Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction

DECEMBER 2015

End the Year With
RON RIPLEY
TASHA ALEXANDER
LINDA FAIRSTEIN
SUE GRAFTON
PATRICIA CORNWELL

The “Malta Trio”
CHRIS KUZNESKI,
GRAHAM BROWN &
BOYD MORRISON

THE “BEST OF”
2015

End the Year With
RONSE GOLUM
TASHA ALEXANDER
LINDA FAIRSTEIN
SUE GRAFTON
PATRICIA CORNWELL

Across the Pond
CHRISTINE POULSON
NAIL-BITING
EDGE OF SEAT READING
WITH A TOUCH OF ROMANCE

THIN ICE
“The queen of inspirational romantic suspense hits a home run.”
—Library Journal

VENDETTA
“A thrill ride from start to finish, the first book in Harris’ Nikki Boyd Files series is filled with twists and surprises.”
—RT Book Reviews, TOP PICK

NO PLACE TO HIDE
Close calls, a race to save the day, and a big old dog named Gus add to fast-paced action adventure.”
—Booklist
When I sat down to write this month’s letter “From the Editor,” I was all set until Friday, December 4th, came around and something happened that changed my direction.

First let’s set the stage. I’ve been to several conferences and have spoken with hundreds, if not thousands, of authors. Now, besides the big names, there is a common theme asked: “How can I get my books into Barnes and Noble?” That is a question that can now, sort of, be answered. On December 4th, B&N released their quarterly earnings report and it wasn’t great news. The stock plunged 20% and their CEO announced that the company was reinventing itself by adding more toys and secondary products because of poor book sales. Now, on Monday, December 7th, he backed off that statement a little by saying that, “books are still the soul of the business.” I would hope so since they have “Booksellers” in their company name.

I know that those same authors believe that if they could only sell in B&N they would be an instant success—making millions. However, getting into that store shouldn’t be your priority, because if you do have a printed book, you’re most likely already selling in the largest bookstore in the United States: Amazon.com. B&N is very difficult to get into at a national level, unless a few things happen. First, your publisher better put a ton of money behind the book to entice B&N to stock it on their shelves. The publisher should then spend even more to place your title on the front shelves, or it may simply die in the back. You may see a regional author, let’s say in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who is able to sell their work in their local B&N, but will that really help with sales?

E-books are the best way for an author to gain an audience and do it quickly. If authors could only grasp that times are changing and they need to focus on writing and then marketing, they may have a much better experience. Writing should be fun. Writing should give an outlet for creativity in ways other art forms can’t. Focus on what’s important, and that’s to write the very best story you can. We can’t stress this enough; it’s a marathon, not a sprint. Slow and steady wins the race and will help build a solid foundation for the future, where the ultimate dream of becoming a full-time writer is attainable and long lasting.

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine

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The great thing about my peers in International Thriller Writers is that we genuinely root for each other’s success. Nothing pleases me more than seeing one of my ITW pals rocket up the bestseller lists. I’m not a jealous person, but do I long for that kind of elusive success with my latest Caitlin Strong, “Strong Light of Day”? Oh yeah, for sure! But here’s the thing: My following eight picks for must-reads deserve the success they’ve garnered, not just because they’re written by my friends, but because they’re damn good—all superlative thrillers you won’t be able to put down:

“MAKE ME” by Lee Child, September 8: Lee has never been better, treating us to a “random” Reacher where simply getting off a train in the wrong town leads to his violent unraveling of a conspiracy with its roots in the Deep Web. A modern day western extraordinaire.

“FRICTION” by Sandra Brown, August 18: The First Lady of Suspense’s stunning tale of the burgeoning relationship between a Texas Ranger and a judge whose life he saved in a courtroom gunfight. The Coen brothers should do the movie.


“The Promise” by Robert Crais, November 10: Much worth the long wait as Bob teams old friends Elvis Cole and Joe Pike with newer ones, Scott James and his German Shepherd partner Maggie, in a tour de force that demonstrates why he’s the master of the post-modern detective novel.

“The Crossing” by Michael Connelly, November 3: Harry Bosch novels are great, Mickey Haller tales even better, for my money. But combine the two and you have a book that’s almost too much fun to be legal.

“The Corrupted” by Lisa Scottoline, October 27: A brilliant character study meshed with a legal thriller that makes us care about its people on every single page.

“Crimson Shore” by Doug Preston and Lincoln Child, November 10: The return of Special Agent Pendergast serves up another neo-gothic tale set wondrously against a Salem, Massachusetts backdrop. Arthur Conan Doyle himself would be proud.

“Finders Keepers” by Stephen King, June 2 (not a friend—yet!): With all his books and iconic stature, the master is still making magic, and this sequel to “Mr. Mercedes” is a shape-shifting masterpiece of a novel as well as a thriller.

Hey, maybe someday one of my Caitlin Strong books will make somebody’s list. Ah, perchance to dream...
FROM ACROSS THE POND

With Christine Poulson

By Chris Simms

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I’m delighted to bring readers of Suspense Magazine a feature from the UK’s Crime Readers’ Association. In it, an author from over here writes about crime from a UK perspective.

A GOOD OCCUPATION?

I believe it was Agatha Christie who remarked that ‘murder was a good occupation for a woman at home.’ What she might have added was that, nevertheless, it was important for that woman to get out of the house now and then. It is true that the long slog of writing a novel does tend to be done mostly at home (not many of us can afford a separate office). But when it comes to inspiration, it’s a different matter. In her “Autobiography,” Christie describes how she had only a vague idea of the plot of her first novel, “The Mysterious Affair at Styles,” when she found herself sitting on a tram in Torquay near a mysteriously looking man with a black beard, and knew who was to be the murderer.

In my own case, most of my ideas have also come to me when I wasn’t actually at home writing. Certainly it helps to get away from the telephone, the ping of incoming emails and Jehovah’s witnesses at the door—but it’s more than that. It is being jolted out of a rut, seeing things afresh, that is so conducive to new ideas.

Perhaps that is why so many of my short stories have been inspired by holidays. My first published story was set in Crete and began, ‘Anne was every inch the Englishwoman abroad. Of course, that in itself wasn’t a good enough reason to murder her...’ Similarly, the first lines of Fishy Story—told from the point of view of a fish—came to me in the London Aquarium, as I gazed at the fish and they gazed back at me. And the basic plot and some key locations for my most recent novel came to me on a trip round Sweden.

It is rare for me to come home from a holiday without an idea for a story, maybe even a first draft. The cathedral close in Salisbury, the Guggenheim Museum in Venice (that wonderfully sinister city), the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen (creepy after dark, with all those screams from the rollercoaster): all have been sources of inspiration.

Perhaps writers are never really on holiday? A recent publication in the British Library Crime Series, “Resorting to Murder: Holiday Mysteries,” contains a fascinating collection of stories by Golden Age writers with settings ranging from the Swiss Alps to the Lake District, no doubt places the writers had visited themselves.

It’s not just being in an unfamiliar place that is so useful. Modes of transport, too, can help. If I am stuck with a plot point or can’t think how to make something happen, a train journey of a couple of hours or more can be a godsend. Driving isn’t so good (too much concentration required) and flying doesn’t work either, though hanging about in an airport might. Walking can be effective. Stephen King tells the story of how 500 pages into “The Stand” he got completely blocked. He had no idea what should happen next. He started going for long, dull walks, mulling the thing over, but his rational mind failed to come up with an answer. When the solution came, it came out of the blue, when he wasn’t really thinking about it.

Dorothea Brande’s classic book on writing, “Becoming A Writer”—first published in 1934, but just as relevant today—also recommends walking and other non-verbal pastimes for writers. Listening to music and or looking at paintings work...
for me. It is all about distracting or quieting the critical, rational side of the brain and allowing the intuitive, creative side to throw up the ideas that you need.

There is a wonderful etching by Goya with the title, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, in which sinister creatures emerge from the mind of a sleeping man. As crime writers that's sometimes exactly what we're aiming for.

**THE PIG AND THE SAUSAGE**

‘I draw from life—but I always pulp my acquaintance before serving them up. You would never recognise a pig in a sausage.’ I love this quotation from Fanny Trollope, mother of the more famous Anthony and a successful novelist in her own right.

Personally, I avoid using people that I know in my novels. I value my family and friends too much.

But I do use people that I don't know. I once went to a party at a Scandinavian embassy—I won’t say which one—and years later the ambassador, with whom I didn't exchange more than a word or two, ended up as the villain in my latest novel. No doubt the ambassador is a perfectly charming man of the utmost probity: it was just one or two aspects of his appearance that I wanted. More recently I saw a man waiting for a train and thought he would be perfect as a character in the novel I was writing. So I stole him. I know nothing about him and it is better that way. He probably isn’t in the least like my character as a person, but he looked just right, and now he is walking around between the pages of a book.

When I wrote my first novel “Dead Letters” (in the US “Murder is Academic”), I was writing about a world I knew well. I had been a lecturer at a college in Cambridge just like my fictional sleuth, Cassandra James. I had a lot of fun inventing a college, St. Etheldreda’s. But, mindful of the laws of libel, I wrote about what I knew, not who I knew. I was careful to make the principal and the other members of the college as different as possible from my ex-colleagues. Even so I nearly came a cropper. The novel had got to the proof stage when it occurred to me to check the names of my characters against the university directory. I found that I had used the name of a real person in another college for my murderer. Hasty corrections were made.

Of course this is assuming that people don’t want to find themselves in novels. But some do. Charity auctions where people bid to have their name used in, say, the next Ian Rankin are commonplace these days. But they usually appear only as a minor character and I bet the writer is careful to make sure that they don’t appear in an unflattering light—unless of course they want to.

There is one person whose life I plunder mercilessly: myself. Although my family are off limits as individuals, I have drawn on my general observation of the way small children behave. When my daughter was a toddler, I used to struggle to get her buckled into her car seat. On one occasion, when I needed both hands free, I put my handbag on the roof of my car. And drove off with it still there. It went a surprisingly long way before it fell off. The person who found it kindly took it to the village post office and it found its way back to me, but it set me thinking, and in my next novel, “Footfall,” Cassandra did exactly the same thing—but with dire consequences.

And that is one of the great things about being a writer. Even unfortunate episodes in one's life need not be wasted. To end on another culinary note, the writer is a bit like a thrifty cook stripping the last pieces of meat off a chicken: any bit of experience can be used in a novel. But as Fanny Trollope suggests, it’s best not to throw whole people into the mix.

Before Christine Poulson turned to crime, she was a respectable academic with a PhD in History of Art and had written widely on nineteenth-century art and literature. The city of Cambridge and the surrounding Fens, with their unique and sinister atmosphere, provided the setting for her first novel, “Dead Letters,” published in 2002, which featured literary historian and accidental sleuth, Cassandra James. Discover more at www.christinepoulson.co.uk.

Chris Simms is the editor of Case Files, the Crime Readers’ Association's online magazine. Subscribe to it for free at www.thecra.co.uk. Along with nominations for the Crime Writer’s Association Daggers (for his novels and short stories) and the Theakston's Crime Novel of the Year award, Chris was selected by Waterstone’s as one of their ‘25 Authors For The Future’. He continues to feverishly scribble away in a small hut behind his house. Discover more at www.chrissimms.info.
Q&A: WHAT INJURIES CAN OCCUR WITH A CAR BOMB?

By D.P. Lyle, MD

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Q: How far away would you have to be from a car bomb (the kind that is detonated by starting the car) to survive, and what sorts of injuries might you sustain in the blast?

A: This question is virtually impossible to answer with any degree of accuracy. There are entirely too many variables involved. How big is the bomb? How big is the car? How close is close? What direction does the shrapnel fly and in which direction is the concussive force of the bomb directed? Are there any intervening walls or structures that might dampen the concussive force or block or redirect the shrapnel? All of these variables and many more must be taken into account before any prediction of injury to a particular individual can be guessed at.

Let’s look at a few general principles, however. Big bombs cause big problems and little bombs cause less. A large bomb can produce a massive concussive force that can spread out for many yards in every direction. It can also produce shrapnel that can fly many hundreds of feet in any direction. A small bomb, needless to say, would cause much less concussive force and much less shrapnel spread; the shrapnel would also move at a slower rate and therefore do less damage.

Let’s assume that this is a moderate sized bomb and the victim is standing close enough to receive injuries from the explosion. There are several types of injuries that can occur with a bomb.

If the person is close enough and the bomb is of the type that produces a great deal of heat, then burns over the skin and face can occur and even the victim’s clothing could be set on fire. This could produce severe injury to the flesh and the lungs. The concussive forcible bomb is simply a wave of air molecules that are accelerated to a very high speed, and when they strike, an object may cause trauma. This is why a bomb will destroy a building, knock down walls, or kill a person within the concussive umbrella. If the force is strong enough it can burst eardrums, causes sinuses within the nose and face to bleed, rupture the lungs, rupture the abdomen and internal organs, and many other nasty injuries. If the person is slightly further away or if the concussive force is dampened somewhat, then injuries to the eardrums and sinuses may occur, but the other more severe injuries to the lungs and internal organs might not.

Shrapnel presents a very difficult and dangerous situation. With a car exploding, all types of shrapnel can be fired in every direction. Chunks of metal and glass, complete doors or windows, beams of metal, and even the engine can be launched in any direction. The types of injuries that someone would suffer depends upon exactly what strikes them and with what speed and force they are hit. I think it would be obvious that if a car door or engine or some large piece of metal from the car struck someone at a very high velocity, it would most likely kill them instantly. If not, their injuries would be so severe that without very aggressive medical treatment and luck they would die from these in short order. But what about smaller pieces of glass and metal? These can penetrate the head, the chest or the abdomen, and damage vital organs and lead to death very quickly. Or they can enter the same areas and lead to massive injury and bleeding which can then lead to death anywhere from minutes to an hour or so. Or they could simply be flesh wounds and the person could survive, but would require surgical repair of the wounds and treatment with antibiotics to prevent secondary infections.

