect. Rather, the supernatural elements of A Song of Ice and Fire are dark and ominous, adding an element of horror and fear to the story.

The White Walkers, for example, are a terrifying enemy that threatens the safety of all of Westeros. These supernatural beings are powerful and almost unstoppable, and their very existence adds a sense of urgency to the plot. The ominous threat of the undead army marching toward the Wall adds a ticking clock, increasing the tension.

Finally, the series' moral ambiguity sets it apart. Unlike in traditional fantasy stories, where characters are often divided into clear-cut heroes and villains, the characters in A Song of Ice and Fire are far more complex. Even the most virtuous characters are capable of making morally questionable decisions, and the villains often have a sympathetic side. This creates a thrilling sense of unease and unpredictability.

SOMETHING BIG IS COMING

The Wheel of Time, written by Robert Jordan and completed by Brandon Sanderson after Jordan's death, is set in a sprawling and complex world and follows the adventures of a diverse cast of characters as they fight against an ancient evil known as the Dark One. This epic fantasy series also has many elements of a thriller.

From the very beginning of the first book, readers are aware that something big is coming. The Dark One is on the rise, and the characters know they must act quickly and decisively to stop him. This creates a sense of urgency that runs throughout the entire series. Readers are constantly aware that time is running out, and that failure is not an option.



This urgency is enhanced by the fact that the characters are constantly on the move. They travel across the continent, racing against time to gather allies, weapons, and information that they need to defeat the Dark One. This creates a sense of momentum that keeps the story moving forward at a breakneck pace.

TWISTY PLOTS

Another characteristic of thrillers is their focus on plot twists and unexpected turns. The Wheel of Time is full of these—warning, spoiler alerts ahead!

One of the series' most notable plot twists is the revelation that one of the main characters, Rand al'Thor, is the prophesied savior of the world. This twist creates uncertainty about Rand's fate. Will he be able to save the world, or will he succumb to the darkness that threatens to consume him?

THE BATTLE FOR CONTROL

Like any good thriller, The Wheel of Time is rich with manipulation. Its plot is driven by the complex and ever-shifting alliances between various factions. These factions battle for control of the world, seeking out powerful artifacts known as Ter'angreal, which have the power to shape reality itself.

Finally, like A Song of Ice and Fire, The Wheel of Time series also builds out complex characters over the course of fourteen volumes, some of which are not easily categorized as heroes or villains.

Both epic series embody the key characteristics of not only the fantasy genre, but also the thriller genre. More important, they have captivated readers for decades, proving that borrowing across genres can work like magic.

FEATURE

Hunger in Horror

When we should be satiated but, somehow, are not

BY DAVID OPPEGAARD



Hunger tends to play an outsized role in horror. It seems that the natural world, the cycle of living and dying, the eat-or-be-eaten nature of Nature, is writ large against the backdrop of horror. We tend to think of horror movies and fiction as methods of escape, but what they often actually do is display a more extreme version of the reality already around us.

Here are a few hungry horror examples off the top of my head (I’m sure you can come up with a dozen more without too much digging):

Zombies. They want brains! All the brains!

Vampires. They want blood! All the blood!

Various demons and creatures from folklore and fantasy want to devour your very soul.

The great white shark in the movie *Jaws* (1975) wants to cuddle. Just kidding. It actually wants to devour all the human swimmers on Amity Island. *Jaws* is basically about a very hard-to-kill set of teeth that is hunger personified, a stand-in for every huge, relentless animal that has hunted humankind throughout its nervous time on Earth (also see *The Grey* [2011] with Liam Neeson, in which he actually punches a ravenous wolf).

The Blob (1958) is, according to Wiki, about a “carnivorous amoeboidal alien that crashes to Earth from outer space inside a meteorite.” *The Blob* loves to envelop human beings, which seems to be its preferred method of absorbing them, and proceeds to grow larger and larger, turning its victims into greater physical mass, until it’s bigger than a building. What does this blob want, beyond feeding its unending appetite? Who cares. It’s basically a moving, primordial stomach turned loose on the panicked buffet that is humanity.

In the novel *The Silence of Lambs* (1988) by Thomas Harris, we are introduced to the cannibalistic serial killer Hannibal Lector, who has turned killing his victims into a culinary triumph that revolts and fascinates both the reader and FBI trainee Clarice Starling. While many chilling serial killers have come and gone in the horror landscape over the past fifty years, Hannibal Lector’s name still rings out in horror fandom, in part due, no doubt, to his very particular way of enjoying his victims and how well it lends itself to

grisly cinematic visions. Hannibal not only has an appetite for murder; he wants to literally savor the flesh and blood of his victims.

I could keep going on in this fashion (for instance, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* could be viewed as a fictional documentary about the perils of getting a little too obsessed with making Texas barbecue) but I think my point is made. Hunger, when reduced to its biological purpose, is the ultimate form of motivation, even for the shambling undead and carnivorous amoeboidal aliens. Hunger, that most basic of animal needs, is why we get up in the morning.

But what happens when we have enough?

When we should be satiated but, somehow, are not?

Most animals eat only when they’re hungry or performing a biological imperative, such as carrying their offspring or preparing for hibernation. Humans, on the other hand, often eat far beyond fulfilling their physical appetites and will also acquire material wealth far beyond their needs. We like to eat, drink, and purchase.

In my new horror novel, *Claw Heart Mountain*, the central characters come from well-off families. Despite their relative material comfort, they are unable, as a group, to resist taking millions of dollars from an overturned armored van they find on the side of the road, while knowing this act is wrong and could lead to a lot of trouble.

At what point should someone be satisfied with their slice of the economic pie? Is this kind of bottomless economic hunger natural or unnatural? Some people seem to be denied a sense of monetary satiation forever. Pick a well-known politician or celebrity, the kind of wealthy persona who still makes time to film a cheap TV commercial, and you can feel their hunger radiating through whatever screen you happen to be viewing them on.

Also featured in *Claw Heart Mountain* is the Wraith, a more traditional, Big Foot-type monster cursed to roam Claw Heart Mountain. During a campfire story, we learn that the Wraith began its existence as an Old West “Indian hunter” who is unable to contain his own hunger for wealth. Late at night, the hunter slaughters the entire traveling party he’s been hired to protect, stealing their hard-earned wealth for himself. One of his victims, an old witch, curses him with both eternal hunger and eternal life before she dies, so that



his suffering is unending. The Indian hunter is transformed into the Wraith.

The Wraith is forced to live with a terrible duality—it is always hungry yet can never be satiated. I worry that too many modern human beings suffer from this same problematic duality and it undermines their happiness in ways both obvious and insidious. When is enough enough? Do you need that third helping at the wedding buffet? That fifth drink? That third house in another part of the country? Does everyone have to look and act like you? Do you need to

own every scrap of land on the North American continent to feel like you have a place in the world?

If you are always chasing some need, some hunger, when can you simply enjoy what you do have? Horror isn’t always obvious. It doesn’t always come at you from an outside source, some toothy monster trying to devour you. Often horror is internal, and this can be the most unsettling and voracious horror of all.

Sometimes, you are the Hunger in the Mountain.



About the author

David Oppeggaard is the author of *Claw Heart Mountain*, *The Town Built on Sorrow*, *The Firebug of Balrog County*, *The Suicide Collectors*, *And the Hills Opened Up*, and *Wormwood, Nevada*. He is also the author of the novella *Breakneck Cove*. David’s work is a blend of horror, literary fiction, science fiction, and dark fantasy. He has been named a finalist for a Bram Stoker Award and a Minnesota Book Award. He lives in St. Paul, MN, with his wife and their ravenous cat.



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Robert Dugoni

Robert Dugoni is the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and #1 Amazon best-selling author of the Tracy Crosswhite police series, which has sold more than 8 million books worldwide. He is also the author of the Charles Jenkins espionage series, the David Sloane legal thriller series, and several standalone novels, including *The 7th Canon*, *Damage Control*, and the literary novels *The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell* and *The World Played Chess*. His books are sold in more than twenty-five countries and have been translated into more than thirty languages.

Q. Can you share a summary of *Her Deadly Game*?

Robert: Keera Duggan is a former chess prodigy and up-and-coming criminal trial lawyer. When a relationship with her boss at the prosecuting attorney’s office ends badly, Keera goes to work at her father’s criminal defence firm. It’s a job Keera swore she’d never take. Her father is a lifelong alcoholic, and her family is dysfunctional as a result. Her two older sisters also work at the firm, which is struggling as her father ages and his illness takes its toll. The firm needs a big case and Keera provides it when Vince Flynn hires her to defend him for the brutal murder of his wife. What Keera uncovers is a complicated and deadly game.

Q. How did you go from lawyer to writer?

Robert: I’ve wanted to write since the seventh grade, and because of some bad behavior on my part, my teachers suggested to my mother (who taught English), that I should read more. She gave me *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and many others, and I fell in love with characters and stories and knew I wanted to be a writer. But somehow, I ended up in law school. Practicing law taught me how to work hard, but also how to tell a story in a way that evokes emotion. Many trial lawyers are born storytellers, and I observed and emulated many of them. Law also made me a keen observer of others—the way they spoke and moved. It provided a rich tapestry for future characters.

Q. Do you plot out your stories? What is your process?

Robert: I no longer plot my novels. I have become an organic writer who listens to the story my characters tell me when I write the first draft. After I have the story down on paper and know what it is really about, then I go to work shaping it.

Q. Tell us a bit about Keera Duggan, who is gifted yet also wounded and vulnerable?

Robert: Keera is an amalgamation of people I know or have known in my life. And yes, she’s very gifted. And she’s very much like her father, although she hates to admit it. She’s smart, intuitive, bold, and willing to take chances.

Q. What was the inspiration behind *Her Deadly Game*, and your character Keera Duggan?

Robert: Each novel starts with a simple idea. I was speaking to a friend who told me about Darren Berg, a Seattle con artist who bilked many sophisticated and wealthy investors out of millions of dollars just like Bernie Madoff, then walked out of a low security prison and was never seen again. From there I started to piece together a story. Many of the best trial attorneys I have known and practiced with are also very good chess players. So I wanted Keera, my protagonist, to have that strength, but I also wanted her to have her skeletons, as we all do—a personal relationship at work that goes sour and puts her career unjustifiably in danger, a dysfunctional family due to alcoholism, a tattered relationship with her father. I didn’t want to write a straight legal thriller, but one that was layered with family and personal issues and police procedural details. The last thing I thought of was the crime. For that I called a former police officer and he put me in touch with a friend of his, and together the three of us figured out the pieces of the crime that propels the story forward.