So you can see almost anything can happen in this type of situation. A big bomb that explodes at a great distance could easily be a clue as to what a smaller bomb would do to a person standing very close to it. Any bomb where the concussive force and shrapnel were directed away from the person might produce no injuries, whereas if the victim were standing in the path of the concussive wave and the shrapnel he could be killed instantly. And anywhere in between. This great degree of variation in what actually happens is good for storytelling, since it means that you can craft your story almost any way you want.

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

Mason stood on the road dressed as a Stormtrooper from Star Wars. The vinyl coveralls that served as the Stormtrooper's black and white uniform was loud as he moved, the elastic of the plastic Stormtrooper mask was biting into his scalp and the battered Star Wars pillowcase was heavy with candy in his hands.

He looked at the Boylan House, a single light shining through a window on the second floor. His cousins Matthew and Luke stood beside him. Both of them were older. Matthew was Han Solo and Luke was, well, Luke was Luke Skywalker.

A few of Mason's cousins' friends were with them, all of them dressed as Star Wars characters. Mason's mom had dropped him off. She was pulling the night shift at the Memorial Hospital ER in Nashua. His dad hadn't been around for years.

Aunt Margaret had been happy to have him. Nobody wanted Mason to miss Halloween. Including Mason.

Although he wasn't too happy about being at the Boylan House.

There was something wrong about the house.

I just didn't feel right.

“T'm going up there,” Kevin, one of Matthew's friends, said. “Anybody else?”

No one answered him.

“Bunch of queers,” Kevin laughed, sliding his Darth Vader mask up and onto the top of his head.

Kevin was a mean boy. He hadn't done anything mean to Mason, or to anybody else that night. But just as Mason knew that there was something wrong with the Boylan House, he knew that Kevin was mean.

“Come on, Matt,” Kevin said, sneering at Mason's cousin. “Don't be such a girl.”

Matthew only shook his head, and Mason saw in the moonlight that his cousin's eyes were wet with tears. Matthew was too afraid to even answer.

A soft wind rustled the tops of the trees, the remaining dry and desiccated leaves making a low, rattling sound.

“You're a bitch,” Kevin said in a low voice, and Mason heard the threat of violence in it.

“I'll go,” Mason said.

Kevin's head snapped to the right to look at him. Surprise replaced the sneer that the older boy had been wearing. But the sneer quickly came back. “How old are you?”

“Seven,” Mason answered.

Again the look of surprise. Mason knew he looked younger. His mother and her best friend always talked about it.

Kevin shook his head, grudging admiration in his voice as he said, “Well, hot damn, kid, let's make this happen.” Kevin handed his bag of candy off to a boy named Chad.


“Thanks,” Mason said, letting his cousin take the pillowcase.


Kevin started walking up the slight hill towards the Boylan House, and Mason followed a few steps behind him. The older boy glanced back once just to make sure that Mason was there, and Mason saw a flicker of relief on Kevin's face.

It seemed to take a terribly long time to get to the Boylan House's front door, but they did.

And Mason had never seen a door so large. It towered over both of them and was set back in the doorway. Above the door was a trap door, set into the overhang of the second story and barely visible in the moonlight.

It was then that Mason noticed how silent the world was standing before that door.

The insects and the night animals
had seemingly been robbed of their voices. The wind had vanished, and an ancient, sickening smell seemed to rise up from the grass beneath their feet. The temperature had dropped sharply, and Mason suddenly felt sick to his stomach, the American chop suey that Aunt Margaret had made threatening to come back up.

In front of Mason, Kevin had noticeably stiffened, a visible tremor in his hands. Instantly Mason felt sorry for the older boy, even if Kevin was mean.

Kevin was scared.

But both Mason and Kevin knew that the older boy had to do something, even if it was just knocking on that huge and frightening front door.

Mason watched as Kevin took a deep breath and put his Darth Vader mask back on his face. The boy's body tensing as he raised his right hand and closed it into a fist.

Movement caught Mason's eye and he looked up.

The trap door above them was opening.

Mason stood frozen, petrified and unable to scream as Kevin knocked once, ever so softly upon the thick and ancient wood of the door.

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Movement caught Mason's eye and he looked up.

The trap door above them was opening.

Mason stood frozen, petrified and unable to scream as Kevin knocked once, ever so softly upon the thick and ancient wood of the door.

A pale white hand shot down from the trap door.

The wrist and forearm, as pale as the hand, vanished into the depths of a black sleeve while the hand's long, yellow nailed fingers buried themselves in Kevin's loose blond curls.

With a sudden jerking motion, the hand and arm dragged Kevin up through the trap door and into the house.

Kevin and Mason's screams drowned out the closing of the trap door.

And as Kevin's screams were suddenly silenced, Mason turned and sprinted for the road. His own screaming triggered that of the other boys and his flight from the Boylan House sent them racing back along Meeting House Road.

Mason raced after them, breathless in the October moonlight.

FOUR

The Monson librarian looked at him in surprise as she unlocked the door while he climbed up the last few granite steps. “Is this a first?” he asked, grinning as she held the door open for him.

She smiled. “It is,” she said, “I’ve never had someone waiting to use the library before.”

“I’m Mason,” he said, extending his hand.

“Julie,” the young woman said, shaking his hand. “Come on in.”

“Thank you,” Mason said.

As the door closed behind them, she asked, “Is there anything that I can help you with today?”

“Well,” Mason said, walking beside her towards the front desk, “I was wondering if you have a local history section. And then I was wondering if you have a microfiche or microfilm machine.”

“You’re in luck,” Julie said, walking around the desk and taking a key off of a hook on a rack hanging on the wall. “We have a large local history section, which I’m sure is a complete surprise to you,” she smiled, “and we have both microfiche and microfilm machines.”

“Excellent,” Mason said.

“May I ask what it is you’re doing research on?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yes,” he said, “I’m doing some research on the Boylan House on Meeting House Road.”

Julie nodded. “Okay. Come on and follow me.” She walked back around the desk and went to a closed door with a brass plate engraved with the name, “Gunther” upon it.

“This,” she said, fitting the key into the door’s lock, “is the Gunther Room. This is where we keep our local history materials, both published and unpublished work. Monson doesn’t have a historical society, so all of that stuff is in here too. Letters, maps, journals. All of that good stuff. There’s even a filing cabinet of photographs.”

With that said she turned the key, then the doorknob and opened the door slowly, taking the key out of the lock as she did so. As the door finished swinging open Julie reached in and turned the light on.

The room was small but immaculately clean and organized. A large and old reading table, with a green shaded brass lamp coming up through a hole in the table's center, dominated the room. There was an equally ancient reading chair at the table, and there was barely any room around the table to get at the shelves packed with books of various ages and gray, neatly labeled manuscript boxes. A pair of sixteen by sixteen windows stood across from the door, letting in the late morning light and looking out over the Monson cemetery. Row upon row of ancient headstones stood in precise order, with barely an inch or two between the sides of each stone, and only a few feet between the rows.

“We’re open until four thirty,” Julie said, stepping aside so Mason could enter the room. “Don’t worry about your truck,” she smiled. “I’ll give the police a call. My brother’s on duty today, he won’t write a ticket up on someone who’s actually using the library.”

“Thanks,” Mason said, turning to grin at her. “Is there a place that I could make copies if I need to? And also, I have a wand scanner, do you mind if I use that?”

“First,” she smiled, “I have a copier, and I can copy whatever you need me to. I’m pretty much caught up on my work, and I just finished a book last night that left me with a book hangover. I can’t start a new one until at least after lunch.”

“Understood completely,” Mason laughed.

Her smile widened. “And second, as to the scanner, that won’t be a problem at all. The only thing I ask when you’re using the Gunther Room is that you leave whatever you take off of the shelves or out of the filing cabinet, on the reading table. Things get lost easily.”

“They do,” Mason said softly,
looking into the room. “They do.”

**FIVE**


Matthew smoked nervously, a slight shake in his hand each time he brought the Lucky up to his lips. He looked over at Mason, clearly unhappy.

Mason sat on the lowered tailgate of his Dodge, a cup of Dunkin’s coffee in his hands. He looked steadily at his cousin.

“Why the hell are we even here?” Matthew asked, glancing up at the Boylan House.

“We’re waiting for darkness,” Mason answered.

“No shit we are,” Matthew responded. He finished the cigarette, dropped it to the pavement and ground the butt into the pavement with his foot. Even as he did so, he was fishing his pack of Lucky’s out from his jacket pocket and fumbling with his lighter. It took him a few times but soon Mason’s cousin had the cigarette out of the pack, into his mouth and lit. He exhaled two streams of smoke sharply from his nose. “The last time we were here,” Matthew said, stabbing the cigarette in his nose. “The last time we were here, Mason answered.

Matthew nodded, a terrified look in his eyes. It was deep, and old and painful.

“I don’t care how many times you tell yourself, or how many times the psychiatrist and my mom tried to tell me, that is not what happened, Matthew.”

“All I want you to do is tell the truth.”

“I don’t give a shit about what you believe,” Matthew said, smoking furiously. “Kevin’s dead, they never found his body. End of the goddamn story.”

“Why,” Mason said, taking a sip of his coffee, “did they never find his body, Matthew? They searched for days. Hell, they even brought the National Guard and the Marine Reserve units in to search for Kevin’s body.”

“They didn’t find his body,” Matthew snapped, “because there’re a hundred acres of wetlands and conservation land behind that damn house.” He refused to look at the Boylan House, keeping his eyes on Mason instead. And Mason could see the fear in his cousin’s eyes. It was deep, and old and painful.

“I’m sorry for bringing you out here,” Mason said sincerely, “I just wanted someone with me. You’re the only one I trust enough to do that with.”

Matthew merely nodded. Mason started to take another drink of his coffee when Matthew stopped him with a horrified, “Look.”

Mason looked up and saw it.

A single light had come on in the upper left-hand window as darkness finally settled in completely over Monson.

If they had been in the town, where the electrical wires were strung from pole to pole and pole to the house, he would have believed that there was a light on a timer. But Mason knew better. Mason knew that there was something more.

He set his coffee down on the Dodge’s tailgate and got off of it. “Watch my coffee, okay, Matthew?” Mason asked.

Matthew nodded, a terrified look on his face as he stared at the Boylan House, the cigarette quickly burning down between his fingers. Wiping his own nervous sweat off of his palms and onto his jeans, Mason started walking up the small hill towards the front of the Boylan House. His childhood fear came rushing back, settling into his bowels and threatening his control over his bladder. Foolishly he felt seven again, walking up behind Kevin Peacock and wondering how frightening the house really was. Never realizing how horrific the house was. Never realizing that the simple act of walking up to that house would haunt every night’s sleep.

Mason straightened his back and painfully dry Mason forced himself to move forward, keeping an eye on the house. As if someone was walking in the house, just above the second floor.

As if someone was walking in the house, Mason looked up and saw the trap door which he had long ago seen open—

And it was opening.

A moment later something black fell down, landing gently on the granite doorstep. The trap door closed with a whisper.

With a mouth that was suddenly and painfully dry Mason forced himself to move forward, keeping an eye on the house. As if someone was walking in the house, Mason kept his eyes on the trap and the front door.

He couldn’t trust the house.

Mason straightened up, walked backward for a dozen feet down the hill, then turned and forced himself to walk calmly down to where Matthew was standing. His cousin had a fresh cigarette shaking in his hands, and he looked at Mason, asking, “What’s that?”

“The trap door opened, and it fell out,” Mason said, his voice shaking. “I haven’t even looked at it yet.”

He put the item on the truck bed and stared at it. Matthew came and stood beside him.

“Oh damn,” Matthew whispered.

On the much scraped and worn bed of Mason’s Dodge pickup, next to his cup of quickly cooling coffee, was a mask. A thin, plastic Darth Vader mask.
Many times we go out and search for interesting authors to bring to you that aren’t yet household names. We get hundreds of requests from publicists and publishers each month, and many of those authors write pretty much the same style of book. One day when searching, I stumbled upon a trilogy that peaked my attention: *The Boylan House Trilogy*. In reading more about it, we knew that we had to connect with the author.

Ron Ripley started out reading scary and disturbing books at a young age. He acquired a thirst for things creepy and needed to explore that. Growing up across the street from a cemetery, Ron would develop stories that would scare him each night before bed. Using these experiences is what makes an author find his style and share it within his stories.

Being able to discover a new author and bring them to you is one of the main reasons we started the magazine. Below you will see the interview we had with Ron, where he talks about *The Boylan House Trilogy* and much more. Let’s take a quick peek inside the series, and then check out what he has to say.

For nearly three and a half centuries, the Boylan House has stood at the end of Meeting House Road. And something in that house has been killing boys for centuries.

The town of Monson is a quaint and quiet New England town. Yet the Boylan House is terrifying and has been for as long as anyone can remember. Adults put the thing out of mind and ignore the fears of their children, admonishing them to stay away.

Too many boys have vanished into the swamps behind the house. Bodies never recovered. Nothing ever recovered. The families are left with their memories and the disturbing thought that the Boylan House had something to do with it.

Mason Philips knows better than that. He knows that there’s something in the house. Something evil. Something hunting children from time to time.

And Mason has decided that it’s time for the killing to stop.


Ron Ripley (R.R.): The behind the scenes look is pretty simple. I have a great wife who gives me the space to sit and write, which in turn lets me scare myself silly. Since I’ve grown up and lived in New England pretty much my whole life, I felt most comfortable writing about New England. Now I know that there are lots of scary places out there, but for me, nothing is scarier than an old New England house. Especially the garrison houses. I was thinking about these houses and wondered what it was that made them scary for me, and that’s when I thought of the Boylan House.

S. MAG.: When you decided that this would be a trilogy, did that change the story as a whole in any way?

R.R.: When I made the decision to make this a trilogy, the only way it changed the story itself was that it allowed me to explore
all of the characters more. And that includes Liam Boylan. By giving myself a little more room to write, I was able to dig a little deeper into Mason. It also allowed me to expand the Boylan House, itself, into something more than just a haunted house.

S. MAG.: Were ghost stories the types of books you liked to read when you were a kid?

R.R.: No, they definitely were not! I grew up next to a graveyard and I was scared to death every night. I liked to read history, comic books, and a lot of the classic authors like Kipling and Steinbeck. I was a different kid for sure. I read a lot of science fiction and fantasy, too. Every once in a while I'd dip into Stephen King or H.P. Lovecraft, but really, the books just scared me too much.

S. MAG.: What is the most difficult part to write when doing a trilogy?

R.R.: The most difficult part to write is deciding the ending of each book. I have to make sure my readers understand that there's more to the story. I need to ensure the story flows to that ultimate ending, and I don't rush it. I can't have a character that does something, well, out of character. The hardest part is to make sure that I've clipped it at the right point.

S. MAG.: What is on your DVR right now?

R.R.: Way, way too much. I don't think that I'll ever watch it all, but I have, The Blacklist, Law & Order, some rugby games, and The Zoo. Lots of other stuff come and go, but I usually spend most of my time reading or writing.

S. MAG.: If you could pick one fictional character and write a new story starring them, who would it be and why?

R.R.: It would be Father Alexander in The Boylan House Trilogy. I've always been fascinated by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the way they combat evil. I know that that sounds kind of silly in today's world, but I'm impressed by their passion. I'd like to write more about his experiences as an exorcist working with his own church and that of Father Moran's.

S. MAG.: What scares Ron Ripley?

R.R.: Everything. I'm serious too. I can't even watch those B horror movies from the fifties and sixties without jumping on the couch. There are also certain places that scare me. Graveyards and cemeteries at night, certain wooded stretches. Certain houses. Strange sounds and glimpses of shadows. All of these feed into my decidedly over-active imagination.

S. MAG.: Who is Mason Philips?

R.R.: Mason Philips is actually a mix of several of my friends, all of whom were Marines. He also has aspects of my father. I wanted to make him a determined individual who was capable of dealing with stress and adversity. Those are the traits that my friends and father exhibit constantly.

S. MAG.: With the setting being a main character, how much different is that instead of an actual person being the villain in your story?

R.R.: That's a really great question. With an inanimate object as a main character it's a little more difficult to make someone afraid of it. Yes, we all have that natural fear of a weapon threatening us, or a crazed killer, but what about a house? Not everyone has that same fear factor when it comes to buildings. We can look at a house and wonder if it's haunted, but it's harder to get someone to read about a building, and say, "Wow, that would scare me to death!"

S. MAG.: What is next for Ron Ripley?

R.R.: Lots and lots. I just finished up a trilogy called The Blood Contract Trilogy which is newly published on Amazon. I've also got some recent nightmares that I'm sifting through in my head. Yes, nightmares. A lot of times I write short stories based on what horrific thing was running through the theater of my mind the night before. I'm starting on another trilogy that'll have a unique combination of horror, paranormal, and fantasy.

We would like to thank Ron for taking the time to speak with us. We hope that you will now put Ron on your radar and pick up the series. For more information about Ron check out his website at: www.jollypublisher.com/ronripley. Readers can find giveaways, discounts and be notified of upcoming releases.

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“DADDY, TELL ME about Mommy.”

“Son, it’s late,” Bernt said, trying to sound firm.

“Please?” Ben persisted.

“She liked tuna fish, cheese and catsup sandwiches. And when she laughed, she had dimples under both sides of her mouth...just like you.”

“And?”

“She would scream herself silly when the 49ers played,” Bernt added.

Ben's face asked for more without saying the words.

“And...she loved you very much. And...it’s time to go to sleep.”

“Daddy…”

“Son, I mean it.” Ruffling Ben’s black curls, he kissed his forehead. “Time for prayers and then sleep.”

“Daddy?”

“Yes, son?”

“Where did Mommy go?”

HOURS LATER, BERNT SAT with empty beer cans all around him. He'd chugged them, yes, but had definitely not enjoyed them. He wasn't the type to drink alone but tonight, he had. He couldn't remember the last time he'd spent time with his friends.

Everything was different now.

His son was asleep, cuddling a ragged bear that he’d had since he was a baby. He looked so peaceful. Bernt envied him that peace. He thought of his son's last question. How could he answer it if he didn't know himself?

Bernt checked all the locks, but his worry was not for outside intruders. He was a big, husky man—well over 6 feet—strong, knew martial arts, and could protect himself and his son easily. Of course, they also lived in an upscale neighborhood that rarely heard a police siren.

Any fear he felt definitely didn't come from the outside.

Bernt pulled out the couch-bed, lay down, and tried to sleep. As usual, he could not. The bed was comfortable, but he missed Kerry. Finally, he got up and walked through the house, ending up where he always did...at the door of the master bedroom.

Would he see her tonight?

The door was kept closed. Always. The room was off limits to Ben. His curiosity had been met with such a firm discouragement from Bernt that his son knew not to push it. He didn't ask why the room was forbidden. Not anymore.

Bernt opened the door. The room was always cold. Nothing helped. Even in mid-summer.

“Bernt?” The voice was Kerry's. It was panicked, upset. He went to where he knew she would be.

The round, white, wood mirror was tall. Nearly six feet. It was an oval shape and had been custom made three centuries before back in Salem, by a settler known for his furniture making skills; Abraham Shelton. However, that was all Bernt knew about him. That, and the fact that the craftsman and his family had lived near Salem during the infamous Witch Trials of 1692.

Bernt and Kerry had bought the mirror on a whim when they were visiting Salem. They had stopped at a little curio shop next to a museum. Kerry had loved the mirror; Bernt had thought it was ridiculously over-priced. Kerry’s whim had won out. They’d lugged the mirror home in the back of their Range Rover.

Two years later, he still blamed himself. But how could he have known? How could anyone have known what would happen next?

“Bernt…”

Kerry was there.

In the mirror, Bernt could not see his reflection. Instead, he saw the other place. It was a garden. Nearby, he heard the laughter of children playing.

As always, Kerry was dressed in ancient clothes; pilgrim-like attire. Her hair was severely restrained in a bun, but a few curls had managed to get loose. She was so beautiful, the most beautiful woman he’d ever known. The
MORNING GREETED BERNT with a nasty hangover. He spoke sharply to Ben as he got him ready for kindergarten. However, Ben was a good-natured little boy who held no grudges.

"I'll tell him tonight," Bernt thought, watching his son get on the school bus. Their housekeeper, Valerie, would be there to greet Ben when he got out of school. She knew the rule about the master bedroom door, and knew that it had to be strictly enforced. In the time since Kerry had vanished, Valerie had been crucial to Bernt. A busy senior partner at a Boston law firm, Valerie had to be strictly enforced. In the time since Kerry had vanished, Valerie had been crucial to Bernt. 

Standing, he walked along its shore, feeling out of place. Looking around, he saw a crude cabin, smoke coming out of a chimney. Bernt was cold, and looked down at his clothing. They were the same ones he'd fallen asleep in. Not appropriate for this weather... wherever he was.

He saw two blond children chasing each other, unaware of him, running near a thriving garden. Nearby, a healthy-looking workhorse was tethered to a post next to a crumbling barn.

He heard steps behind him. He saw a tall, imposing man—pale, with gray-blond hair. He was possibly in his sixties. He was strong though, able. He owned a long beard and wore the same type of historic-looking clothing that he'd seen Kerry wearing in the mirror the night before. Bernt studied the man's clear green eyes, and pock marks on his cheeks. Not able to ignore the rifle he was carrying.

"You've come a long way, stranger." The man's voice was neither aggressive nor friendly. Just stating a fact, he was.

"What are you looking for?"

"My wife," Bernt replied.

And suddenly, Bernt was waking up in front of the mirror in his own home, staring at his own hopeless face within the looking glass. 

###

IT WAS FRIDAY.

As Bernt got out of his vehicle and stared at the house, he felt empty and sad. Ben would not be in there. Valerie had taken him to spend the weekend with his best friend, Aaron Jones. Aaron was having his birthday and the boys had planned a sleepover for Saturday night. Bernt dreaded going into the home that was only bearable when Ben was there.

Then, Ben came running out of the house, Valerie quickly on his heels. Bernt frowned as Ben rushed into his arms. "What's going on, Valerie?" He asked the housekeeper. "Why isn't Ben with Aaron?"

"Ben left his bear, Mr. Myerson. He insisted on coming back. I went up to get it, and..."

"Daddy! I saw Mommy! I saw her!" Bernt's heart stopped. Valerie flinched under his hard, cold look. "I'm sorry, sir. I thought he was right behind me, I swear."

"It's okay, Daddy!" Ben said, happily. "Valerie didn't know. Mommy was calling me. So I went in there!"

"Sir, I'm so sorry," Valerie kept repeating her line of guilt.

Bernt waved her away. "Valerie, I'll take care of it. You go on home. See you on Monday after his playgroup. I'll take him to the sleepover, and then get a lock for the door. It won't happen again."

Nodding, Valerie quickly left.

As she drove away, Bernt felt a tug on his hand. Ben's eyes were huge. "Why are you going to lock Mommy up in there?"
Bernt knelt down on the driveway, and his son went back into his arms.

"Daddy, did I do something bad?" Ben asked.

"No." Bernt shook his head. "Not bad, son. Dangerous."

"But she was calling me...I saw her!" Ben said.

"I know what you think you saw, son, but..."

"I DID see her!" Ben insisted stubbornly.

"No, you didn't...that's just a," Bernt stumbled for an explanation, "a funny mirror."

"Mommy said you would tell me that."

"Did she?" Bernt closed his eyes and tried to think. But how could he explain what he himself still didn't understand?

"Why couldn't I touch her?" Ben asked.

"Because...she isn't real."

"Then how could she talk to me?"

Bernt knew that the time had come. "Mommy always loved that mirror. She kept it in that room since before you were born. Then, when you were about two, she started acting very sad. She started spending a lot of time in the bedroom, looking in the mirror. Then, one day, I came home and I saw her...walk into it. And then, she was gone."

"How?" Ben's little voice was filled with fear.

Bernt shook his head. "I don't know. Things don't usually work like that. Never. Just in stories. She walked into that mirror and I can't get her back. But I do know she doesn't want you to go where she is. That's why you can't go near that mirror again. No matter what you hear coming from that room. Understand?"

"If you put a lock on, I can't," Ben said earnestly.

"Right. But you know how to use a key. Don't go looking for the key. Don't go back in there."

"Yes, Daddy. But..."

"What?"

"Can't we just bring her back?"

"I don't know. But I'll try."

###

**BEN WENT TO HIS SLEEPOVER,** and Bernt went straight to Lowes, buying the toughest deadbolt he could find. He spent most of the early evening putting it on. His promise to his son haunted him. He did say he would try. **But how do I start?**

Bernt called Aaron's mother, Norma, and said he was going to Salem on business, and might be late picking Ben up the next day. Norma told him not to worry.

Bernt hung up, grateful for good friends that didn't ask questions, even if they still had them. The case of his "missing" wife had been filed away. It was a true 'cold case.' Even after all the investigating, the police remained stumped. And Bernt, holding the only clue that would have helped them, didn't dare say it out loud. The cops would have him locked up in minutes with that tale, seeing as that most folks didn't believe in mirrors that swallowed people up and sent them to another time.

The traffic was light, and Bernt arrived in Salem within the hour. He checked into a local hotel, and tried to sleep. Managing a few hours, most likely because he was far away from the scene, he woke, downed several cups of coffee and headed for the shop where he and Kerry had purchased the mirror. Once there, he found the shop had a new owner and didn't have records from the past. He had just moved to Salem and wasn't sure of the local folklore, other than the witch trials which everyone knew in order to entertain the tourists with their haunting tales. He was sorry he couldn't be more helpful, and suggested that the lady next door at the museum may know far more.

The museum was deserted except for Bernt and the curator. She was a lean, elderly woman with a white page-boy haircut and bright blue eyes. She was dressed in a tasteful suit, complemented by pearls. She reminded him of his mother, Anna, whose favorite hobby had been genealogy. Suddenly, Bernt knew exactly what to say.

"I'm doing some genealogy research," he looked at her name-badge, "Mrs. Shelton."

She smiled. "Call me Jean."

Taking her hand and greeting her, Bernt continued, "On a 5th great-grandfather, actually. Stoughton was the surname. He would have been alive during the late 1600s, during the trials. My mother started the research, but never found anything about him before she passed away."

The curator suddenly looked a bit less friendly. "I am very familiar with that name. Could his first name have been William?"

"Yes," Bernt said, as his heart sped up. "I believe he was a judge."

The curator's smile faded completely. "William Stoughton condemned several innocent people to death in 1692. He created mass hysteria. Nothing was ever proven, mind you. Children were left without parents. Lives were ruined. Worst of all, he never recanted or apologized. He went to his grave claiming he'd done the right thing. I wouldn't call that a true judge, would you?"

Bernt marveled at the passion and rage in the petite woman's voice. Of course, he certainly wasn't responsible for anything that happened back then. "I'm...I'm interested in seeing where he worked, Where the trials were held. Who the families were. There was a courtroom or church in the mirror once..."

"Mirror?" Jean asked sharply. "Sir, I'm sorry. I don't understand."