Q. Can you tell us more about Frederick Darren Berg and how he influenced the story of *Her Deadly Game*?

Robert: Darren Berg was a con artist who ran the largest Ponzi scheme in Washington State history. His scheme was modelled after Bernie Madoff’s Ponzi scheme in New York

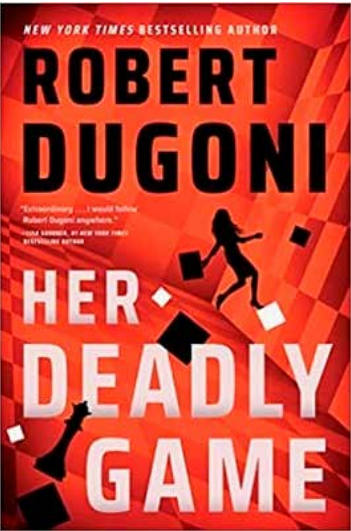
City. He bilked hundreds of investors out of millions of dollars in investments that did not exist, paying them distributions by bringing in additional investors. Meanwhile, Berg led a posh lifestyle of mansions, private jets, and expensive cars. When his investment scheme crashed, Berg was convicted and sentenced to eighteen years in prison. In 2018, after spending just a few years in confinement, he orchestrated his escape using a runway near his prison. It is believed he walked away from a work assignment and jumped on an airplane flown by his boyfriend. He has never been caught. The story generated a lot of articles which discussed Berg’s upbringing and revealed his propensity to con people from a very young age. It started innocently, a few dollars here and there, and eventually built to his \$500 million dollar investment firm, Meridian Investments, which was a total scam.

Q. Is there a lesson that readers can take away from *Her Deadly Game*?

Robert: I never write a story with a moral or a lesson in mind. Each reader comes to a story with their own personal background and takes from the story that which is meaningful to them. I want readers to relate to a story on an emotional level so they can become a part of the story, and immerse themselves in it.

Q. What’s next for you? Will Keera Duggan return?

Robert: Keera Duggan will be back in what I hope is an equally long running series. In the interim, I’m working on a standalone novel based on a true story, a trial that took place in 1933 for which I have three full scrapbooks kept by my wife’s grandfather, who was a prominent Seattle attorney. I’m also working on a World War II story based on real events that have never, to my knowledge, been told in any detail. I’m excited about that project as well.



Robert Dugoni’s latest: *Her Deadly Game*

Keera Duggan was building a solid reputation as a Seattle prosecutor, until her romantic relationship with a senior colleague ended badly. For the competitive former chess prodigy, returning to her family’s failing criminal defense law firm to work for her father is the best shot she has. With the right moves, she hopes to restore the family’s reputation, her relationship with her father, and her career.

Keera’s chance to play in the big leagues comes when she’s retained by Vince LaRussa, an investment adviser accused of murdering his wealthy wife. There’s little hard evidence against him, but considering the couple’s impending and potentially nasty divorce, LaRussa faces life in prison. The prosecutor is equally challenging: Miller Ambrose, Keera’s former lover, who’s eager to destroy her in court on her first homicide defense.

As Keera and her team follow the evidence, they uncover a complicated and deadly game that’s more than Keera bargained for.

Thrillers for Teens

When it comes to getting young hearts racing, these five suspenseful reads are at the top of their class.

Teenagers today are living through unprecedented times. Political instability. Economic uncertainty. The aftermath of a global pandemic that caused months, if not years, of social isolation. More than just escapism, books give young readers a way to make sense of the complex, unpredictable world they're learning to be a part of.

Young adult thrillers have become a staple in the literary world, especially with the popularity of books-turned-movies like *The Hunger Games* and *The Maze Runner*. From classic novels to modern thrillers, here are some of the best thriller books for teens that can stand up to the test of time.

THE HUNGER GAMES
BY SUZANNE COLLINS

This dystopian thriller takes readers on a journey through a post-apocalyptic world, where a tyrannical government holds an annual event called “The Hunger Games.” In this game, children are chosen to fight to the death, and the last one standing is declared the winner.

The concept of a televised fight to the death in a dystopian world is thrilling for young readers who are looking for an exciting and suspenseful story. The characters are relatable and well-developed, making it easy for readers to become emotionally invested. Katniss, the protagonist, is an independent young woman who defies traditional gender roles. Peeta, her fellow tribute, is kind and supportive, providing a balance to Katniss’s strong personality.

The Hunger Games explores themes that are relevant to young adult readers, such as social inequality, oppression, and rebellion. The novel also explores the importance of standing up for oneself and fighting for what is right, making it an empowering read for young adults.

A GOOD GIRL’S GUIDE TO MURDER
BY HOLLY JACKSON

This novel follows the story of Pippa Fitz-Amobi, a high school senior who decides to investigate a murder case for her senior project. The murder case involves a popular girl named Andie Bell, who was allegedly killed by her boyfriend five years ago. As Pippa delves deeper into the case, she uncovers shocking secrets and risks her own safety to uncover the truth.

The novel is written in a unique format that includes interviews, journal entries, and police reports. The mystery surrounding Andie’s murder becomes more complex as Pippa uncovers new clues.

Pippa is smart and determined, making her an excellent role model for young adult readers. The supporting cast of characters is also diverse and interesting, each with their own unique backstory and motivations.

A Good Girl’s Guide to Murder explores the power of social media, the impact of toxic relationships, and the dangers of making assumptions. It also highlights the importance of speaking up and taking action when something is not right.

THE MAZE RUNNER
BY JAMES DASHNER

In this action-packed thriller, a group of boys wakes up in a maze with no memory of their past lives. As they try to escape, they discover that the maze is full of deadly creatures and hidden traps. This novel is a great choice for teen readers who enjoy fast-paced adventure stories.

Thomas is a teenage boy who wakes up in a mysterious glade with no memory of his past life. The glade is surrounded by a massive maze. Thomas and the other boys in the glade must work together to find a way to escape, while also trying to uncover the truth about why they are there and who put them there.

One of the strengths of *The Maze Runner* is its world-building. The post-apocalyptic setting is eerie, and the maze itself is an intriguing element that adds a sense of danger.

With a fast-paced plot, the novel is full of action and suspense. The story explores complex themes such as memory, identity, and the ethics of scientific experimentation.

THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN
BY PAULA HAWKINS

This psychological thriller follows the story of Rachel, a woman who becomes obsessed with a couple she sees from her train window. When the woman goes missing, Rachel becomes involved in the investigation, leading her down a dangerous path. This novel is a great choice for teen readers who enjoy mysteries.

Rachel takes the same train every day and becomes obsessed with a couple whose house she passes by. When the woman from the couple goes missing, Rachel becomes embroiled in the investigation and must confront her own demons in order to uncover the truth.

The story is told from multiple perspectives, including Rachel’s, the missing woman’s, and the husband’s. Rachel is a flawed but relatable protagonist who struggles with alcoholism and the aftermath of a failed marriage. The story explores the dangers of obsession, the consequences of secrets, and the power of memory. It also addresses issues such as mental health and domestic violence, which are important topics for young readers to be aware of.

ONE OF US IS LYING
BY KAREN M. MCMANUS

This young adult thriller is a modern-day twist on the classic “whodunit” mystery. When five high school students walk into detention, only four walk out alive. As the investigation unfolds, the truth becomes more and more elusive.

When the student who died is revealed to have been murdered, the other four become the prime suspects. The students must work together to uncover the truth about what really happened.

The story is told from the perspectives of the four main suspects, which allows the reader to see different sides and adds to the suspense. The novel also features a number of red herrings and false leads, which makes it difficult to predict the ending.

Another reason why this book is a great choice for teen readers is its relatable characters. The four main suspects are all high school students who struggle with issues such as popularity, identity, and family dynamics. These issues will resonate with many young adult readers who may be going through similar challenges in their own lives.

Finally, *One of Us Is Lying* explores topics that are relevant to young adult readers, such as the dangers of stereotypes, the impact of social media, mental health, and LGBTQ+ identity.

The thriller genre has a lot of range to offer teen readers, from dystopian worlds to psychological thrillers. With each turn of the page, readers will get danger, suspense, and unexpected twists. There’s never been a better time to pick up a book and let the adventure begin.





Megan Abbott
Edgar Award-winning author
meganabbott.com

Megan Abbott

Megan Abbott is the Edgar-winning author of the novels *Beware the Woman*, *The Turnout*, *Give Me Your Hand*, *You Will Know Me*, *The Fever*, *Dare Me*, *The End of Everything*, *Bury Me Deep*, *Queenpin*, *The Song Is You*, and *Die a Little*.

Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Salon*, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times Magazine*, and *The Believer*. Her stories have appeared in multiple collections, including the *Best American Mystery Stories* of 2014 and 2016.

Q. *Beware the Woman* is getting rave early reviews. What can you tell us about it?

Megan: It's about a woman, Jacy, newly married and newly pregnant and in that rapturous flush of romantic love, who takes a trip with her husband Jed to the beautiful, remote Upper Peninsula of Michigan to visit his father-in-law, the charming and welcoming Dr. Ash. After a brief health scare, Jacy's pregnancy becomes a source of growing concern for Jed and his father. Jacy's mom always told her, "We all marry strangers," and as the trip continues, Jacy begins to realize how little she really knows about Jed's complicated relationship with his father and the role it may play in their marriage.

Q. Your novels often explore the dark side of American girlhood. Is the same true with Jacy in *Beware the Woman*?

Megan: When I write, I'm most interested in the emotional life of women of all ages, especially the emotions that we're encouraged to hide: messy feelings of anger, aggression, ambition, open desire, transgressive desire. And with Jacy in *Beware the Woman*, I found myself diving into my biggest fears about the body and control, and about the masks we all wear in relationships, about the fear of betrayal, of domination. The way women experience these fears and how they reckon with them.

I always remember, since I was a girl, seeing Gavin De Becker on TV talking about the "gift of fear," how women must listen to those feelings, the instinct that they're in danger. I thought so much about that when writing *Beware the Woman*. I think many writers, especially in our genre, write about what scares us and Jacy's plight taps into so many of my deepest fears.