He tried to change his thoughts, make sure the woman did not throw him out of her museum presuming he
was my 4th great-grandfather. His story is profoundly odd. "Abraham Shelton was my 4th great-grandfather. His wife, Elizabeth, was one of the ones sentenced and hung by your ancestor."

Moments later, Bernt left the museum. Mrs. Shelton had given him instructions to the old courthouse where the trials had been held; her tone made it clear that she was no longer in the mood to speak to him.

Heading to the site, he walked around. As he got closer to the main chambers, the smell of flowers seemed to grow stronger in the air. Entering the room, he found a wall plaque that read: "Here, in 1692, were held the trials presided over by William Stoughton, Esq. which led to the subsequent deaths of twenty falsely convicted people."

His head seemed to spin for a moment, the smell of flowers unbearably strong. Then he heard it…Kerry's voice.

"Bernt…help me…please!"

As he stood there, colors, textures, time swirled around him. The empty room turned to that of a room filled with stern-faced people. A judge presided over them, sitting slightly higher atop a wooden chair as if it were a throne. It was the man Jean Shelton had showed to him in a book not a half-hour before. He stared at William Stoughton.

A young woman stood before the judge. She was perhaps in her early thirties. Her two children were clutching her skirts. The children were the same ones he'd seen playing near the garden.

"No!" The young woman cried out when the sentence was read.

She was to be hung. For witchcraft. "No! I am innocent!"

William Stoughton's face was set in stone. "Take her. Now. The sentence will be carried out tomorrow at sunrise."

"I'm innocent!" Elizabeth Shelton pleaded. Her children were openly wailing now, being pulled away by other stern-faced men and thrust into the body of a tall, powerfully built man standing in back of the courtroom.

Bernt sucked in his breath. It was the man from his dream…You've come a long way, stranger. A long way, indeed.

The scene continued to unfold in front of Bernt. Elizabeth was the only one who looked directly at him as if she was able to see him standing in the future. "Would you deprive a child of his mother?"

Before he could respond, the vision dissipated and a person was shaking him. "Are you well, Mr. Stoughton?" It was Jean, looking extremely concerned.

"Not Stoughton…that was my mother's family." Then, he blacked out.

### BERNT AWOKE in the Emergency Room.

It was early afternoon on Saturday when he was released. The doctors had found nothing, suggested that he was simply exhausted and needed to take better care of himself.

He thought again of Jean Shelton. Bernt had, improbably, found a direct descendant of the woman his own ancestor had condemned to death. Out of anyone in Salem, maybe she would believe him.

Returning to the museum, Bernt hoped that she would hear him out. The museum was open, but Jean was gathering her things to go. "I'm glad to see you're well," she said simply. "I was just closing up."

"I wasn't exactly honest with you, Jean. William Stoughton is my maternal grandfather, but discovering his past is not why I came to Salem. My wife…she's missing. I wonder if you might know…why."

Jean lifted a well-tweezed eyebrow. "I don't know your wife."

"No, but you do know about witchcraft…or, the strange things that went on here in Salem," he said slowly, wondering if his words would land him back in the ER again, this time in an observation room.

"Kerry, my wife, went missing two years ago. Missing…but we still hear from her. I saw her…walk into a mirror. Since that time, I've seen her image in the mirror. She talks to me. She was in that courtroom during one of her visits. Another time, on some type of farm. Some older man's farm."

Jean listened placidly, seeming unsurprised by anything Bernt was saying.

Giving him hope, he continued on, "Was there any history of the trials victims putting curses on the judge after he condemned them? I know this sounds crazy. It sounds crazy to me! I'm a lawyer; I believe in facts, common sense…logic. Even so, I know there are things that happen that no one can explain. I never believed in anything like this…until it started happening to me…I, my boy, we need her back. When I passed out in that courtroom, I thought I heard Kerry calling me."

Jean's face remained calm, unsurprised…as if Bernt had asked her where to find a good pumpkin patch in the area.

"Wait just a second," she finally spoke. Turning, she walked out of the room. She was gone for only a few minutes before returning with a tattered book in her hand. It was a history of the trials. In it, as Bernt turned the pages, were drawings of the people involved; Judge Stoughton, others…

It couldn't be.

"What is it, Mr. Myerson?"

"That woman in the drawing. It is impossible."

Jean peered at the one he pointed out. "That is the wife of my 4th great-grandfather, Abraham. He married her after Elizabeth Shelton, his first wife and the mother of his children was hanged."
“No,” Bernt said firmly, shutting the book, “it isn’t. That’s my wife. That’s Kerry.”

### MOMENTS LATER, they were in Bernt’s Range Rover, just outside Salem’s city limits. They turned onto an old, poorly maintained dirt road. Finally, Jean told him to stop. “We have to walk from here.”

“This is the place?”

Jean nodded. “The family farm. They lost it after your, ah, his second wife died during childbirth. Abraham Shelton couldn’t maintain his work as a carpenter and the grueling maintenance of the farm without a wife. He was shunned by his neighbors because of the trials. The children had to go to her sister…where one of them died soon after. The other one was my ancestor, named Elizabeth after her mother. Abraham died of grief.”

They found the remains of the old cabin within a minute. Jean went to a small, rotting gate that surrounded a neat, clean cemetery. Someone had been taking care of the land for a long time.

“This is where both wives are buried,” Jean said. “One on either side of Abraham.”

Bernt again felt that other-worldly vibe that quickly enveloped him. The graveyard swam around him. He saw a room, chilly, cold air, and a man, the man from his dream completing work on an object. Bernt looked closer. It was the mirror.

As Abraham Shelton put his tools away, he returned to the mirror. He pulled out a weathered book, carefully opening it to a section mid-way through the pages. Abraham Shelton began to read an incantation. The words sounded foul, angry…bitter.

Before this, Bernt couldn’t touch anything in his dreams. This time, however, he could. He did. He rushed at Abraham and knocked the book out of his hands.

“You have got to stop!” he shouted. Abraham looked at him, his eyes were bottomless pools of rage. Bernt felt like shaking him. “Must we both lose our wives?”

“It’s a bitter consequence,” Abraham said, his voice hard, “However…”

“However, nothing! We knew nothing about you. It was just a mirror my wife loved. I loved her, so I bought it. We had no idea of your grudge. Kerry is innocent. She isn’t even related to the judge. Your children need a mother but, damn it, so does my son! All I can tell you is that we’re sorry. I know saying that doesn’t change anything, but I can’t change what history did to you. I am not my great-grandfather. I did not do this!”

“Then, talk to him,” Abraham said shortly. “Elizabeth is to be hanged tomorrow.”

Bernt considered his demand for only a moment, then nodded.

### THIS IS INSANE, Bernt thought.

Unable to extract himself from the past, he and the burly farmer took the workhorse, attached him to the cart and began their journey into a town that had long since vanished.

Straight up to the door of a finely made home, they passed a servant who tried to stop them. But then, they were looking at the judge who was sitting by his fireplace, reading his bible.

Judge Stoughton got to his feet, indignant. “Abraham, what is this about?” Then, he looked at Bernt. “Who are you?”

Bernt looked at his ancestor, and let out a harsh laugh. “You wouldn’t believe me.”

“Tell me anyway.”

“I’m your grandson. At least, I will be a long time from now. My mother was your 5th great-granddaughter.”

The judge remained standing tall, his face filled with confusion.

“Abraham put a curse on a mirror that my wife, Kerry, and I bought. The curse took her into this world, your world, after Elizabeth Shelton was… hanged. My wife was brought here to replace Abraham’s lost wife…and she will die here if you hang Elizabeth tomorrow. You not only kill Abraham’s wife, but you will kill my wife in the process. An innocent woman. The mother of your grandson!”

He saw the judge flinch at his words.

“These things you are so frightened of—magic, spells, witchcraft…they are all real. But there is also mercy. Can you show mercy on his family? For my sake?”

“Listen to how the lad speaks,” Abraham pleaded, “Look at how he is clothed! He is not from here. He is right. I did put a curse on that mirror to avenge myself and take out revenge on your future family, William Stoughton!”

The judge never took his eyes off Bernt. “I see the likeness of my wife in you. You have her eyes. Her mouth. I believe you.” He turned to Abraham. “Take the curse away. Take it off my grandson and give him back his wife.”

“Will you give me back mine?” Abraham asked. “A grace for a grace? Mercy for mercy?”

A long minute passed. “Done,” Judge Stoughton said in a stern voice. “But then, you and your wife will leave this community immediately. You and your spells! That is why these trials are happening in the first place. I will rid Salem of your wicked black magic.”

“Release her now and we will go tonight. Me, Elizabeth, our children. I’ll burn the mirror. You will never see us again. You can do that. Give the order.”

Judge Stoughton inclined his head once, and then reached for his cloak.

### BERNT SUDDENLY WOKE UP, his head pounding. The room was at first unfamiliar, and he reached quickly to turn on the light he saw sitting on a table. He was back in the motel room. However, he was not alone. There was
clearly someone in the king-sized bed with him, covers over their head.

His heart pounding, Bernt pulled the cover back. Hair...blacker than black, almost blue. Even in sleep, you could see the dimples under her lips. Kerry was home.

“Kerry?”
She opened her eyes to stare at him.
“I was sleeping. Now, you wake me up. What's going on?”
He wrapped his arms around her.
“You get dressed. We’re going home. Ben will want to see you!”
“Oh, can't we finish the weekend, Bernt? Ben is safe as can be at the sleepover. We've got to let him go sometimes.”

“It's not that…” Bernt said, confused. Kerry was acting as if she'd never been away from Ben. Had never walked through a looking glass and fought for her life in a time of magic and death.

Kerry sat up in bed, rubbing her eyes. “Are you still disappointed about not finding that mirror? Darling, it was just a drawing in a book about Salem history. It probably never existed.”

Bernt looked at her, not knowing what to say. She really didn't remember.

Kerry smiled and lay back down.
“I was having this really odd dream,” she said. “I mean it, Bernt. It was so detailed! You know, I almost believe that I could churn butter and tend a garden right now. That was what the dream was about. I was working so hard, taking care of two children that I didn't even know. There was a man there…”

“Abraham.”
She sat up, shocked. “How could you know that? It was my dream, not yours.”

Bernt shrugged. “Just a dream, darling. Go back to sleep.”

He waited until her breathing returned to the slow, regular sounds and then leaned over her face, kissing her tenderly on the cheek. “Welcome home,” he said softly, as long restrained tears began to run down his cheeks.

###

**KERRY LOVED THE REST** of their time in Salem. At her insistence, they stopped back at the antique shop and looked around, seeing nothing they liked. Then, Kerry went to the museum next door. “We didn't have time, yesterday,” Kerry said, smiling in that pouty way she had when she wanted to do something that Bernt wasn't likely to do. But this day, this time, Bernt was willing to indulge her in anything. *Anything.* She was home.

Bernt wasn't surprised at all when Jean greeted them, even though it was a Sunday. “I saw you two looking around. I'm just in town for a quick errand, but I have a few minutes,” Jean said.

Bernt hesitated, but Kerry enthusiastically agreed. She seemed to want to look at everything. The kitchen utensils, the farm implements, the clothing, all of it. She had always been a fan of history, but it seemed that her love for it had grown.

“What is it?” Bernt asked finally, not wanting to take his eyes off her in case she would end up being yet another dream, another vision that would disappear and cause his heart to break.

“It looks so familiar to me,” Kerry said. “I need to stop drinking wine before bed. That crazy dream got to me.”

Jean came up to them smiling, wearing the same outfit that she'd worn the day before. She did not seem to recognize Bernt. “Any questions I can help you with? If they’re quick, of course. I have church in a half-hour.”

“No, we should be going,” Bernt said, heading towards the door. “Our son is probably wondering what happened to us.”

He's at his first sleepover,” Kerry said. “He was so excited about it. He just chattered like a little squirrel when he told me…”

Bernt felt the little chill invade his body when Kerry stopped and lifted something in her hands.

“Oh, this book!” Kerry exclaimed.

Bernt saw that it was the book from yesterday; the history of the trials.

Kerry was looking through it excitedly. “It looks fascinating! Is it for sale? Could I buy it?” she asked with the exuberance of a child.

Jean looked at it, then back at her.

“For you, my dear, it’s free. Call it a souvenir of your trip.” She looked over Kerry's shoulder at Bernt, and very briefly smiled.

On the trip home, Kerry was absorbed in the old book, treating it as carefully as if it were an ancient religious item. The pages were stuck together in some places, but she managed to get them apart.

“Bernt!” she said suddenly, a mile from their house. Her voice was so urgent that Bernt slammed on the brakes. He was still not used to having her back. He still thought he'd look over and see the seat empty.

“This is a story about the Stoughton family! *Your* family!” Kerry exclaimed, “Remember your mother's research that she never finished?”

“I remember.”

“Look at this,” Kerry continued, “Judge William Stoughton was the main judge that everyone hated. He was the only one who wouldn't admit that the Salem trials were a mistake. But here it says that he *did* pardon a woman named Elizabeth Shelton the night before she was to be hung for witchcraft. Instead, he made the family leave town. He pardoned her because she had two young children. Here's a drawing of her at her trial. You can't tell much about her in this picture, but it must have been an incredible story.”

She turned to him, and smiled. “Maybe your ancestor wasn't such a bad guy after all. He spared her at the very last minute. Isn't that amazing?” •
“Powered by pedal-to-the-metal pacing, a seamless narrative, and subtle symbolism. Indeed, to classify this solely a YA novel does it a great disservice, as it will likely appeal to young and old readers alike. A thriller that many readers may find hard to put down.”