Q. What are your thoughts on the future of the crime fiction and suspense genres?

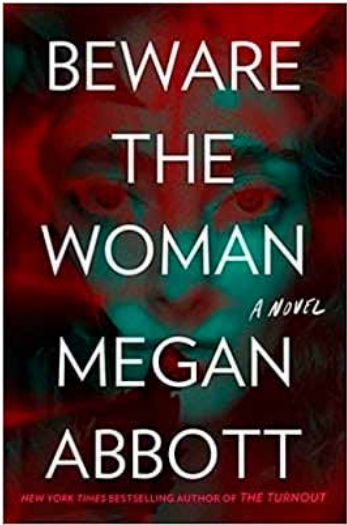
Megan: I'm really excited about it. I've never felt more energized by the books coming out now, both the brilliant recent debuts (Angie Kim, Margot Douaihy, Eli Cranor, Wanda Morris) and these surging new voices. It's finally feeling like progress is being made in terms of diversity of all kinds and that has yielded thrilling and distinctive work. Nothing feels formulaic, not the plots, not the points of view, not the worlds the books bring us into, not the issues they raise. In fact, it's like the genre is being expanded, overturned and reinvented. It's exhilarating.

Q. What are some of your favorite thrillers? What are you reading now?

Megan: Too many to name! But some ones I've loved lately are Jordan Harper's *Everybody Knows*, William Boyle's *Shoot the Moonlight Out*, Laura Lippman's *Prom Mom*, which comes out in July, and *Where Are the Children Now?*, which is Alafair Burke's stunning sequel to the Mary Higgins Clark classic.

Q. What are you working on next?

Megan: I've been writing a lot in TV/film these last few years. I'm going to be adapting *Beware the Woman* for a feature film—more on that soon! I'm also adapting one of my favorite movies, Todd Haynes's *SAFE*, for television (that's a dream project a few years in the making). And, yes, a new novel in there somewhere!



Megan Abbott's latest: *Beware the Woman*

Honey, I just want you to have everything you ever wanted. That's what Jacy's mom always told her. And Jacy felt like she finally did. Newly married and with a baby on the way, Jacy and her new husband, Jed, embark on their first road trip together to visit his father, Dr. Ash, in Michigan's far-flung Upper Peninsula. The moment they arrive at the cottage snug within the lush woods, Jacy feels bathed in love by the warm and hospitable Dr. Ash, if less so by his house manager, the enigmatic Mrs. Brandt.

But their Edenic first days take a turn when Jacy has a health scare. Swiftly, vacation activities are scrapped, and all eyes are on Jacy's condition. Suddenly, whispers about Jed's long-dead mother and complicated family history seem to eerily impinge upon the present, and Jacy begins to feel trapped in the cottage, her every move surveilled, her body under the looking glass. But are her fears founded or is it paranoia, or cabin fever, or—as is suggested to her—a stubborn refusal to take necessary precautions? The dense woods surrounding the cottage are full of dangers, but are the greater ones inside?

The Boogeymen of Suspense

How boogeymen of the suspense genre have tapped into our societal anxieties

Boogeymen have always held a special place in suspense novels. These malevolent entities often represent the ultimate embodiment of fear, the unknown, and the unexplainable. Whether it's the supernatural boogeyman that lurks in the shadows or the very real human boogeyman that exists within our society, these figures leave readers with a sense of unease that can linger long after the story has ended.

The appeal of boogeymen in suspense is multifaceted. For one, they provide a terrifying obstacle that must be defeated for the hero to emerge victorious. Whether it's the demon that haunts the haunted house, the serial killer that stalks the streets, or the monster that lurks in the woods, the boogeyman serves as a formidable foe that must be outwitted and defeated.

But perhaps even more compelling than the physical threat that boogeymen represent is the psychological threat they pose. Boogeymen embody our deepest, darkest fears, the things that go bump in the night and make us afraid to turn off the lights. They remind us of the fragility of our existence, the fact that we are mere mortals living in a world that is often unpredictable and cruel.

In some cases, boogeymen also serve as a symbol for larger societal fears and anxieties. For example, the boogeyman in a novel about a serial killer may represent the fear of violence and crime in our society, while the supernatural boogeyman in a haunted house novel may represent the fear of the unknown and the unexplainable.

Here are some of the top thriller novels with boogeymen that will send chills up your spine.

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS BY THOMAS HARRIS

One of the most iconic boogeymen in literature is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the brilliant psychiatrist and cannibalistic serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs*. FBI trainee Clarice Starling seeks Lecter's help in catching another killer known as Buffalo Bill, and the two engage in a chilling game of cat-and-mouse that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

THE SHINING BY STEPHEN KING

Stephen King is a master of horror, and *The Shining* is one of his most iconic works. The novel features the Overlook Hotel, a snowbound resort where a struggling writer named Jack Torrance takes a job as a caretaker. But the hotel has a dark history, and it's not long before Jack begins to unravel, leading to a terrifying showdown with the boogeyman lurking in the hotel's halls.

IT BY STEPHEN KING

Another Stephen King classic, *It* features one of the most terrifying boogeymen in literature: Pennywise the Clown. The novel follows a group of friends in the small town of Derry, Maine, who are terrorized by the evil entity that takes on the form of their worst fears. The novel explores themes of childhood trauma, fear, and the power of friendship in the face of unspeakable evil.

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO BY STIEG LARSSON

While not a traditional horror novel, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* features a boogeyman of a different sort: the powerful and corrupt men who perpetrate violence against women. The novel follows journalist Mikael Blomkvist and hacker Lisbeth Salander as they investigate a decades-old disappearance, uncovering a web of corruption and abuse that threatens to consume them both.

THE TALISMAN BY STEPHEN KING AND PETER STRAUB

The Talisman features a young boy named Jack Sawyer who embarks on a perilous journey through parallel worlds to save his dying mother. Along the way, he encounters a series of terrifying boogeymen, including a werewolf and a twisted version of himself. The novel is a masterclass in suspense and tension, and the boogeymen that Jack encounters will leave you with nightmares.

Boogeymen are a staple of suspense novels for a reason. They tap into our primal fears and anxieties, providing a tangible antagonist for the protagonist to overcome. Whether they are supernatural or human, these malevolent entities serve as potent symbols of the darker aspects of our existence, reminding us that danger can lurk around every corner, and that we must always be vigilant and brave in the face of adversity.



Kara Thomas
Barnes and Noble's YA Book Club author
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Kara Thomas

Kara Thomas is the author of *The Darkest Corners*, *Little Monsters*, *The Cheerleaders*, and *That Weekend*, Barnes and Noble's YA Book Club Pick for July 2021. Kara's books have been sold in multiple languages and have been nominated for the International Thriller Writers Award. In 2013, she wrote and developed the pilot *The Revengers* with Rashida Jones and Will McCormack for The CW. She lives on Long Island with her husband, son, and rescue cat, where she spends way too much time on Reddit Unresolved Mysteries trying to solve cold cases.

Q. *Out of the Ashes* is your first thriller for adults after writing for YA readers. What was new and challenging for you about writing in the same genre for a different aged audience?

Kara: Every book has its own unique challenges with drafting and revising, but I wouldn't say *Out of the Ashes* was more difficult because I was writing for a new audience. If anything, writing from the perspective of an adult came much more naturally to me, since I was the same age as my main character for the first time. In terms of writing for an older audience, I really enjoyed the freedom of not having to worry about what is "acceptable" for readers of a certain age—I never shied away from difficult topics in my YA novels, but there are certain thresholds you can't cross if you want your book to be included in a YA library collection, for example.

Q. What was important or meaningful to you about your novel's setting—a small town in New York, a place where none of its inhabitants seem to leave?

Kara: Carney is loosely based on the small rural town my parents live in—the same one I visited every year growing up. It was important for me to recapture the feel of a small town where so many local families are intertwined. My favorite mysteries are the ones with that small town claustrophobic feel, where even the tightest knit communities could be harboring some very dark secrets.

Q. You're a self-proclaimed true-crime junkie, and you've said you got the idea for *Out of the Ashes* when you read about the Sodder family fire and the mysterious disappearance of some of the children in 1945. What drew you to that particular story, and what other favorite true-crime cases have fascinated you? How did the true story factor into your novel?

Kara: In addition to the Sodder family tragedy, I was also drawn to two other cases where people were reported missing after house fires—the disappearance of Lauria Bible and Ashley Freeman, and the disappearance of Joey Lynn Offut. I am always careful when I draw inspiration from real-life cases not to use details or to base characters off real people. Real-life tragedies are not entertainment; I am more interested in digging into the emotional aspects of that type of loss. How do you grieve a person who is missing, as opposed to someone who has died?

Q. Can you tell us about your television writing? What's different from writing for the screen versus writing for the page?

Kara: I wrote a pilot for the CW network back in 2013 called *The Revengers*. It was actually a comedy, which will surprise anyone who has read any of my books! I really valued that experience, even though the pilot ultimately didn't get filmed. Screenwriting is an entirely different skill set from novel writing, and the development process was

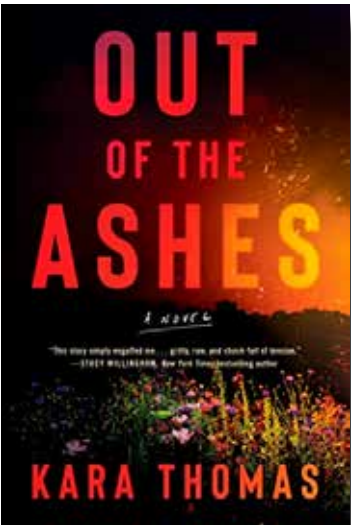
wildly different as well. Before I even wrote the first draft, the network and studio had weighed in on the story and characters through multiple rounds of workshopping. Even though I was the writer, there had been so many voices involved throughout the process that I didn't feel total ownership over the finished product the way I do with my books.

Q. What are you reading these days? Are you able to read thrillers when you are writing them?

Kara: I love reading mysteries and thrillers! On the YA side, I'm currently reading *The Legacies* by Jessica Goodman, out at the end of July. I also just finished *I Have Some Questions for You* by Rebecca Makkai, and it will easily be one of my favorite mysteries of the year. I also facilitate the true crime book club at the library where I work, so I read a lot of non-fiction—a recent favorite is *Golden Boy* by John Glatt.

Q. Can you share what you are working on now?

Kara: I am simultaneously revising my next adult book and my next YA. I have to remain tight-lipped about the YA for now, but the adult book is more of a thriller than *Out of the Ashes* was. It's about a former journalist who is drawn back into the case that destroyed her career and personal life. It's my first book that is set entirely on Long Island, and it follows the disappearance of a girl from Dune Road in the Hamptons.



Kara Thomas's latest: *Out of the Ashes*

When she was thirteen years old, Samantha Newsom's family was murdered and their Catskills farmhouse set ablaze in an unsolved crime that left nothing behind but ashes.

Twenty-two years later, Sam is pulled back to her hometown of Carney, New York, under the shadows of the grim tragedy she's never forgotten or forgiven. Authorities mishandled the evidence, false rumors were seeded about her family, suspects yielded nothing, and the case went cold. Not anymore. Investigator Travis Meacham has been assigned to the case, and he has news for Sam: a prison inmate has come forward with a shocking admission. Sam's baby sister, presumed dead in the fire, made it out of the house that night.

It's not the only reveal that upends everything Sam thinks she knows about the crime and her family. But Carney protects its secrets. And this time, Sam might not be able to escape the town alive.



Stone of Heaven

BY DEBORAH L. CANNON

“You think diamonds are the hardest minerals on earth? Go at it with a hammer, and it shatters into a hundred crystals. But jade? You whack that with a hammer and the hammer bounces back and smacks you in the face. That was what Scarlet always said.”

Sky got up from some stout boulders by the thawing riverbank, and I tore my eyes away from her. I was asking too many questions. We had been on the road for hours, and had stopped by the roadside for a quick bite of peanut butter sandwich. The air had a sharp chill. Only now did I allow myself to study the austere landscape. Sky Fong grew up here among the jade rock. For the first time since I started this project, I saw the stone for the force of nature it was. The glimpses of translucent green amidst the river cobbles and the gray, fast-moving water had a quiet beauty. While water could cut through mountain ranges, rocks were the mountains’ offspring and came in many forms. Jade was special. Jade was strong, beautiful and resilient.

“You know, we don’t have to go,” I said. “We can postpone until things die down, and your grandmother has been laid to rest.”

“It doesn’t matter. I would have to be there anyway. My—my cousin will make sure of that.”

“Why don’t you like her?”

Sky sighed. “We’ve never gotten along. Personality clash.”

“But you were raised together by your grandmother.”

“So?”

“You’re alike in many ways. Both artists.”

She had no energy to contradict me. Her grandmother was dead. That was the horrible news we got this morning from her cousin. She died by strangulation. In fact, she strangled herself by fastening an ancient stone figurine to a thin rope and looping it around her neck, then pushing the thirty-pound carving off the other end of a table. She was found draped across the tabletop last night, head dangling off the edge in an impossible position, lifeless.

Why? Who knows. All I know is that, for the surviving family, it is humiliating to be forced into the public eye that way.

I am filming a documentary on the British Columbia Jade Trail. As fortune—or misfortune—would have it, I managed to book some time with the locals. Sky’s cousin. And, before the tragic incident, her grandmother Jadyn Pey. The Chinese have a long history with jade in this province. And although I called to reschedule, the cousin, being a headstrong young woman, insisted since we were on our way that we do the segment.

“We can turn back. We can wait. Just until the investigation is over.”

Sky shivered. “It *is* over. It was a suicide.”

I steered the Ford Ranger along the bleak, frozen northern road. Sky was grateful that I had offered to drive after she received that text from her cousin. She was in no condition to drive.

In the distance the raw, barren peaks of the Coast Mountains were visible through the mist. The town of Lillooet

was not much further. Traffic was slowing; the turnoff was coming up just at the bend of the river.

“Any idea what was troubling her?” I asked.

She shrugged. “Granny was old. Old people get depressed.”

“That might be so, but most grandmothers don’t commit suicide.”

“Well, mine did.”

“I’m really sorry, Sky.”

“Thanks.”

Her feelings were normal. I mean, after what had happened, she had a good excuse for feeling down. She had not seen her family in years. The guilt was crushing, the shock unthinkable. And so many misunderstandings unresolved.

We arrived at the antique store. In front of the building, a huge slab of stone stood upright like a statue alongside the flagstone path leading to the entrance.

It was all because of the jade that Sky’s family had fallen apart. Her dad had died mining jade. Her mom had left him because the work took him away from them. She too finally left. And Sky was raised by her father’s mother with an older cousin, Scarlet.

Sky had given me the short version of her family history when we received the news. Granny adored Scarlet, Scarlet who was named after an auspicious color. Red meant luck, joy. Prosperity. Sky’s name on the other hand reflected the colors blue and white. Blue for immortality and white for purity. She was never going to live up to that name.

Granny wanted Scarlet to take over the antique shop when she retired. But Scarlet had greater aspirations. She was an artist, and her work was modern fusion. She was a bit of a phenom around here. Until, of course, the incident with the strange jade object.

Six months back, on a sunny, windswept August morning, Granny Pey arrived early at the antique shop and went down to comb the riverside. The water was low due to drought and exposed more rock than usual. Rubble often tumbled down from the cliffside. Thick lenses of nephrite were buried inside those mountains and erosion had exposed many of them, causing pieces to crack off during storms and ending up in the river below. So, it wasn’t odd to find chunks here and there. Except that this piece had

been carved. And the river it had been discovered in was an ancestral waterway of the local Indian Band.

It was typical that Granny should think the figurine was a special object considering it was made of jade. The Chinese revered jade as a symbol of health, wealth, power. And purity. Artifacts frequently turned up during construction projects, but this one was different. This statue was found half-exposed in the water, river-rolled and covered in algae.

When she brought it to the store, it caught the attention of the Lillooet Indian Band. They unanimously agreed that it was an artifact of their ancestors.

Sky’s artist cousin who lives in a small house at the north end of town saw the writeup and photos in a newspaper. The figurine was just under one and a half feet tall and eight inches wide. It was a head. No body. Its smooth skin and bulbous eyes and thick lips were a style reflective of many cultures.

By this time, Sky and Granny had parted ways. Scarlet and Granny however were close. And Scarlet, being an acclaimed artist—unlike Sky, who worked behind a camera and was rarely noticed for her work except by me, her boss—had the artist’s temperament, which meant Scarlet was very closed-mouthed when it came to her art. No one, not even Granny, got to see what Scarlet was working on until it was finished and ready to be presented to the world. Scarlet was on her way to becoming one of the most celebrated female artists in the province—until the incident with the jade figurine.

She claimed she carved it.

And that it had been stolen.

There were no RCMP reports for the theft. She had not reported the theft. So, you can see why it was difficult for anyone to believe her. Sky was glad that no one believed her. If the local band council believed it was an ancient sacred object, then it was. Sky figured they would know. But the puzzling thing was—why would her cousin lie? Her career was on track for national fame. She was already getting orders from Vancouver and Toronto, and requests to participate in art shows. What difference did it make if she had carved the thing or not? The scandal put a taint on her reputation. Sales slowed. Art show offers melted away because the band council accused her of trying to take credit for the work of their ancestors.

But equally curious was—how could anyone possibly know that the figurine was old? Even the big museums in the city had no way to date stone artifacts. Stone was not dateable except in geologic years.

An RCMP cruiser sat parked at the side of the building. I told Sky to stop fiddling with the video camera. “Leave it for now.”

No amount of stalling was going to change anything. She dragged herself towards the door I now held open.

A dark-haired woman stood just inside the door, her back to us, facing a man. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police. On a table was the jade head. What was it doing here? It should have been bagged and taken to the lab for inspection.

The woman was staring at an iPad of photos that the officer was showing her, and didn’t notice us at first. Or if she did, she pretended not to.

Her long black hair hung in shiny, loose waves. In contrast, Sky’s hair was shoulder length and stiff like a broom. It was also starting to show some premature gray. Scarlet on the other hand had jet black hair—no wonder she was named Scarlet—dressed in a red sweater and with her long artist’s fingers and slender build...

She turned as the officer looked up, past her head. Sharp air followed our entry. The door banged shut. The store was crowded with interesting objects. Every possible color of jade was represented in small, delicate figurines: troubling shades of aqua-green, soapy white, blood red, and even black. A distinctive scent—incense—tickled my nose.

Sky grimaced. “Hello, Scarlet.”

“Hello, Sky.”

An awkward silence fell as the officer stepped around to greet us. He was tall, physically fit in a lean way, with a pleasant manner. “I am Ty Chang from the RCMP, Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.”

“Sky Fong,” Sky said. “Scarlet’s cousin.”

“Fong? I thought your name was Pey,” He jotted a memo in his notebook. “I am sorry for your loss ... You are the victim’s other granddaughter?”

Victim? Is that what they called suicides? My curiosity stirred. IHIT investigated murders. Homicides. It was in their title.

“Paisley. Paisley O’Donnell,” I said, extending a hand across Sky’s chest. “Sky and I came to film a segment for a documentary. We were on the road when we heard the tragic news.”

Chang shook my hand. “I’m sorry, but there will be no filming today.”

The cousin cut in before he could elaborate. “Detective Chang thinks the mode of death might have been staged.”

Staged!

“How did she die?” I asked.

“There is a slight possibility that her neck was broken before the rope and statue were attached.”

The detective was observing the cousins closely. He gave no other explanation for such an absurd suggestion. He pointed to the table where the stone figurine stood upright. No mistake about it. It was the smooth carving of an elongated head with bulbous wide-set eyes, large flat nose, and thick lips.

“I was just asking Ms. Pey about this sculpture.” He glanced in Scarlet’s direction, then returned his calm gaze to Sky. “Have you ever seen this before?”

“No,” she answered quickly.

I felt my brow twitch.

“I mean, no, I have never seen it in person. I haven’t been back here for years. I saw pictures of it in the newspapers during the controversy.” A controversy that was as yet unresolved.

He raised the iPad so that it was within eyesight of us all. “It has come to my attention that Jadyne Pey sent photos of this statue to a curator at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria—a Dr. Devine. She wanted his opinion.”

“What was his opinion?” I asked.

Scarlet cut in before the detective could answer. “That it was an authentic prehistoric figurine ... He’s a quack. He wanted to buy it for the museum because he thought it was old. *I* carved it! It is modern. I showed you my sketches, Detective Chang. *And* the before and after pictures on my phone. I am the artist!” She glared at Chang to challenge him. “I even gave it a title.” She thrust her phone at us. The title was *Loss*.

He made no comment. He swiped left, then right on his iPad and stopped at a series of smooth, curvilinear jade

stones, standing upright like statues. These were blanks ... or perhaps they were finished pieces that were only meant to suggest certain images. Like clouds in the sky, some brought to mind animals, others trees or mountains. Yet others, faces. These were all shaped like elongated heads. But if you used your imagination, each appeared to have distinctive features.

“Generally,” he pointed out, “Dr. Devine says Lillooet-area stone carvings are abstract.” He indicated the archaeological examples on his screen.

Scarlet agreed. “So what? That doesn’t mean the carving is old.”

Chang shot a glance at the sculpture on the table. Sky was looking at it too. For a moment I thought I was seeing things. Instead of an elongated head I saw the image of a naked woman holding a baby. The bulging eyes had become breasts, the large nose her belly and the thick lips arms cradling an infant. I blinked and the image was gone.