—Kirkus Reviews

Dr. Stephen Pevnick is a world renowned behavioral scientist as well as an advisor to the President of the United States. He has gathered the world’s most prodigious savants—people with astonishing intellectual abilities—to his research center in Maine. His intent is to conduct an unprecedented experiment to have the savants work on a common project together; a major challenge because the savants, while gifted, do not possess the social skills that might enable them to work as an effective team. But, soon after they gather, a catastrophic event occurs that threatens to destroy the Eastern Seaboard. The world’s best scientists are helpless to stop it as panic grips the country, and a sinister conspiracy emerges with the potential to eradicate the free world. Can this group, plagued by their own insecurities and doubts, come together and use their incredible skills to save the world, or will the dark forces that set this disaster in motion prevail?

“Put Kendrick on your must-read list, and move him near the top of the pile.”
—Booklist

THE SAVANTS

PATRICK KENDRICK

AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK & DIGITAL FORMATS WHERE BOOKS ARE SOLD

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Cover Shot

By LynDee Walker

Fans always wait (impatiently) for another Headlines in High Heels Mystery. And for those that do, you will be talking about this one for a long time. A new book by LynDee Walker is always a treat for the mystery reader, and all will be happy to catch-up with Nichelle Clarke, crime reporter.

To begin, Nichelle hears on her scanner that a death has happened in a swanky building in town. Odd part is, she begins to get threatening messages, and when the death happens, it seems to combine the two and shoots everything into high gear. Nichelle is on her way to get some information from the detectives on the case, as she has good relationships with the law, and is sure to be told whether this was a murder or a tragic death. But when her detective pal tells her that there is a gag order on the case, Nichelle goes out on her own to find the real story she craves.

Nichelle may be a reporter, but she is one in the news business that actually has ethics and doesn’t want to hurt anyone. And after a brief respite of slow news, she suddenly has her hands full with this case and one that involves a man with a rifle who has taken a hospital full of people hostage. She finds herself in a predicament, knowing that she has way too much to lose if she doesn’t throw herself into these cases and help find the reasons behind each.

“Cover Shot” is a very well written mystery, yet again, because the author gives the reader clues embedded in a spider web of twists and turns that will keep you reading until the end. Main character, Nichelle, is always very likable, and gosh knows she loves those high heels. Bring on more!

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

Song of Shadows

By John Connolly

In the previous novel featuring Charlie Parker, “The Wolf in Winter,” he was almost killed. In fact, he was pronounced dead. But lucky for him, he’s not, and currently lives in Boreas, Maine—a small, quiet town that’s perfect for rehabilitation. As per usual, it won’t remain peaceful for long.

The body of a Florida man has washed up on shore—not far from Charlie’s rented house. His neighbor, Ruth Winter, seems to be very frightened and, Charlie being Charlie, just can’t seem to keep his nose out of the case.

As Charlie settles into his new place, a town that was named for the Greek God of the north wind, he tries hard to help Ruth out, yet she is pushing him away just as fast. Charlie is aware that Ruth is very troubled as he starts to look into the life of the corpse. He soon finds a link between the man’s death, a tragic family in Maine, and another death in Florida. Ruth, however, is hiding a secret that turns out to be connected to events concerning a Nazi death camp that took place seven decades ago.

This Parker novel is just a little different from the previous ones, as Charlie doesn’t seem to be the end-all and be-all of the story. Taking place in the ‘scary-King world’ of Maine means that a few very grisly characters and many plot twists are available at whim. Parker fans will still hang on every word. Charlie is physically broken but there’s nothing wrong with his mental abilities keeping him the still dangerous investigator. Readers will love this and be looking forward to seeing the next path that Charlie takes.

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

A Dish Best Served Cold

By Rosie Genova

Mystery writer Victoria Rienzi has come back to her Jersey shore roots to research and write a new book loosely based on her Italian ancestors, and learn the ins and outs of Casa Lido, her family’s restaurant business. Vic’s been toiling away doing unglamorous prep work in the restaurant all summer under the watchful eye, and iron fist, of her nonna—Italian for grandmother.

The Rienzi family is looking forward to celebrating a milestone the last week of August, the 70th anniversary of their restaurant. But the party may have an uninvited guest. A hurricane is headed up the coast, and the seaside town of Oceanside—and Casa Lido—are directly in the storm’s projected path. Nonna Rienzi is determined that, despite the weather forecast, the party will be held outside story exactly as planned.

The party has another uninvited guest, Pietro Petrocelli, a local character whose love of booze, and lack of acquaintance with a toothbrush or a bar of soap, have earned him the nickname “Stinky Pete.” Pete knows some secrets about several Oceanside residents, including the Rienzi family. When the hurricane hits, and Pete’s body is found in the carousel house on the pier, it appears to be an accidental drowning. But Vic suspects that something more sinister is going on, and the hurricane was just a convenient excuse for someone to silence Pete for good.

“A Dish Best Served Cold” is the third in Rosie Genova’s Italian Kitchen Mysteries. It’s a perfect storm of great atmosphere, likeable characters, excellent plotting, and nifty transitions between New Jersey’s past and present. Highly recommended!


Bloody Truth

By John J. Davis

The Granger family returns in the second of the Granger Spy series, and I, for one, am thrilled to see them again. John J. Davis has written a series that is not only fresh and riveting, but in many ways it is also a throwback to the golden era of mysteries—the type many of us cut our teeth on when we were young—think James Bond and Nancy Drew blended and stirred.

In “Bloody Truth,” Ron and Valerie Granger along with their teenage daughter, Leecy, are all working with the CIA. Ron, ex-CIA, and Val, ex-Mossad, both working freelance, are teamed up with Leecy, a new agency recruit to help clear an old gremency of Ron’s, named Jens, who is being framed for stealing the world’s greatest computer hacking equipment and possibly starting a world-wide economic and political catastrophe. In order to do so, they must find the world’s greatest computer hacker and recover the stolen equipment.

What starts as a rather routine mission turns into something much greater. At stake . . . world domination! What makes John J. Davis’s Granger Spy series so good is that it is a suspense thriller that defies genre. It is espionage, political, and a touch of YA just to name a few. Although “Bloody Truth” can be read as a stand-alone, I suggest reading “Blood Line,” the first book in the series. It will add to your reading pleasure.

In “Bloody Truth,” Davis has done what few authors have accomplished in many years; he has written a suspense thriller that can be read and enjoyed by the entire family, and for that, he is to be applauded. I highly recommend “Bloody Truth” and eagerly await the next Granger Spy novel.


SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS

INSIDE THE PAGES
**MOVE YOUR BLOOMING CORPSE**

By D.E. Ireland

A sheer delight will be had by mystery fans as they jump into the second book in the Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins Mystery series, because not only is the plot a wonderful mystery, but the main characters are certainly well known and still as captivating today as they were in their own heyday.

Centered on horse-racing, these two “literary” stars are about to attend a race, the Royal Ascot, since Eliza’s father is part of a group that owns a champion horse. Lately, they have been going to races while also witnessing demonstrations by suffragettes, and when one of the group is found murdered, it turns out that the killing may be the work of a suffragette follower. And when another member of the group is killed, the people begin to fear that the entire membership is being targeted.

Eliza is being very single-minded and is determined not to become involved in another murder investigation, but Higgins really can’t wait to get started. Eliza’s mind soon changes when her father becomes a suspect, and immediately starts to aid Henry.

“Dramatic” and “brilliant” are two words that can always be used for this duo as they start to investigate the killings. From a victim saying goodbye by being trampled during a race, to another being found murdered in the posh stables, the duo gets involved quickly. Especially since there is a big race looming called the Eclipse Stakes. And there is definitely a slew of suspects from jealous wives to suffragettes to horse owners that will do anything to win.

A fast moving historical mystery that is so full of fun readers should expect to laugh, while learning all about horse-racing in the distant past, and waiting for the climax which contains many twists before it’s all over. Eliza and the Professor continue to be one of the best “teams” ever written.

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

**RED ICON**

By Paul Watkins (Writing as Sam Eastland)

“Red Icon” is not only a standout historical that will tell readers about a completely different Stalin; it’s also a thrilling story that doesn’t stop for one single second when it comes to action.

The Red Icon called, “The Shepherd,” is priceless, and was last seen in the custody of that mad monk who was once confidant to the Tsar and Tsarina Romanov. AKA: Rasputin.

Now, in the year 1944, two Russian soldiers on the front lines are taking cover in the basement of a church. There, they discover the Red Icon which sets off a challenge between Stalin’s Inspector Pekkala and a crowd of people referred to as the Skoptsy; these people were once hunted by the secret police, sent off to Siberia, and now wish to take revenge against Russia. As the Inspector finds out about the survivors of this group who live in the forests of Siberia, he soon gains the knowledge that they’ve come back to find “The Shepherd” because it is their birthright to own.

Following one of the deadliest battles of the war between Russia and Germany, a German scientist has made a horrible gas which the two countries are still not aware of. When they come up with a new weapon of mass destruction to make their move, Inspector Pekkala has to stop them. Of course, the killing power of this gas is beyond anything previously used. In other words, Pekkala has his hands full to save the Red Icon while also defusing the deadly gas.

Author Sam Eastland/Paul Watkins is definitely at the top of the list when it comes to authors who can write creatively and, for lack of a better term, perfectly, when it comes to war. “Red Icon” will keep readers wide awake so they can see the story play out until the very end. Watkins is known as a gifted storyteller and readers will find that this novel is no exception.

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

**DEATH ON THE HIGH LONESOME**

By Frank Hayes

This book was an absolute gem. So often cowboy heroes in the Old West all begin to sound the same, but this is a book that will have you glued to your chair. This is the second for writer, Frank Hayes, the first being “Death at the Black Bull,” and he is truly becoming one of the best.

Sheriff Virgil Dalton is the head lawman in the small town of Hayward. Dalton and his group of policemen have to cover a very large area of land in this state (one that remains unknown), and one of his Deputy’s, Jimmy Tillman, finds himself injured when a woman’s body falls over an interstate overpass and lands on the windshield of his police car. When the coroner’s office finally gets to examine her, they find that she was extremely dehydrated and had been hit by a truck just moments before she fell—the hit-and-run being the cause of death.

Soon after this happens, an elderly lady named Velma Thompson calls the office to report that her husband has disappeared. Dalton’s Office Manager, Rosita Brand, goes to the Thompson ranch and finds Velma dead on the porch and the husband still nowhere to be found. Sheriff Dalton decides to look for the missing husband, Charlie, and he heads to the High Lonesome (AKA: the rugged mountain chain behind the Thompson’s ranch), taking along the Thompson’s daughter, Marian, who wants desperately to help find her father.

That mystery, as well as the other Thompson children returning to the homestead to see if they can sell the house and put their father in a home, makes for great reading. This is an impressive book. The character’s act like honest to goodness real-life people dealing with their real-life problems, as a mystery is cast that readers will definitely love. Sheriff Virgil Dalton and his minions will hopefully come again very soon.

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

**A BLOSSOM OF BRIGHT LIGHT**

By Suzanne Chazin

Jimmy Vega is a detective with the Lake Holly, NY, police department. Jimmy’s girlfriend, Adele Figuera, is a lawyer educated at Harvard, and is also the founder of La Casa, which is the town’s Latino community center, in which a Latino without papers can take refuge.

In this tale Adele gets a call from Zambo, the town alcoholic. Zambo says that he has seen the baby Jesus in the arms of the Virgin Mary near La Casa. Jimmy asks Adele not to bother checking it out as it is probably something Zambo saw in a drunken dream state. But, as is par for the course, the dream was real and a baby is found dead in the woods near La Casa. Jimmy is on the case and works with the Lake Holly department searching for the child’s mother, who is soon also found dead, wearing a hoodie that belongs to Vega’s own daughter, Joy.

In the meantime, Adele has been offered a job in Washington, D.C. with a congressional candidate. She has not yet told Jimmy about it and he is not at all happy at the prospect when he finds out. As Adele is trying a case of a widower who is about to be deported because of his Hispanic descent, the ugliness of politics comes into play when the candidate who wants to hire her in D.C. refuses to help on her case because it might lose votes for him.

Jimmy and Adele are both wrapped in a story that involves murder, a Latino community’s secrets and the spiteful world of politics. The answers he comes up with might put Adele in danger, but it will definitely stun the small town of Lake Holly.

As always where this writer is concerned, the plot is deep, interesting and holds the reader from beginning to end. The subjects addressed are certainly ones that the modern day world are dealing with, which makes the plot even more interesting.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion
SHIFTING TIME
By Kelly Bennett Seiler

A book that will bring people to a standstill as they ponder the question: “What if?” Everyone is sure to have had a ‘what if’ in their lives. Like it or not, all of us at one time or another have said this small phrase, and then tried to bury it in the back of our minds.

The course of this tale is the story of Meade and Daniel. When you read their backstory, you see them grow up together and fall in love. Then, Daniel gets sick and suffers the heartbreaking end to his life. However, what you also see is the future. Fifteen years later when Meade Peterson, now a book editor, has made it on her own. Unfortunately, the one thing that is still missing from her world is love. She promised she would love Daniel forever, but forever was supposed to last a great deal longer.

In all of these fifteen years, Meade still can’t rid herself of the sorrow of his passing. She still thinks about all the things that she’ll never have now that Daniel is gone. She certainly has a life now, living in New York City...but the pain of wondering is larger than she can deny.

One day, she meets a new gentleman named, Tanner. Soon this new love brings her much joy, but the belief that she cannot give her heart to someone other than Daniel has her at a standstill. So, Meade goes back to her hometown of Austin, TX, for a chance to figure things out...instead, becoming the victim of a violent crime.

The author has certainly put together a suspenseful story, however, not a quickly plotted one. Each scene, each moment in time, is an emotional one...dealing with the “what if?” and attempting to be grateful for the now, seeing as how the future may never arrive. For people who like the dramatic element, this is certainly the book.