“He also suggested that a piece this large, of this quality, and made from a single block would be priceless. But greed was probably not the motive. Otherwise, the killer wouldn’t have left the jade figurine at the scene of the crime. They also wouldn’t have used it as a decoy murder weapon,” Chang finished.

Murder? Now my curiosity was at an all-time high. “So, this is a homicide? What was the motive?”

Scarlet and Sky exchanged quick glances. For the first time in a long while I think they felt something for each other. It wasn’t exactly sympathy, but it was close. Scarlet and Granny were not on speaking terms these past few months and...

“I have already interviewed Ms. Pey,” Chang said without answering my question. “I would like to speak to you, Ms. O’Donnell—alone.”

Inside Jady’s office space, a cubicle which provided false privacy, my reflection stared back at me from a full-length, antique mirror on the rear wall. Large green-framed glasses that made my big eyes look even bigger; long, red hair tied into a high ponytail; and a brown, fleecelined, leather bomber jacket and a black wool miniskirt overtop telltale fishnet stockings ending in combat boots.

“Tell me, Ms. O’Donnell—” his eyes lifting from the combat boots.

“Call me Paisley,” I insisted.

“Fine. Paisley. What is the topic of your documentary? What did you intend to talk to Jady and Scarlet Pey about?”

“The Stone of Heaven.”

Did he know the cousins could hear every word we spoke? I tipped my glasses higher on my nose. “Jade is a stone considered by Asian cultures to be the arteries of the mountains, the frozen flow of the river and the captured light of the stars. As such, it has powers to give life and to take it away. It connects the heaven with the earth. That was why Chinese emperors prized it so highly.”

Silence.

“What, Detective?”

“Stone?” he queried. “It’s one of the most ... *dead* things on the planet.”

“Many peoples believe otherwise.”

The shrug was almost palpable, although he did not actually make the gesture. I heard a ding like the sound of a text on someone’s phone. Not mine; it must be Chang’s.

He fished it out of his inside breast pocket.

A lengthy pause as he read the text. “Sorry. That was the medical examiner.”

“Something to do with the case?”

He nodded. Then he said, “Scarlet’s grandmother hated her granddaughter’s art because it was non-traditional.”

Was that what she told him? “Please don’t tell me you suspect Sky’s cousin of killing their grandmother. She doesn’t want the store. She has nothing to gain.”

“Did you know that nine times out of ten a murderer kills because someone humiliated them?”

“And behind every museum object lies a secret. The curator wanted the jade head for the museum. It’s a rare and stunning piece and would draw in visitors by the shipload. Maybe Jady refused to sell, and he wanted it so badly that—”

“Did you not hear what I said?”

“Did you not hear what *I* said? You have no idea what kind of relationship the curator had with Jady ... Why are you questioning me anyways? I didn’t know her ... *I* certainly would have no wish to harm her. Without Jady Pey I have *half* a documentary.”

“You seem like a resourceful woman, Ms. O’—Paisley. I’m sure you have already thought of something.” He checked some scribbles in his notebook. “I noticed



you raise your eyebrows like you were surprised when Sky Fong said she had never seen the jade figure before.”

“Did I?”

“What did you mean by it?”

“Absolutely nothing. I don’t recall raising my eyebrows.”

“Suppose you tell me what you know.”

“I don’t understand. I don’t know anything.”

He gave me his card. “Well, if you change your mind ... All right—” He pointed to the exit with his pen. “Shall we return?”

Scarlet and Sky lingered by the jade figurine. The detective laid down his pen on the table beside it. And then his notebook. It was cellphone sized, one of those old-fashioned things with blue-lined paper and spiral binding. His gaze took in the cousins, his face one bold fat accusation.

“I was in Vancouver yesterday,” Sky insisted, shooting a pleading glance at me. “Paisley can vouch for me, and so can any number of people who saw us on our road trip up here.”

“I saw Jadyn only yesterday,” Scarlet burst out. “That’s when I told her my plans to move to Vancouver Island. There were people here at the antique shop when I told her. They not only heard me but saw me.”

Chang let his gaze slip from Scarlet to Sky.

The detective’s phone suddenly burst into song. He fetched it from his jacket pocket and addressed the three of us. “Don’t go anywhere, I’ll be only a moment. I wish to speak to you next, Ms. Fong.”

This time, instead of entering the cubicle where a person could hear every word uttered, Detective Chang stepped outside onto the front stoop of the building, and then made his way down the frosted pathway. Through the window he was visible pacing beyond the upright slab of jade, phone pressed to his ear, expression terse and focused, breath fogging.

“I’m confused,” I said.

“That makes three of us,” Sky mumbled.

Detective Chang returned. “I hope the three of you have had time to rethink your answers.”

“We have no idea why anyone would want to kill Granny,” Scarlet said.

Chang pursed his lips in thought. “That phone call. It was Dr. Devine from the provincial museum in Victoria. He has changed his mind. He no longer believes that the carving is a native artifact.”

“I *told* you,” Scarlet said. “I carved it.”

Chang nodded. “Was Dr. Devine on good terms with Jadyn?”

“I don’t know,” she answered.

Chang raised his voice with his next question. “How did your grandmother react when you informed her of your plans to leave? I want specific details.”

“She was sad. She accused me of choosing money over family. She hated the fact that I wanted to be a modern artist. She said that I had ruined her life. It *isn’t* her life. It’s mine!”

Sky nodded vigorously. She understood how Scarlet felt. Chang seemed to understand as well because he too was nodding, but in a slow, undramatic way.

“Granny accused me of the same thing. She said I was unworthy of inheriting the store, that I was an embarrassment, a disappointment, that I couldn’t possibly be related to her—” Sky clapped a hand over her mouth.

I rose to her defense. “So, what are you saying, Detective Chang?”

He observed the two cousins, Scarlet and Sky. “You two are free to go. There will be no charges. And Ms. O’Donnell—Paisley, I am done with the questioning. You are free to continue your work.”

He began to collect his things, the notebook and iPad and pen.

Detective Chang could feel our stares on his back. He glanced at the jade figurine with its wide-set bulbous eyes, large nose, and thick lips. He turned. “The medical examiner has examined the body. The noose and the stone statue were the cause of death.”

He turned back, shoved his notebook and pen into his righthand jacket pocket, and tucked the iPad under his arm.

“Thank you,” I said.

Detective Chang looked the cousins squarely in the eye. “There has been a death. The hand that dealt the death-blow is questionable. But a suicide is not a murder in the

eyes of the law.”

We all stared back.

He went to the door and stepped outside. I hesitated, glanced at the business card in my hand. And then my vision landed on the jade head standing on the table. That weird trick of the eyes was happening again ... Something occurred to me. I smiled, muttered incoherently about having left something in the truck.

Sky glanced at Scarlet. I followed the detective out the door. Detective Chang was walking down the flagstone path. I turned to see if we were alone. My breath puffed. I saw no one. But the door was still sliding shut. And that stone slab, close to the side of the building, made a great hiding place.

“Detective Chang,” I called softly.

He stopped, turned, and waited.

“I think I might have something to tell you.”

He smiled. “Maybe you don’t need to. It won’t change anything.”

I hesitated. He was probably right, but then I thought better of it.

“I saw one of those stone figures in Sky’s apartment last year when she had me over for dinner. It looked a lot like that jade head in the antique shop—” I shot a quick glance backwards. “Same height and weight, I believe. I never asked her about it because I glimpsed it in her bedroom and I didn’t want her to think I had been snooping.”

“And were you?”

“No,” I said. “I—well, I *am* a documentary filmmaker. I am always curious about people.”

“Do you think perhaps it was the jade piece Scarlet claims to have carved and then lost, and the grandmother found?”

“The shape is identical.” I paused for a moment. “It was an elongated head, with the exact same kind of eyes and lips.”

My eidetic memory—I call it videographic—is one of the reasons I became a documentary filmmaker. I can take a bunch of images—even memories—and turn them into a mental reel ... And then came another vision. Sky once told me that she got pregnant at the age of sixteen. Her

grandmother called her a whore and forced her to have an abortion. She made her take the abortion pill mifepristone. She bled for days ... When I told Chang this, he asked, “She wanted to keep the baby?”

“I think so. It was the reason she left and never came back. It’s also why she changed her name. Her grandmother said that their surname meant purity and—” I bit off the sentence. “Is it possible to kill someone with a noose and a stone statue, the way that Jadyn Pey was killed—without it being suicide?”

Detective Chang paused to consider. He replied, “There’d be a struggle. When life is at stake, adrenaline kicks in. It would take more than *one* person—”

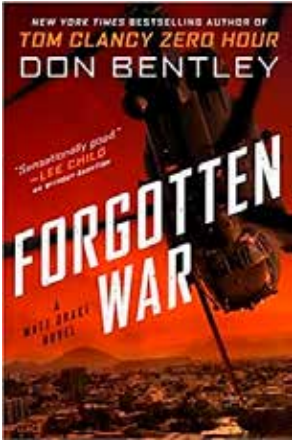
We both looked back at the antique shop. Something red flashed behind the stone slab.

A car engine started and footsteps raced away.

Detective Chang pulled out his gun.

From Europe to the Far East to the South Pacific, Deborah L. Cannon travels for work and play. She holds degrees in Anthropology and Museum Studies. Now author of the romantic mystery series *Fresco Nights*, she lives in Hamilton, Ontario, with her archaeologist husband and two dogs.

HERE'S WHAT WE'RE READING THIS SUMMER



Forgotten War
Don Bentley

Don Bentley has created another action-packed and suspenseful novel. This fourth book in the Matt Drake thriller series has an intensity that few writers can achieve. This book, which can be categorized as a political thriller, technothriller, and a military thriller, has aspects of all three and is mainly set in Afghanistan and Texas.

Matt Drake, Frodo Cates, and Frodo’s girlfriend Katherine are waiting on Matt’s wife Laila to arrive at a restaurant when Frodo is arrested by two members of the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division for a murder that took place ten years ago in Afghanistan in 2011. Matt is determined to prove his friend innocent, but Frodo isn’t talking. At the same time, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is occurring.

Matt is full of wit and sarcasm, and has an aptitude for languages. He wants to make the world safer and often sacrifices his own well-being to achieve this. He shows character

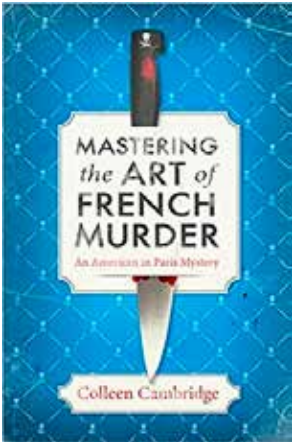
growth despite the large amount of action in this novel.

Fluid writing, great characterization, and fantastic world building, as well as an excellent, fast-paced plot will keep readers engaged. It takes a little while for readers to understand how the strong prologue fits in with the rest of the story. However, pay close attention to it. There is also some shifting in time between 2021 and 2011.

Overall, this fantastic novel is shocking, emotionally charged, and riveting. Be aware that there is plenty of danger, death, intrigue, and violence in this story. Additionally, with the current situation and the actual 2021 events in Afghanistan, this one seemed very realistic. There are a few threads that were left open for the next book in the series, but the main plot line is fully resolved. Themes include political maneuvering, teamwork, friendship, bravery, patriotism, war, honor, differences in operational philosophies, murder, and much more.

Fans of action thrillers and military thrillers will want to read this book. The author’s note at the end provided some additional insight on the fall of Afghanistan and where the book diverges from actual events.

Reviewed by Pam Guynn



Mastering the Art of French Murder
Colleen Cambridge

It’s 1949 in post-war Paris and the City of Lights is coming back to life again. A young Julia Child has arrived with her husband, who is working at the US Embassy. To keep herself busy she has enrolled at the Le Cordon Bleu cooking school and is working on perfecting the classic French dishes she will later publish in her iconic cookbook.

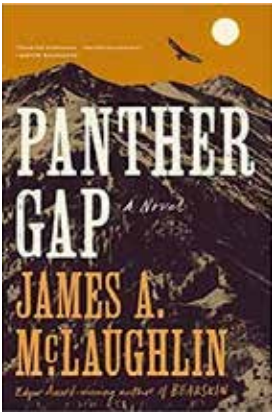
Across the street lives her fictional neighbour, Tabitha, who has also recently arrived from America to live with her French grandfather and his partner, who she calls Uncle Rafe. Tabitha worked in an aircraft factory during the war, but after found herself out of a job. Raised by her French grandmother, she is paying her way by tutoring French to Americans living in Paris. Since Tabitha is a terrible cook, Julia has taken her under her wing and is teaching her how to shop (and pick up local gossip) at the markets and

to cook simple dishes, much to her grandfather and Uncle Rafe’s delight.

Julia’s sister Dort is visiting and working at a theatre that puts on plays in English. She often invites the cast and crew back to Julia’s to party after a show. When a body of a young woman is found one morning in the cellar of Julia’s building, Tabitha recognises her as one of Dort’s guests. Although neither she nor Julia knew the woman, Inspector Merveille of the police judiciaire discovers she was stabbed by a knife from Julia’s kitchen. To protect Julia from being accused of her murder, Tabitha must take on the role of amateur sleuth. Meanwhile, Julia has her own mystery to solve—why her mayonnaise recipe doesn’t always work.

This is a delightful murder mystery full of charm and wit. The sights and sounds of springtime in Paris make a wonderfully atmospheric setting. Julia’s cooking journey and friendship with Tabitha make a wonderful backdrop. Tabitha is resourceful and plucky, ready to take on anything. This happily appears to be the first of a new series.

Reviewed by Carolyn Scott



Panther Gap
James A. McLaughlin

Panther Gap is a larger-than-life story that defies genre and boundaries. One laden with a complex, multifaceted plot line and atypical characters refusing to be locked in a box. One that delivers a stunning message.

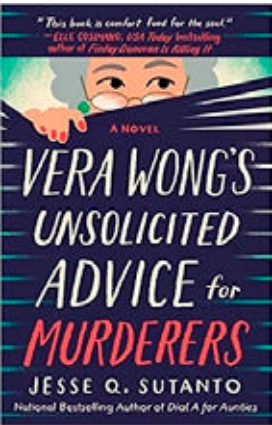
Siblings Bowman and Summer spent their early years running wild and free on their father’s secluded, off-the-map

ranch. This remote location is rich in the history of the “Others,” with ancient subterranean passages forming a honeycomb in the Colorado canyon walls. Since losing his wife, their radical environmentalist father appears to be slipping away in fits of paranoia, experiencing psychotic episodes in losing battles with ghosts from his past while guarding dark secrets with his life. His irrational warnings frighten his children, but they absorb his lessons in survival skills and love for nature as they grow into misfit teenagers.

Bowman and Summer eventually become estranged when Bowman leaves the security of the ranch to pursue the elusive panthers in Central America, with hopes of discovering his own true identity, and Summer is left to take over the ranch, which is bordering on financial disaster. It’s only in later years when their father’s warnings prove to be sound and the much maligned inheritance from their late grandfather comes into play. They reunite to battle the crime and mafia drug forces threatening their way of life. The story that ensues is a dark, gritty, raw, sometimes heart-breaking thriller.

Panther Gap is a beautifully written, action-packed thriller that will sweep readers away. It has all the best of an old timey, shoot ‘em up western: rugged setting, conflicted family, dirty money, and a slew of bad guys gunning to claim a legacy. The action is swift, the characters damaged, and the outcome in question until the final page. Perfect for fans of suspense thrillers, crime fiction, and anyone who loves to get lost in a fantastic story.

Reviewed by Sandra Hoover



Vera Wong's Unsolicited Advice for Murderers
Jesse Q. Sutanto

Vera Wong is a widow with one son who she doesn’t get to see very often. She lives above her dilapidated teashop in San Francisco. One morning she goes downstairs and finds a dead man in the middle of her shop with a flash drive in his outstretched hand. After calling the police, she takes the flash drive and hides it in her apron pocket. Vera

is positive she can do a better job than the police can in discovering who killed the man. She feels she only needs to investigate the people who come to her shop after the murder and she will discover the killer.

Vera is lonely, inquisitive, intelligent, fiery, bold, and funny. She has very set ideas on how an older generation should be treated and lets others know if they don’t meet her expectations.

Told from five points of view, the novel gives readers extra insights into Vera and other supporting characters. Vera remains the focal point, ordering her suspects around as she

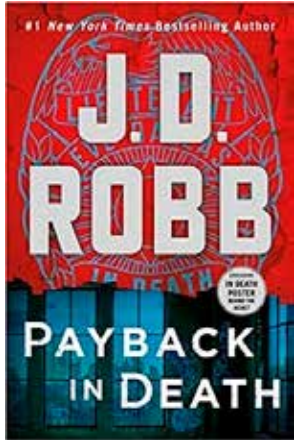
gets to know them and their secrets. This relieves her boredom and gets her to enjoy life again. However, will she find the killer?

The story brilliantly captured the characters and the cultural lifestyles and traditions of the group. The plot has some twists and turns, but this story is about more than solving a mystery. Threads include found family, loneliness, jealousy, personal boundaries, and regret, as well as generational differences and expectations.

Diverse characterization and great world-building makes this a fast and enjoyable read. Readers will keep wondering what Vera will uncover next and how it will affect the story. There are multiple believable suspects with motives to kill the man found in Vera’s shop. The joy of food, tea, and friendship are interwoven with the investigation into alibis and motives.

Readers who are looking for an entertaining, heart-warming, lighthearted, and funny cozy mystery with a mature protagonist will love this novel, and many will want to see a series featuring Vera.

Reviewed by Pam Guynn



Payback in Death

J. D. Robb

Payback in Death is book #57 in the long-running In Death series by J.D. Robb (an alias for Nora Roberts). This series is a futuristic police procedural set in New York City around the year 2061. To those who may be turned off by the “futuristic” label, don’t allow that to stop you from enjoying these books.

This is a well written, highly engaging, character-driven series with outstanding writing and puzzling murder cases. The character development, intricate investigations, and suspense are always front and center with a sprinkling of humor.

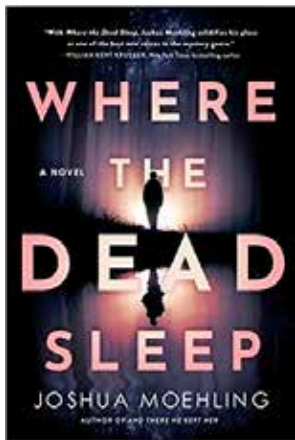
The story opens with Roarke and Eve enjoying the last days of a two-week Greek vacation that is extended with a week-long stopover in Ireland with Roarke’s family. Fans of the series know that any downtime is rare for this couple. Arriving back in New York, their plans are to enjoy one last intimate evening of vacation time before hitting work again early on Blue Monday. Those plans fly out the window when Eve’s link signals with an unusual request from Webster that she take the lead at the scene of an apparent suicide of the

man Webster considered a father figure. Roarke accompanies Eve, and they’re off and running again.

The apparent suicide of retired IAB Captain Martin Greenleaf quickly turns into a murder investigation when Eve steps on the scene and recognizes signs of a staged suicide. As always, there are several red herrings muddying the water, challenging readers and Lt. Dallas to sift through the evidence, find the motive, and track down the killer.

Payback in Death is a challenging police procedural with tension increasing in time with Eve’s handling of the case as the plot unfolds. Eve is bold, brash, and unrelenting, as always, as she turns every clue over time and again until it finally clicks into place on her murder board and in her own mind. Some of her best scenes occur near the end when she finally gets a murder suspect into an interrogation room, where she does some of her finest work. Strong characters and relationships, unique plot lines, and tight pacing make this a must-read series for fans of crime and police procedurals. *Payback in Death* is a fantastic read for fans of the In Death series and for everyone who enjoys a challenging mystery and police procedural.

Reviewed by Sandra Hoover



Where the Dead Sleep

Joshua Moehling

Ben Packard is back, and the small town of Sandy Lake is on edge once again when Bill Sandersen is found shot to death in his bed.

After a life spent chasing money and breaking hearts, it’s less a matter of finding a suspect than somehow narrowing down the crowd to determine who finally snapped; and when it comes to poking

around in ancient small-town secrets, Packard is more than qualified.

The second in a series is where readers really decide if they are going to follow it or not—and luckily for readers, Joshua Moehling has taken a promising debut and solidified it with a follow-up that is not only a great book, but a very encouraging sign of the series to come.