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

DEATH AT THE ABBEY
By Christine Trent

This delightful historical mystery captured me on the first page and never let go. I know that description is used a lot, but it’s very true for this book.

Violet Harper, a series character, is a female undertaker in London in 1869. She and her husband Sam are in North Nottinghamshire and have been for four weeks while he tries to get a coal mine started. He’s having trouble finding enough workers because the 5th Duke of Portland routinely employs hundreds of locals for building projects on his property, Welbeck Abbey. When the Duke’s valet, Pearson, shows up and requests that she come to the estate on a mission that he can’t seem to state coherently, she raises a few objections, but ends up going. It turns out that she is being asked to prepare a raven for burial!

Her ministrations are interrupted, though. Things continue to get weirder and weirder, as first one worker, then another are found dead. Violet knows they’ve been murdered, but can’t convince anyone else of this. Sam gets invited to demonstrate the new technique of dynamite blasting for the underground tunnels, ballroom, chapel, unused guestrooms, and such that the Duke is having constructed, so he’s on the scene eventually. No one ever uses the ballroom, the chapel, or the many beautifully decorated guestrooms. I got a kick out of the continuously roasting chickens, too.

The Duke was presented as such an oddball, I had to look him up. A detailed Author’s Note in the back also gives information on him and other actual historical people and places that are used in the story. From the light research I did, that Duke was even stranger than portrayed here!

Seemingly disconnected deaths and other happenings keep occurring, but the author masterfully tied everything together in the end to create a thoroughly enjoyable read.

Reviewed by Kaye George, Author of “Eine Kleine Murder” •

LICENSE TO QUILL
By Jacopo della Quercia

A terrific book if looking for a good mystery with a slice of history. The past is just a bit odd, but real history buffs will love it. This book will turn the “Gunpowder Plot” (a group of lapsed Catholics that plotted to kill King James I by blowing up the House of Lords) into a stage for old Will Shakespeare to become the 17th century James Bond.

Working on this idea, Shakespeare, who needs no introduction, and Christopher Marlowe, a poet and playwright, are pulled into a revolutionary plan with some conspiracies to sabotage the growth of Protestantism by the Roman Catholics. Marlowe becomes the spy of Sir Thomas Walsingham, a real spymaster. In the city of London, Guy Fawkes threatens Will into writing a special play: “Macbeth and His Witches.” A very loyal Shakespeare informs Walsingham, who steps in and sends him to Sir Francis Bacon who once served as Chancellor of England.

A lot of heroes come to the forefront in this book, starting with the wily and loyal Shakespeare; the courageous, Christopher Marlowe; and, Bianca, the Dark Lady who was born a peasant, Jewish-turned nun, and then spy and assassin who went on to be Will’s significant other.

Using tons of research, the author writes a wonderful book. In fact, “Macbeth” has never been written better, and Shakespeare has never been portrayed like this. The normally surly and somewhat crazy writer is transformed into “007” and his partner, known as “W,” transforms into a spy turned well-known secretary known as, Penny.

The author has written many comedy articles for the website “Cracked.com” and has had works featured in the New York Times bestseller: “You Might be a Zombie and Other Bad News.” In conclusion...this writer is a real blast!

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

BEYOND A DOUBT
By Nancy Cole Silverman

Main character—a reporter for an AM radio station located in Hollywood—Carol Childs, has been called to the scene of a young girl’s murder. It seems that certain attractive young women are being pulled into the glamour of Hollywood via the internet, and have been promised that they will become stars. When Carol takes a second look, she sees that the victim was dressed for nightclubbing, but had “fallen” a long time before crashing to the actual ground. Carol is bound to investigate but has been put on the backburner in this case and can’t get her regular sources to speak up.

The following day, Carol is called to another crime scene at Hollywood’s Walk of Fame. Marilyn Monroe’s star has been stolen. A mob around the scene are extremely unhappy and a Marilyn impersonator shoves a business card into Carol’s hand that might help her solve the previous murder. Carol is between a rock and a hard place when her friend, Gabi—who works in television—disappears, and the life of Carol’s own daughter Cate is threatened.

This is a novel of many secrets; missing women, human trafficking and more, as the author gives us a terrific story building up to a climax that will please the reader. The old saying regarding ‘people are not always what they seem’ fits perfectly in this case.

To give any more clues will spoil the plot for the reader as each character is tied into something else that would bring a good mystery mind to unveil the ending before reaching it. Therefore, just know that the pages are full of ‘whys,’ but only one solution will apply. Readers will be waiting impatiently for the next installment.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
BENEATH THE TOR
By Nina Milton

For many, the historical location of the Tor in Glastonbury (a dedicated monument located in the English county of Somerset), and the many legends behind it, are fascinating. This tale extends that fascination even more.

One midsummer’s night on the Glastonbury Tor a woman by the name of Alys Hollingberry all of a sudden up and dies. Shock certainly sets in regarding this event, and even more shock comes when Alys’s teacher—a shaman—says that the woman may have taken drugs during the ritual they were holding. Alys is not the type, to say the least, but the belief that drugs may have been involved turn this suspicious death a bit more suspicious.

Brice, Alys’s husband, comes to Sabbie, a young Shaman, for help. Brice has been receiving threatening emails about Alys, and Sabbie agrees to help him by turning to the spirits for direction. Unfortunately, no clear answers are given to Sabbie, only more mysteries that cannot be fully understood.

Sabbie goes one step further and tries asking her boyfriend, Detective Inspector Rey Buckley, for help, but he is involved in problems of his own. Sabbie is determined to get to the truth of what happened, so she continues on her quest. But there’s one thing she definitely does not know and that is the fact that an off-the-roker killer is heading for a victim, and both of them are closer to Sabbie than she imagines.

This is a great mystery as there are some really interesting characters. Sabbie’s study and research of the mystical, as well as the construction of the Glastonbury Tor and the power it supposedly holds depending on what legend you read—from St. Michael to King Arthur to it being the actual home to King of the Fairies—holds the interest from beginning to end.

Milton offers readers a new type of mystery series with these, Shaman Mysteries, and the future promises to be bright where these tales are concerned.

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

GRAVE DISTURBANCE
By Martha Crites

Rain, wind, and water suffuse Martha Crites’ new novel, “Grave Disturbance,” a story where Seattle and its rural hinterlands provide soggy scenic background—and more than a touch of danger. Psych evaluator, Grace Vaccaro, finds herself mired in more than mud when both her neighbor and a paranoid homeless man are murdered.

Grace and her husband, Frank, live in the rural town of Duvall, near Cathedral Falls, a waterfall that is a point of contention between a local developer who owns the land, leaders of the Snoqualmie Tribe to whom the falls are sacred, and increasingly angry environmentalists.

Martin, the murdered neighbor, was editing a documentary about Cathedral Falls. Is there a clue hidden within his footage? What happened to the outtakes? Grace had recently evaluated the vagrant who was killed at the same location as Martin. Is it coincidence, or are the two murders connected?

The town is divided by plans to develop the falls. Lydia Taylor, a powerful member of the Duvall city council, is in favor. Also in favor is her husband, Will, a highly successful mining engineer. Recent city council meetings saw heated words between Lydia and Will, on one side, and Martin, leading the anti-development faction. Lydia and Will argued their opposing causes with passion—but was there passion of another sort as well?

The heart of any novel is its cast of characters. Ms. Crites has developed a rich and varied ensemble. Of particular note is the character of Bob—an aging slacker, surfer dude, who may have finally found his footing.

Another killing occurs, and Grace fears she may be the next target. Frank and Grace love living in their remote and secluded community, but remote does not guarantee quiet, and seclusion is not always safe.

Reviewed by Andrew MacRae, editor of “And All Our Yesterdays” •

EVERYTHING SHE FORGOT
By Lisa Ballantyne

Margaret Holloway is a deputy head teacher at Byron Academy in London. On her way home, driving in wintry weather on icy roads, she's involved in an accident that takes out many cars on the freeway. Margaret has had a very bad day, to say the least, and an ending like this is not what she needs. But this doesn’t turn out to be an ordinary wreck. When she tries to get out of her car, the car catches fire and she suddenly believes that this accident is going to turn into her own tragic death.

Instead, a very mysterious man breaks her window and pulls her out of her car, putting his life at risk. After the man helps Margaret to safety the car does explode, and her knight in shining armor disappears. Margaret looks for him, finding him in a coma at a hospital where he was taken after the fire.

The story then shoots back almost thirty years, where a little girl named Molly is kidnapped on her way to school. When the whole country is looking for Molly, fearing the worst, the child is getting to know the man who kidnapped her: Big George McLaughlin. George is a very large man who was born into a very mean and nasty group of gangsters, but there is something about him that is very different that readers will have to figure out on their own.

Moving back and forth between 2013, when Margaret’s savior shows up at the accident, to the year 1985, when George abducted Molly, this absolutely die-hard, spell-binding story has readers locked, as they try to solve the mystery of a man who has far more secrets than you will possibly imagine. This is a 5-star read if there ever was one.

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

STONES IN THE ROAD
By E.B. Moore

In this Amish-themed novel, the second by E.B. Moore, we find ourselves in the year 1882, and twenty-one-year-old Joshua is revisiting his Amish homeland for the first time in the last ten years. He has gone to the graveyard to find his father’s headstone, and instead, he finds his own grave with the inscription: Beloved Boy, 1872. The date carved being the day he ran away from his father and the farm he grew up on. Needless to say, this was not the welcome home he imagined.

Joshua remembers the day that he fought with his alcoholic father causing a candle to fall over and the barn to burn down. When Joshua ran he left his mother, Miriam, and four sisters to assume he was dead. Joshua moved on to California, seeing the state as a Garden of Eden where the sun always shines. But Joshua comes upon some interesting times looking for a “substitute” mother figure, and spends time working on a pig farm, soon thinking that the cities he visited along the way were a definite “Dante’s Inferno.”

The novel goes back and forth between Joshua and his family in the past, and the future he is making for himself. As time whizzes by, his father ends up suffering a great deal from the fire, with severe burns; and Miriam’s life is taking care of him, although she never gives up the hope that her son has not passed away.

Much like the prodigal son returning (or, perhaps, Lazarus rising from the dead), Joshua and his mother have to draw on former strengths and learn to forgive. And when the day comes for Joshua to come face to face with his father, the reader will be craving that reunion.

This is a very good read for the history buff, drama lover, and for all those who wish to delve into Amish life.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
RECIPIES FOR LOVE AND MURDER
By Sally Andrew

Set in South Africa by debut author, Sally Andrew, this story is a fantastic read filled with fun, romance and recipes.

To begin, main character Tannie Maria, is a middle-aged widow who likes to cook. Tannie lives with her five chickens in the Klein Karoo and writes a column for the Klein Karoo Gazette regarding recipes. Her editor tells her that the head office is looking for an advice column and there will be no room for the new feature and her recipes. So, Tannie Maria is going to write the new column, and because she mostly knows only about cooking, she decides to combine the two into one and call it: Tannie Maria’s Love Advice and Recipes. And her column is a huge success.

Among the first letters sent to her is one from Martine, who has a very abusive husband that has recently killed the ducks that she received as a gift from a female friend. Tannie Maria sends advice and a recipe, but neither one prevents Martine’s death. Tannie Maria and Jessie Mostert, the investigative reporter for the Gazette, decide to investigate the crime much to the dismay of the lead detective Lt. Henk Kannemeyer. Henk is a widower who is beginning to stay out of the realm of murder but he truly wishes that she and her mother-in-law don’t get along well, she doesn’t have a choice.

Even though Tannie Maria, Jessie, and Anna Pretorius, a brokenhearted friend of Martine, all think that her husband killed her, the police arrest Anna instead; her fingerprints are found all over the murder weapon. Anna and Dirk, her husband, are each sure that the other is the culprit, but Tannie Maria and Jessie go on the hunt to find the real person who deserves to be behind bars.

This is a delightful read for anyone, and the recipes in the back of the book are reasons to start cooking immediately! Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

CRIMSON SHORE
By Douglas Preston & Lincoln Child

It’s always like Christmas for lovers of suspense when the words “Preston & Child” once again appear on a book cover. It’s a truly great Christmas when the main character of that novel is Aloysius X.L. Pendergast. For those who have read these books voraciously, it’s not a surprise to learn that this latest tale is one that will keep you riveted until the very end.

Special Agent Pendergast gets a query asking him to come to a small town in Exmouth, Massachusetts. It’s a tiny village where the waves can be seen from every angle and fresh seafood is prepared and served in the restaurants at all times. (Although, Pendergast will prove that this is yet another thing he can do better than most.)

A collection of highly expensive wine has been stolen from a man, and Pendergast takes on the “easy” case, not only for the chance to earn a rare case of wine, but also to get away. He takes Constance Greene, his ward, with him as he travels. Almost immediately, he runs into a sheriff who's not a nice man, and definitely does not love Pendergast’s attitude. As far as the crime is concerned, however, nothing for Pendergast could ever be simple. He finds this out yet again when he discovers a body has been bricked up in the wine cellar; it has been entombed for over 150 years... after it was tortured. Add to that a fresh victm that pops up in the salt marshes, a body that is covered with some seriously strange symbols, and the once “easy” crime turns horrifying.

From solving this murder, to a mystery that involves the 1692 Salem witches, to a particular creature that may just force Constance and Pendergast apart, the team of “Preston & Child” continue to make these books the absolute best there is in the suspense realm.


NINE LIVES
By Wendy Corsi Staub

“Nine Lives” is the first in a brand new series by Staub that focuses on a wonderful family and…murder.

Bella Jordan and her son, five-year-old Max, are on their way from the East Coast to make a new home in Chicago. They’ll stay with her mother-in-law until Bella can get her feet back under her and start over. Bella lost her dearly beloved husband, her job, her home… and even though she and her mother-in-law don’t get along well, she doesn’t have a choice.

Mother and son get as far as Western New York State where they look for a campground to set up for the night. It is there they see a very pregnant cat in the middle of the road. Bella takes the cat to a vet who reads a chip in its ear and finds that she comes from a little town called Lily Dale located only a few miles away. Bella, being the kind hearted she is, suspends her travel plans and heads to the small town to find the owner.

But there is far more to this town that she finds… psychics, mediums, and the cat’s owner who runs a guest house. An owner who died the previous week. The lady next door, another medium, asks Bella if she could stay and run the guesthouse for a couple of days. Bella agrees, since they need a bed and the car is making funny noises. Max immediately finds a friend, and Bella soon figures out that the former owner’s death was most definitely murder.

This is a cozy by a good writer telling of a town that is its own character, just as much as the people that reside there. There is also a personal beauty to the story, focusing on a family looking for a home and finding a lovely circle of neighbors who just happen to talk to dead people. This series should definitely continue for a long while to come.

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

PARCHMENT AND OLD LACE
By Laura Childs with Terrie Farley Moran

This book is the latest Scrapbooking Mystery by Laura Childs in which Carmela, the owner of Memory Mine Scrapbooking Store, and her significant other, Edgar Babcock, star.

The couple is strolling to his car one day when a scream fills the air, coming from the direction of the cemetery. With both taking off at a dead run toward the fearsome noise, soon Carmela can no longer see any signs of Babcock. Not only that, but as Carmela runs past tombstones and mausoleums, she soon finds herself trapped between a heavy cemetery gate and the wall of a crypt.

It’s discovered that the scream came from a woman who had been strangled with a piece of old lace. The victim was Isabelle Black, an Assistant District Attorney; a career like this makes authorities believe that her job plus revenge had something to do with her murder. However, there is more about the victim that they didn’t count on. Isabelle was not a favorite of her about to be mother-in-law, Vesper Beaudette, and the lace used to strangle her has its own very special involvement in the case.

Carmela has said that she will butt out but readers know she can’t. Isabelle’s sister, Ellie, is the tarot card reader at the local Juju Voodoo shop who just happens to work for Carmela’s friend, and she asks for her help in unraveling what happened to her sister. When Edgar asks her to identify the lace, this team is off to the races, and you will not know what is happening until the chase stops.

Readers are returning to New Orleans and the Scrapbooking Shop, a great setting for any murder mystery. Written by Laura Childs, bestselling author of many series, Childs had a partner in this one; Terrie Farley Moran. Set in a cool city and written by two masters of mystery, this is most definitely a must read.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
BLOODLINE
By Warren Murphy

This book begins with Private Tommy Falcone of the U.S. Marines. The date is June 6, 1918, and Tommy and his company are moving away from the Germans who are on their tails. Unfortunately, they walk directly into the bad guys and Tommy is wounded—sent back through the lines to a medical unit.

Tommy remembers when he told his father that he was joining the Marines. He had not been drafted and his father couldn’t see why he would want to join the service, but Tommy enlisted and now he’s stuck with it. His brother, Mario, also enlisted, but Father said that since Mario is a priest, God will look out for him, but no one will look after Tommy. Turns out, Dad was right.

It is 1920, New York, and the Falcons are living in the City. Father, Tony, is a policeman, and a very good one at that. Tommy and Mario, who both served in WWI, are honest citizens. Tommy works as a cop and Mario as a priest, but there is a termite in their lives that comes in the form of their cousin, Nilo, who has a very icky past in the "old country." He has run to America after causing more than a few deaths in Italy.

When Nilo arrives in New York, he hooks up with a Mafia boss who comes from the same Italian town. The Don gives Nilo a job as a real estate broker, but after a time, Nilo is on to heavier work as a hitman. The newspapers call him “Kid Trouble,” and even though Tommy and Mario try to ignore what their cousin is up to, it’s difficult.

From a gang war to a family’s heartfelt struggle, this is a fantastic narrative of the Mafia in this era, and after each chapter, there is a timeline showing readers some very interesting bits of history. This author has produced a knockdown, drag-out, full-on great read!

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

BUTTER OFF DEAD
By Leslie Budewitz

Winter weather has taken over Jewel Bay, Montana, and businesses in this idyllic town, known far and wide as the Food Lovers’ Village, are definitely suffering. In an effort to woo tourists to the area, as well as cheer up the townies and hopefully add to the business coffers, local artist Christine Vandeberg comes up with the ingenious idea of a mid-winter film festival of classic foodie flicks.

Erin Murphy, current proprietor of the town’s specialty food market affectionately nicknamed The Merc, eagerly agrees to help Christine organize the event, as do members of the local high school film society, who’ll have a chance to showcase some of their work during the festival. But when Christine is found dead in what appears to be a random act of violence just a few days before the festival is to open, Erin suspects that someone may be trying to sabotage the event. And one of the films ordered for the festival is mysteriously replaced by a pornographic movie.

Losing a good friend is tragic for Erin, still grieving over the hit-and-run death of her father a few years before. Things get even worse when her brother, Nick—Christine’s current beau—jumps to the top of the suspect list, and lies to the police about where he was when the murder was committed. Erin is determined to clear her brother and restore harmony to her town. And perhaps also find some peace for herself.

“Butter Off Dead” is the third in the Food Lovers’ Village mystery series by Leslie Budewitz. It’s delightful, delicious, and non-fattening! A calorie–counter’s trifecta of yummy fun.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Funerals Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

SHANGHAI REDEMPTION
By Qiu Xiaolong

In this latest Inspector Chen novel, Chen Cao has finally been promoted. Things are looking up for Chen within the Shanghai Police Department, not to mention the Communist Party. But it seems that his promotion has no power and very few responsibilities. You see, Chen has moved from his position as Deputy Party Secretary to Chief Inspector in the Shanghai Legal Reform Committee, but is beginning to suspect that he’s being set up to fail. Chen is put in charge of a corruption case against a Party member and no one is giving him any support, making him feel like he will shortly suffer the loss of his good reputation.

In Chen’s investigating tactics, he wanted to make his enemies believe that he was doing nothing, which allowed him to do whatever he had to while they were not watching. Living under a one-party system is no laughing matter. Surveillance is everywhere, and Chen is a man who shines at being ethical, moral and loyal to his friends and family.

Chen’s first assignment in his new job is a doubtful pornography raid at the Heavenly World nightclub where, oddly, there is a book launch party for Chen’s translation of T.S. Eliot. Chen wonders whether he was the target of the raid all along. Old Hunter, a retired policeman, urges Chen to quit the force and look into work as a private investigator, but Chen will not stop until he figures out the reasons behind his new job. He looks into a few cases, including a government official who has casual affairs and whose wife fears for her future. When the official’s wife is killed in her home, his duty to the people is clear, and takes Chen on the most perilous case of his life.

This is an excellent story with a great deal of suspense. Chen is one character that grabs the heart because of his “good” beliefs in a truly “evil” world.

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

THE GOLDEN AGE OF MURDER
By Martin Edwards

This fantastic non-fiction book is the perfect gift that tells all mystery/thriller lovers how to go about looking at the old favorites and remembering how good they were. It tells the mysteries of the writers who actually invented the modern detective story, and every page has must-read information.

This is a history of the Detection Club, a wonderful network of crime writers operating during the ‘Golden Age’ (1930-1949.) The book begins in 1937, as author Ngaio Marsh attends a dinner being held to elect the new President of the Club. Some of the attendees will bring back memories, good memories; Dorothy L. Sayers, Anthony Berkeley and the brilliant Agatha Christie, to be precise.

As well as being a history of the Detection Club during this era for crime writing, the author, Martin Edwards, gives us biographies of those involved in the Club, their relationship with each other, and discussions of true crime stories which sometimes inspired the writer. Criticisms about Golden Age fiction were many, involving the fact that most were advertised as ‘cosy.’ Of course, most people at this time were not willing to read a lot about violence after WWI, wanting to be entertained instead. Also, many people at that time were being slammed by the Great Depression and coping with many problems, all they wanted from their stories was to lose themselves in beautiful locations that brought absolute escape to the reader.

If you enjoy that true detective fiction, and the era that first presented it to the public, you will love this. Martin Edwards talks about plots, specific novels, and true crime of the era, as well as how the authors used their writing to glorify their fellow authors. It was so nice to see how writers helped one another instead of having to constantly hear about the Internet being the sole selling device on the planet. Good writing was once based on good writing… not how many emails one received.

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

SuspenseMagazine.com
SIGNWAVE
By Andrew Vachss

“Signwave” takes the reader through the lives of Adelbert (Dell) Johnson, and his wife, Dolly. To begin, Dell met Dolly while she was a nurse serving with “Doctors without Borders” in Africa, where she helped save the life of a very badly wounded mercenary soldier who had never before known the love and caring that she owned. That mercenary, one among many who wound up at the only medical facility in the heart of the jungle, was the man Dolly would marry.

Dell was that man. He learned about being loyal in the French Foreign Legion while serving for five years. He also learned during his stint with the Legion about weaponry and ways to kill without being seen and with no regrets.

Now Dell and Dolly are retired and live on the Oregon coast where they own some land near a forest. Dell had invested most of the money he’d earned as a soldier so they can live comfortably without working regular day jobs. It seems that Dell is quite wealthy, but no one knows that, not even his wife. What they do know is that they are both loyal to each other, their few friends and to the land and animals. Dolly wants to establish a dog park on some vacant state-owned land; her idea conflicted with other plans in motion to use the land for logging.

Dolly discovers that a company is buying up the adjacent land and sends a tip to a blog that causes her to receive feedback in the form of a threat; and if Dolly is threatened, her husband will definitely take care of the problem.

Written entirely from Dell’s point of view, there are three books in total where readers will see exactly what Dell is made of—especially when calling on his military skills to care for his beloved wife. The entire series is a must read.

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

DEPRAVED HEART
By Patricia Cornwell

It is always a supreme pleasure when Dr. Kay Scarpetta is back! All readers who have been waiting for a new Scarpetta (and not impatiently, mind you), get ready! Because this is the tale that picks up where “Flesh and Blood” left off. Readers were kind of left up in the air and wondering what happened… and this little treasure is above and beyond what they were expecting.

Dr. Scarpetta is on assignment, working on a possible accidental death in Cambridge, MA, when she gets an urgent message from her niece, Lucy. It is a video that was taken about twenty years ago that seems to relate to someone following and/or stalking someone else. The picture worries Scarpetta enough for her to leave her crime scene and make her way to Lucy’s home. She loves her niece like a daughter and is desperate to talk to her about the small clip, and others that are sent soon after.

This book turns into an interesting story full of paths that go in every direction, offering up bad guys and good that change right before the reader’s eyes. It is a spellbinding story as virtually all the cast of characters and tales in the novel become unforgettable, including: the very strange death of the daughter of a movie magnate, a wreck on the bottom of the sea in the Bermuda Triangle, a gruesome gift someone left in the back of a crime scene truck, and videos from the past that are threatening to send Lucy to prison.

Awesome. For a long time fan the plot of this book will fall into place, but for a new reader to appreciate the entirety of this book’s storyline and the outstanding writing, it might be useful to go back and read some of the older Scarpetta books to learn the backstories of the characters. Won’t be a problem to do so. They were all equally incredible.

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

FATAL RESERVATIONS
By Lucy Burdette

Things are heating up for Haley Snow, the protagonist of the Key West Food Critic mystery series by Lucy Burdette (a.k.a. Roberta Isleib). And I don’t just mean the weather. There’s a new boss at Key Zest—the local lifestyle magazine where Haley is the staff writer and restaurant critic—Palamina Wells. Palamina turns out to be a lot more hands on than any of the staff bargained for, and Haley quickly realizes that her future at the magazine is on shaky ground. As well as her future with Wally, her on-again, off-again boyfriend and Key Zest editor, who seems to be more interested in having a hands-on relationship with Palamina than Haley would like.

Haley always asks her good friend Lorenzo, a tarot card reader and one of the fixtures of Mallory Square’s Sunset Celebration, for help in situations like this. But Lorenzo has serious problems of his own. The body of Bart Frontgate, a controversial performer at the Sunset Celebration whose act involves juggling oversized forks studded with flaming chunks of meat, has just been fished from Key West harbor. The police quickly determine this was not an accidental drowning, it was murder, and Lorenzo becomes their chief suspect. Then the body of a young woman who also had ties to Lorenzo is discovered at—all of places—the Key West Cemetery.

Haley is determined to prove Lorenzo’s innocence, but things don’t look good for him when he inexplicably drops out of sight. With the assistance of her octogenarian housemate, Miss Gloria, Haley probes the layers of Key West’s intertwined families, and of her dear friend, Lorenzo. And traps a surprising killer.

“Fatal Reservations” is a fun, fast-paced read penned by a real pro. I loved it!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Funerals Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

BRYANT & MAY AND THE BURNING MAN
By Christopher Fowler

There have been many novels in this series about detectives Arthur Bryant and John May who work in the Peculiar Crimes Unit, and this latest by Fowler is just as fascinating and intriguing as all the rest. This book is definitely a standalone novel that keeps the reader absorbed in the story, and will make everyone want to go back and read them all.

The two detectives are a bit elderly and just a little odd, and they have found themselves with a puzzle containing bodies that are piling up with absolutely no link between any of the murders. London is under a type of blockade, as a banking scandal has been all anyone can talk about. There have been violent protests in the city, and a young man burns to death after being caught in the crossfire between rioters and police.

It seems that a killer is taking advantage of the problems in the city and is using the bedding to get payback, but his intended victims are chosen so randomly that the Peculiar Crimes Unit is called in to find a way to stop him.