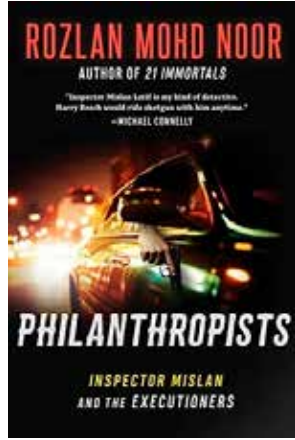
It’s such a balancing act with procedurals—you have to have a book that stands on its own, but that moves the longer-running elements ahead, too. Preferably there’s

enough momentum to be interesting, but without either going too far or not far enough. With the one you end up with a series that throws too much at the reader in each installment, while the other way ends up losing steam and becoming repetitive and slow. *Where the Dead Sleep*, though, absolutely nails the balance; Packard is settling into his new life here, even as a new mystery promises to keep him using his detection skills to their utmost.

That balance works in other areas of the book, too. Events are exciting and the mystery compelling, but still felt like they could be taking place in the real world.

Packard and the people of Sandy Lake that we’re getting to know are great characters; they will make readers look forward to getting to read the next in the series. And while *Where the Dead Sleep* wraps up into a book that could stand alone by the end, there are some hints that future books will be very interesting indeed. I’ll be here for it, and in the meantime will be recommending these books to every procedural fan I know.

Reviewed by Fiona Cook



Philanthropists

Rozlan Mohd Noor

Imagine Harry Bosch patrolling the gritty streets of Kuala Lumpur or CSI Malaysia, and you arrive at an approximation of the challenges faced by Inspector Mislan Latif. Back on a 24-hour stint of duty at the Special Investigation Unit after surviving a gunshot eight months ago, this is the sixth stellar outing for this detective.

Known as a maverick, but loyal and of the highest integrity, Mislan is able to contend with the ever-present bureaucracy of the department. Each story is self-contained and can be enjoyed as a standalone, as Noor flawlessly supplies any necessary backstory. Each narrative is rich with supporting characters and expounds on the unique, exotic color and flavor of Malaysia.

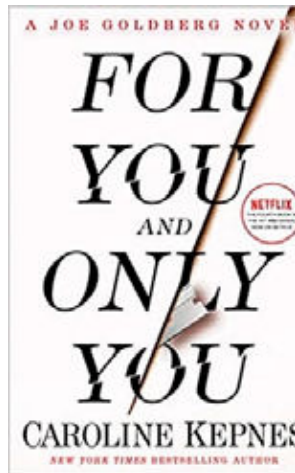
Back in the saddle with his feet on his desk and just starting to take a quick snooze, Mislan’s phone rings, requesting his presence along with his assistant, Detective Sergeant John Kamaruddin. There has been a double murder in a home in the police district of Sentul. They find two dark-skinned immigrant men killed in identical execution style in the master

bedroom of the rental. Somewhat perplexing is the presence of three pounds of drugs lying undisturbed on the bed. There are no identifying papers, wallets, or phones. None of the neighbors heard a shot or disturbance, and yet an anonymous source called the police. This local area is noted for its abundance of drugs as well as legal and illegal foreign nationals. This appears to be a crime with no motive and is possibly unsolvable. The two victims were apparently dealers of heroin and meth, supplied from the Golden Triangle by the Thai-Myanmar Syndicate.

As Mislan begins his investigation, COVID-19 is spreading through the country and a lockdown is implemented, impairing Mislan’s investigation. Soon after the murder, a phone connected to one of the victims is used to call charities, offering to donate huge amounts of cash with no questions asked. The investigation takes them into the burgeoning underworld as well as the refugee community.

Themes explored include hostility toward immigrants and the Rohingya community, distrust of the government and police force, impediments resulting from bureaucracy, and the far-reaching effects of COVID-19. Noor effortlessly provides a complex and convoluted narrative with plausible twists that escalate into a propulsive page-turner.

Reviewed by Lou Jacobs



For You and Only You

Caroline Kepnes

He’s back! Joe Goldberg—everyone’s favorite psycho serial killer—will not let any mortal stand in his way of romantic pursuits. Joe has spent time honing his literary skills and has penned a fictionalized account of his previous exploits, aptly called *Me*.

This book, the fifth in the series, can nicely stand alone, as can the previous novels.

The series was the inspiration for the Netflix series *You* and veers from the content of its television counterpart.

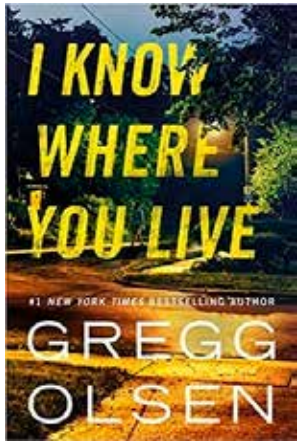
Joe has garnered the attention of the critically acclaimed author Glenn Shoddy and has been invited to attend a creative writing fellowship at Harvard University. Instead of being surrounded by aspiring writers, he is confronted with a bevy of “real writers”—some have even published mystery or horror novels, plays, and first books. Then his attention is piqued by the beautiful Wonder Parish, who aspires to be a

writer. Like Joe, she has no college degree, loves literature, and lives at home, caring for her wounded veteran dad while managing a Dunkin’ Donuts shop. She is unfortunately very insecure about her position in the group. Naturally, Joe soon becomes obsessed with her and will let no one stand in the way of his burgeoning romance. Shoddy’s wife, aptly named Sly, is somewhat infatuated with Joe and lets it slip that Glenn is actually a fake—his critically acclaimed novel *Scabies for Breakfast* was actually written by her.

During the writing seminar, Glenn casts aspersions on the worth of Wonder’s writing skills, which does not sit kindly with Joe. To complicate matters, a current and favorite podcast, “The Body on Bainbridge,” is bringing unwanted attention to Joe through the musings of mystery writer, Sara Beth. The similarities between Joe’s writings and the content of the podcast are not lost on Sara. Proactive steps will be taken by Sara to draw Joe into a web of secrets and confidence.

Bodies will drop as Kepnes weaves a delightful narrative, filled with satire and wit. As she skewers the publishing industry, we enter the inner twisted mind and musings of Joe Goldberg—often dark, satirical, but always amusing.

Reviewed by Lou Jacobs



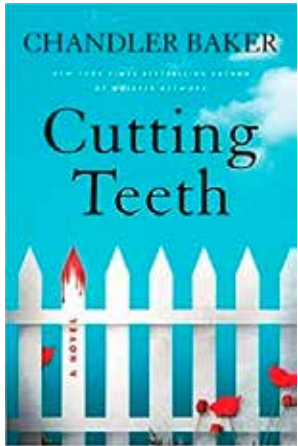
I Know Where You Live

Gregg Olsen

A young woman, a victim of childhood sexual abuse, gets her revenge by looking up predators online and making sure they pay for what they did. This is a riveting novel about bad parenting, secrets, and most importantly, revenge.

Violet Manfred has a lot going on. She has just married the love of her life; she has an exciting career, and her grandfather, known as Papa, passed away at her wedding. Violet isn't sad but grateful. This isn't a terrible loss. She didn't want him there and had specifically asked that he not come, which was ignored. And then he has the audacity to have a seizure at her wedding.

She is relieved. He was a horrible man who molested her decades ago, though no one, including her parents, would believe her or acknowledge the molestation. Now that he is gone, she feels a sense of relief and lightness. But what else can she do to make sure no one else suffers the pain she has endured for years? What if she helps eliminate the other predators who roam free? It's an interesting concept.



Cutting Teeth

Chandler Baker

Darby, Mary Beth, and Rhea became friends when their children all started attending preschool. Each of the women are trying to redevelop their identities outside of being a parent, while still trying to maintain their respective relationships and households.

The entire preschool class has developed an odd habit: they crave their mother's blood. Trying to deal with this medical peculiarity has Darby, Mary Beth, and Rhea at odds with each other. Then, a teacher's body is discovered stabbed to death, and the women only have one another to turn to in order to keep their children safe.

Chandler Baker is the bestselling author of *The Whisper Network* and *The Husbands* and, like its predecessors, *Cutting Teeth* will leave a, ahem, mark. Vampiric children, the struggles of motherhood, and a murder all in one entertaining and engaging novel? Leave it to Chandler Baker.

All three protagonists take turns narrating the novel, highlighting their individual perspectives on life and motherhood. As dissimilar as the women are, they are all

When Violet joins a sexual assault support group, a fellow member encourages her to redress the balance for other victims. Because she feels freed by her Papa's death, she hopes that by eliminating other predators, she can free others from the nightmare of having their abusers walk free.

She begins by hunting down the predators that are close by, eliminating one while she is on a business trip two hours away from her home. One by one, she finds predators who have served their time and eliminates them, enjoying a strange sense of empowerment that she is ridding the world of these horrible men. But clearly, committing multiple murders has consequences, and as the bodies pile up, so do the lies. Violet loses track of what is a lie and what is the truth.

I Know Where You Live is heavy. Olsen describes, in detail, experiences with sexual assault and molestation, which may hit people a little too hard. It can be tense and uncomfortable to read, but the author has a story to tell, and he does it eloquently. Trauma and revenge are never easy subjects, and what adds to the tension is that Violet is not really a likable character, though with good reason. Readers can ask the question: were her acts vengeful or virtuous?

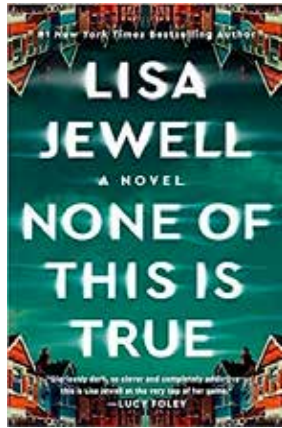
Reviewed by Cara DiCostanzo

genuinely likable and relatable in one way or another and readers will have their backs from the first page. The medical conditions that affect (most of) their children is bizarrely original, but yet not so strange that it fails to be believable. Young children literally draining their mothers of blood is not as far-fetched as one would hope.

The novel starts with a child biting, which slowly becomes a full-blown identified "event" affecting multiple children from one classroom. Then, a teacher is murdered, and the plot switches focus to the police investigation. As suspects are highlighted and circumstances are laid out, the reader is pulled into a haunting murder mystery, where anyone could be the culprit. The vampiric children are not the focus of the novel by the time you reach the middle, and, in fact, several chapters go by where they are barely discussed. The ending provides complete satisfaction, and Baker ties up all loose ends.

Baker examines the complexity of female friendships and the expectations of mothers in particular, leaving room for ample twists and turns. The plot is well-developed and carefully executed, providing a hugely suspenseful and delicious enjoyable story. *Cutting Teeth* is going to bring Baker into the spotlight once again, and the praise is warranted.

Reviewed by Erin Clemence



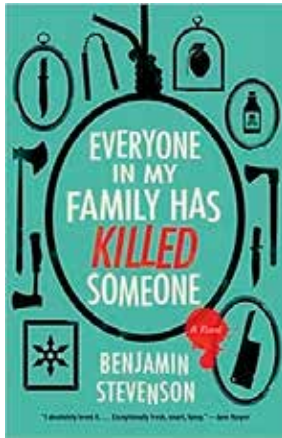
None of This Is True

Lisa Jewell

Alix Summers is a popular podcaster looking for something new for her next season. While she's celebrating her forty-fifth birthday, she meets Josie, her birthday twin, who was even born at the same hospital. When the women bump into each other a few days later, Josie shares that not only has she been listening to Alix's podcast,

but she also has a story to tell.

What follows is a deep dive into the sordid history of a woman who is complicated and just a bit off. Josie is hiding something, and the more Alix digs into her life, the less she wants to know about it. But Josie doesn't want Alix to slip away, and soon invites herself to stay in Alix's home. Cue a series of increasingly unsettling events that culminate in Josie going missing. Alix needs to find out what is going on and what is really true.



Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone

Benjamin Stevenson

Meet Ernest Cunningham, "Ern," the narrator of *Everyone in my Family has Killed Someone*. Ern is the self-published author of numerous books telling others how to write crime fiction.

He begins with Ronald Knox's 1929 *Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction*. Knox was a Catholic Priest and member of the legendary Detection Club.

Other members included Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and G.K. Chesterton.

Ern is attending a family reunion at a ski lodge in the mountains of New South Wales, AU. He never looks forward to reunions because he has always felt like an outsider. This reunion promises to be particularly fraught as Ern's brother, Michael, is getting out of prison after a stretch for murder. Ern happens to be the person who testified and put Michael there.

The Cunninghams are unhappy with Ern: his mother, Audrey, and her husband, Marcello; Michael's ex-wife, Lucy; Ern's soon-to-be ex-wife, Erin; and his Aunt Katherine. The

Lisa Jewell creates a deliciously creepy thriller in *None of This is True*. As the podcast reveals more and more information, readers will feel like they are being dragged underwater without a second to catch their breath. The plot is claustrophobic and eerie and unfolds in the perfect way. The snippets from the Netflix documentary sprinkled throughout the book are the perfect way to give context and a rich backstory.

This novel may turn out to be among readers' favorite writing from Jewell, who is not afraid to go dark. There are so many levels of deception and dysfunction that you won't know what to believe. The book keeps readers guessing up until the last chapter and waiting with baited breath to see how it will end. It is perfect for fans of the unreliable narrator and twisted domestic thrillers.

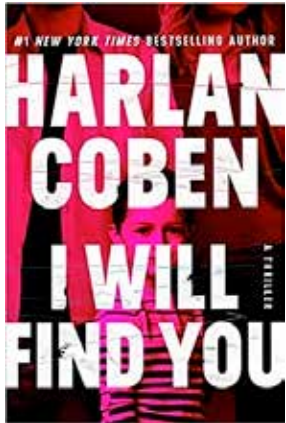
Reviewed by Chelsea Hofmann

only one who seems happy to see him is his half-sister, Sofia. That may be because she needs money and somehow knows about the bag containing more than two-hundred-thousand dollars Ern has been holding onto for Michael. Soon after their arrival, a body is found, the victim of a particularly horrible death. Very quickly, the lodge is snowed in, and the temperatures drop precipitously.

Not only is the snow falling, but so are the Cunninghams. Is there a serial killer loose known as The Black Tongue? Can one of the Cunninghams be the killer, or is someone seeking revenge for Ern's father, Robert, and his notorious criminal past? People don't often forget about cop-killers, even if they are long dead.

Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone may be one of the most original pieces of crime fiction readers will have ever read; horrifying and hilarious at once. Anyone who has read Golden Age mysteries will recognize all the tropes of the snowed-in scenario, but with a new spin. Stevenson's Ern has a terrific voice, sly, ironic, and likable. Readers may be suspicious of his claim to be a reliable narrator, but that is what he proved to be. I don't expect to read another book this year that will engage me as much as this one has.

Reviewed by Linda Baker



I Will Find You

Harlan Coben

David Burroughs has been in prison for five years for the murder of his son, Matthew, three. He didn't do it, but who did?

He and his wife Cheryl are divorced, and she is remarried and pregnant. David has refused any visitors since his conviction, but always proclaimed his innocence. While this story may stretch your imagination, it is still a

wild ride and so much fun.

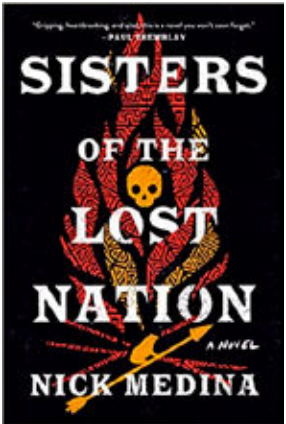
When David receives a visit from Rachel, Cheryl's younger sister, his world is turned upside down. She has a photograph of a little boy, approximately eight years old, who is the spitting image of Matthew, with the same distinctive birthmark on his face. A photograph that brings him to tears. It suddenly convinced Rachel and David that Matthew is alive, but who was the mangled body found in Matthew's crib? And what should they do about it?

I Will Find You is a whirlwind, sometimes hard to follow, action-packed novel full of jaw-dropping reveals, prison

escapes and crazy twists. David realizes his only option is to escape from prison. Not an easy feat, but luckily he knows the prison warden, who puts his job on the line because he is close friends with David's father. If David can escape, his first destination is NYC, where his former neighbor lied under oath that she saw David burying a baseball bat. Her testimony sealed the verdict, and he wants to know who she lied for. From there, he wants to know who the actual victim is and more important, where is Matthew? He must accomplish all of this with the FBI breathing down his neck.

Without revealing further details, *I Will Find You* is so action packed, you will find yourself taking a break just to catch a breath. Some scenes are heart-pounding, while others are heartbreaking. Harlan Coben's latest novel is told from multiple points of view: David, FBI agents Max and Sarah, and Rachel. While the plot focuses on David and Rachel, we actually learn little about them. Readers will become invested early on in this riveting story. It is absolutely addictive with such a satisfying conclusion that makes for a wonderful reading experience. Harlan Coben's stories are always well put together and this book is no exception—a must-read for fans of Harlan Coben.

Reviewed by Cara DiCostanzo



Sisters of the Lost Nation

Nick Medina

Nick Median's debut novel is rich with native folklore, interwoven with a coming-of-age story and a riveting and all-too-real mystery. Set on a fictional reservation in Louisiana, it features 17-year-old Anna Horn.

Anna is tormented at school and terrorized by an ancient myth. However, as girls go missing on the reservation, including Anna's younger sister, Grace, Anna is determined to find answers. Where are they going? Is there a culprit, a mythological horror, or something else?

Anna is an outcast and bullied. She's faced years of isolation and alienation for being different. She's also kind, helps at home, is interested in the history, storytelling, and culture of her people, and is terrified by a story her uncle told her when she was a small child. It is exciting to see her transformation as the story progresses.

The prologue sets the tone with Uncle Ray telling Anna a tribal myth that stays with her throughout the story. But part one starts with a chilling scene that lets readers know this

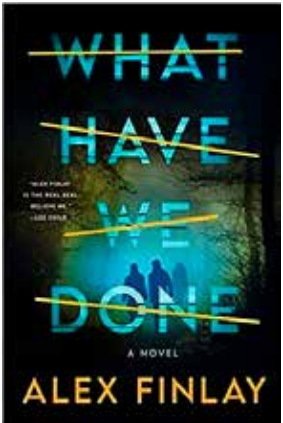
will be a thriller with a mystery to be solved. Readers should be aware that the story goes back and forth in time, covering thirty-six days.

Medina does a great job with world building and characterization. The author has provided a content warning list at the beginning of the novel, which includes issues as varied as addiction, child abuse, assault, identity, disappearances, racism, and bullying.

The author is a wonderful storyteller and readers will find themselves progressing effortlessly through the narrative. He did an excellent job of showing the crisis faced by the families in this novel, which is an all-too-common occurrence in native communities. The number of missing women and girls, as well as those who experience multiple types of assault, is much higher than the national average. The author's note also talks about native myths and folklore.

Overall, this amazing, memorable, and emotional debut novel is a powerful and vivid page-turner with great world-building details and tension. This is a book that readers are going to remember, and they will look forward to reading the author's next book.

Reviewed by Pam Guynn



What Have We Done

Alex Finlay

You can never outrun your past. Sooner or later, it will come for you, as the three main characters in Finlay's *What Have We Done* learn.

What do they have in common? Twenty-five years ago, all three were orphans, living in a group home called Savior House that existed as a so-called safe place for parentless children.

However, the safe haven it should have been came into question when several kids went missing over time.

Before the closure of the home, a bonded group of three—Jenna, Nico, and Donnie—along with two others enter the dark woods surrounding Savior House to bury a secret, each swearing to never speak of it again. The children are sent to live with foster families, leaving their past and each other behind. In present day, each one lives a somewhat productive, if problematic, life ... until the day their past catches up to them. Now one person is dead, and the others reunite to figure out who knows their secret.

What Have We Done is a tension-laden thriller, most of which is narrated by three characters: Jenna, a housewife with unusual deadly skills; Nico, a reality television show producer with some dangerous connections; and Donnie, a famous rock star fighting a losing battle with an addiction. Interspersed among their chapters, the villain's voice is also heard.

A brisk pace drives this highly readable story forward. Alternating timelines allow readers to dial in on events in both the past and present as they attempt to figure out the identity of a killer before time runs out.

The action is literally non-stop and brimming with plot twists. Finlay's utilization of shorter chapters and alternating points of view are highly effective in keeping readers slightly off kilter as they race toward the climax.

Alex Finlay is quickly becoming a favorite author for readers who want a complex crime thriller to get lost in for an evening. Finlay has become one of the must-read voices in crime fiction today. *What Have We Done* is highly recommended to fans of suspense thrillers and crime fiction.

Reviewed by Sandra Hoover

Blackstone

Riveting New Thrillers

"A spy thriller that only an insider could have written."
—THE BLURB

"Rollicking...This fanciful, funny caper, the perfect starting point for newcomers, cries out for a TV adaptation."
—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

"This book is everything you want in a military thriller...Tier One fans get ready to cheer—John Dempsey is back!"
—DON BENTLEY, New York Times bestselling author

"This wry, extremely funny, character-driven novel will remind readers of classic LA noir...Kotzwinkle is sure to win new fans with this one."
—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW

"Dana Haynes knows how to write an irresistible high-voltage thriller."
—MEG GARDINER, Edgar Award-winning author

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