Using their network of peculiar contacts, the two detectives go on the hunt for a killer who likes starting fires to execute his victims. But soon their investigation turns to the history of mob rule in London, including, corruption, rebellion and the legend of Guy Fawkes, one of the men in 1605 who’d planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament.

This is a very solid story and a great addition to Fowler’s long-running series. The mystery is fascinating and readers will definitely want to know what happens next. And for newcomers to the series, this will be an excellent place to start.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
THE GOLEM OF PARIS
By Jonathan Kellerman and Jesse Kellerman

It’s been a very difficult year for Detective Jacob Ley, who is still thinking about his last case for the LAPD. This case, seen in “The Golem of Hollywood,” had him questioning his own sanity. After it concluded, he found himself drinking too much, cut off all relations with his father, and now the police Special Projects department is following him around. He also has a memory of a woman named Mai that he can’t seem to get rid of.

Jacob was introduced to supernatural monsters in his last case and the entire thing landed him the job of archiving cold cases in a warehouse. Now Jacob must head out on yet another brutal ride when a cold case unveils connections to his own mother’s past.

The murder of a mother and son is part of the equation. Jacob had believed that his mother was dead, only to find out now that she’s living in a health care facility in a catatonic trance. As he investigates the cold case, he heads off to Paris where a recent murder and a Russian billionaire become central parts of the case. Add in a trip that his mother made to Czechoslovakia when she was very young, and the puzzle becomes even more amazing.

Between the members of the Special Projects team following him, and ‘Mai,’ who is apparently a mythological golem, Jacob is tested. In the past Jacob has seen a dark legend come to life, but this apparent golem is looking after Jacob while everyone else seems to be striving for his death.

The father/son Kellerman team are making sure that readers will come back for another round in the Golem series, because this is one tale that is filled with imagination, mystery, and knowledge that all readers will love.

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

A DOG GONE MURDER
By Elaine Viets

Things seem to be getting better for mystery shopper Josie Marcus. Married at last to her favorite guy, veterinarian Dr. Ted Scottsmeyer, and settled into a brand new home, Josie is filled with optimism about life. She’s even confident that her teenage daughter, Amelia, will outgrow her sullen attitude soon, and is prepared to make the best of it—no matter how long the attitude adjustment takes. Even Jane, Josie’s mom, seems to have her life on an even keel, having found love with her new tenant, the handsome Frank Hyzy.

Josie’s newest mystery shopper assignment seems, at first glance, like a fun one—investigate three local doggie day care facilities to see how well the dogs are being treated. Her first stop is Uncle Bob’s Doggy Day Camp, well known to local television audiences for its commercials featuring Uncle Bob and his “talking dog,” Ralph. Josie’s even more excited about her assignment when she learns that Frank Hyzy works there, too.

But Josie’s investigation reveals that good old Uncle Bob hates dogs. In fact, the day Josie pays her first undercover visit, she finds out that Uncle Bob has viciously kicked a small dog so hard he’s broken its leg. Disgusted by the terrible abuse, Frank confronts Uncle Bob in his office and announces that he is quitting and will report the incident to the authorities. The loud argument is heard by all the other staff members, so when Uncle Bob is found dead in his office (by Josie), Frank is the police’s number one suspect. Josie’s mother—who never asks her for any favors—begs Josie to help clear Frank. With surprising results.

“A Dog Gone Murder” is tightly plotted with great atmosphere and characters readers will want to know better. It’s a five dog biscuit winner! Woof!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Funerals Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

THE THEORY OF DEATH
By Faye Kellerman

Well-known main characters, Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus, are now living in Greenbury, New York. Decker is now a Greenbury PD Detective after retiring from the LAPD. And as you might imagine, this lovely town located in the upper regions of New York is a lot quieter than the City of Angels. Yet…it never fails. These two can find intense situations and puzzling crimes wherever they go.

Local college senior, Eli Wolf, is found shot to death in a snowy field with his clothes piled neatly beside his corpse. Although many claim it to be a suicide, Decker delves deeper. When he and Rina visit the boy’s home, they find that Eli was in an accident six years earlier that apparently “scrambled” his brain. The boy all of a sudden had become an expert in the world of theoretical math.

Eli’s parents are Mennonite’s and don’t do a lot of talking about their family. Decker has to question them, along with their other son Jacob, who was also in the accident, as well as the people Eli knew at the college who are a bit challenged in dealing with anyone but their peers. When Eli’s death is finally categorized as a suicide, a discovery of hidden papers in Eli’s dorm room changes things completely. Then, yet another corpse shows up and the belief that a murderer is at work takes precedence in the investigator’s eyes.

The crimes, puzzles, mysteries, and thrills are all exciting when it comes to Kellerman’s writing, but it is the perfect relationship between Decker and Lazarus that still holds the reader and grows better and better with each novel.

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

MARGARET TRUMAN’S INTERNSHIP IN MURDER
By Margaret Truman and Donald Bain

This excellent book is the twenty-eighth in the Capital Crimes series by Margaret Truman, now brilliantly written by Donald Bain. This time out, a tale of murder is told which brings many prominent folks forward, and drops a U.S. Representative of Congress into a mess of trouble.

Laura Bennett is on her way to Washington to work as an intern for Congressman Hal Gannon. Laura has gotten away from her family back in Tampa, and she’s having a swell time rocking the Washington night life…choosing to begin an affair with Congressman Gannon. She’s positive that this affair will end up to one day be the romance of the century, and she will become the “First Lady” of the United States.

The fairytale ends when she discovers that Gannon is not what he seemed to be, and Laura makes a solemn promise to herself that she will bring him down along with all his dreams of becoming President. Unfortunately, Laura goes missing and her family hires PI Robert Brixton to find her, instead of the Washington Police who might bring the scandal to light. As Brixton looks into the background of Gannon he finds that, along with his hype on family values, he is also a huge womanizer. When Laura’s dead body turns up in the Congressional Cemetery, many questions are raised about her trysts with Gannon, and he quickly becomes suspect number one.

This is a fantastic addition to these amazing novels. There are many longtime fans of Truman who still miss the lady terribly, but they continue to enjoy the great writing of Donald Bain. He has kept these stories going in a way that Truman would, and her fans do, absolutely love.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
ANATOMY OF EVIL
By Will Thomas
You’ve perhaps heard the old song, Three Little Words, that has been used in many stories. The three little words that begin this review will be about the main character who was also the most horrible killer in English history: Jack the Ripper. As most know, Jack’s horrible deeds terrorized London in the late 1800’s. The West End of the city was lit up with violence against immigrant Jewish people, and against prostitution, with many of the latter killed viciously by a stranger marked “The Ripper.”

In the year 1888, two private detectives—Cyrus Barker, and his assistant, Thomas Llewelyn—have a visitor. Robert Anderson is an old friend who’s been appointed Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard and head of the CID, but Mr. Anderson’s doctor has insisted that he take some time off. He asks Barker and Llewelyn to be temporary members of Scotland Yard’s investigation into a case that will be known as the “Jack the Ripper Murders.” They agree to become Anderson’s assistant and close their agency, moving to Whitechapel, which is the lowliest of neighborhoods where these horrible mutilations occur.

Rumors are being flitted around that a member of the Royal Family could actually be involved in the murders. The two new policemen are learning the location of every street in the area while hunting for clues. Their investigation takes them through Victorian society, from the highest to the lowest, trying to find the killer before he strikes again. However, the Ripper has been able to escape them time and time again, proving to everyone that his fame might just last forever.

This book is the seventh and latest in the Barker and Llewelyn series set in Victorian London. Readers will love the new twist on Jack when the Barker/Llewelyn detectives hunt him down. And with the highly interesting ending, this is one author who has made the long-told tale of this vicious killer a thrill once again.
Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

DEATH TAKES PRIORITY
By Jean Flowers
Cassie Miller is the new postmistress of a one-person post office in North Ashcot, a small Berkshire town in western Massachusetts. Cassie grew up there, and then fled for Boston and a career with the postal service. She is newly returned to her hometown, and has found it not easy to become reacquainted with her roots. The murder of an old high school flame certainly doesn’t help.

Scott James, an antique dealer, is a newcomer to Ashcot. To Police Chief Sunni Smargon, he is a person of interest in the murder. He is also of interest to Cassie. Why not? He is intelligent, thoughtful, and attractive to boot. Still, she must admit that she has reservations about him. It would definitely dampen their relationship should he turn out to be the murderer.

And what of Derek Hathaway, another former high school classmate? Derek has gone from schoolyard zero to financial hero since graduation. Yet, for someone whose interests are far from Ashcot, he is spending copious amounts of time back on his home turf.

Cassie has struck up a friendship with Sunni Smargon in the few months since she returned. She and the police chief share mutual experiences in personal life and work life. But as she digs for information to clear Scott, Cassie’s and Sunnie’s paths of investigation are bound to collide. Can their budding friendship survive the turmoil the murderer has stirred up in the town?

Jean Flowers’ writing experience shows in this first of a new mystery series. She has peopled her story with a wide and varied cast of supporting characters. Clues are craftily cached along the way, and the pacing is pitch-perfect. Ms. Flowers understands well the art of writing a cozy mystery.
Reviewed by Andrew MacRae, editor of “And All Our Yesterdays”

GHOST GIRL
By Lesley Thomson
This novel brings back Stella Darnell, who is the daughter of the late Detective Chief Superintendent Terry Darnell. Stella is under pressure while trying to live with the death of her father. The late chief has been gone for a year and she has not yet been able to clear out the house or put it on the market. What she has been doing is concentrating on her business, Clean Slate. Inside her father’s home, Stella discovers a folder of snapshots that lead her directly into a case that must be solved. She wonders why Terry took photos of these particular streets in West London, so she and her employee, Jack, go on a mission to find out some facts.

One of the pictures is dated 1966, referencing a day when a small, ten-year-old girl saw something that would haunt her for the rest of her life. As this thriller gets even darker, Stella becomes obsessed with finding the truth that lies behind the photograph. As chapter upon chapter goes by, readers will find everything from a brother and sister in 1966, the link between that particular tale and Stella’s troubles, and Jack, who is now following someone that he thinks is a killer. There are so many multi-sized puzzles, readers will begin to suspect everyone is on the side of evil.

This is for dedicated readers who will be agreeable to being patient, taking their time to get to know every nuance of every character. The book is a very good mystery, with a great setting in West London. Even without the infamous Ripper, these surroundings exude menace; a feeling that will grip you until the very impressive end.
Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion

THE KILL
By Jane Casey
At the start of this riveting story, Detective Maeve Kerrigan, and her significant other, Rob, are attending a colleague’s wedding and looking for some down time where they can spend a lovely weekend in the countryside. The two of them need a break from work, but as Maeve knows, her work is never far behind. She gets word of the killing of a police officer, Sgt. Terence Hammond; Hammond has been found shot dead in his car in Richmond Park, just outside of London. Maeve collects her partner, Detective Inspector Josh Derwent, and they head to the scene. So much for rest and relaxation in a lovely countryside.

The officers discover evidence that Sgt. Hammond was not alone when he died, and there is a Mrs. Hammond at home. When they call on her, they find a woman who isn’t as upset as they assumed she would be; in fact, she is mighty angry. There are two children; a boy, who has health problems, and a girl who is very bitter and not willing to even talk with the police.

The officers look into the victim's background to discover who might have been holding a grudge. And when more deaths of more officers come to light, the one heartbreaking case turns into a nightmare.

Superintendent Charles Godley, Maeve and Derwent’s boss, starts to go a little downhill as his life begins to fall apart. Maeve knows something from the past about Godley and wishes she didn’t. But as she struggles with personal emotions, her thinking cap remains in place as a police task force is ambushed and another cop is killed.

This is a very quick series and the duo of Maeve and Derwent is a joy to read. The two of them were made for each other, and readers will be thrilled with this book.
Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion
from William Meikle
twelve new tales of
William Hope Hodgson’s
occult detective
CARNACKI

Carnacki operates in shadowy occult realms, on the fringes, in places out of sight and out of mind of the everyday. But sometimes darkness touches the lives of these ordinary people, and they find they need help—the kind of help that only Carnacki can provide.

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The next book in the Ghost House series!
“William Meikle does a stand-up job here of capturing the tone of the original stories.”
—DAVID BRZESKI, British Fantasy Society

“… shining examples of what is missing in horror fiction today: atmospheric in style, old-school in character, with an intriguing story to be told.”
—DAVID WYNN, Mythos Books

from DarkRenaissance.com
DEAD RINGER
By Sarah Fox

Readers are in for a treat with Sarah Fox's new cozy in her series called, A Music Lover's Mystery.

This new tale begins with Midori Bishop, a violinist with the Point Grey Philharmonic Orchestra. She is just now starting a romantic relationship with Maestro Hans Clausen, and the renovations of the Abrams Center where the orchestra plays are moving right along. All is right with the violinist's world. Until...

During a morning break, Midori overhears an argument between Hans and Jeremy Ralston, a cellist with the orchestra. The same day, she finds the strangled body of Jeremy and realizes that Hans is suspect number one. Midori is firm in the fact that she does not believe Hans could be a murderer, and she starts to investigate, believing that the police aren’t getting anything done.

As Midori attempts to prove the maestro's innocence, much to the dismay of her friend J.T., she finds that many other members of the orchestra have their own problems with things that they would rather keep to themselves. Jeremy must have made many enemies, as he was only a temporary member of the orchestra (referred to as a “ringer”), and as Midori’s investigation heats up, the closer the grand finale gets between she and the killer.

Much like all really good mysteries, there are many likely suspects to choose from. Midori is very disappointed to discover, when the orchestra plays are moving right along. All is right with the violinist’s world. Until...

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SLASHER GIRLS & MONSTER BOYS  
Stories Selected By April Genevieve Tucholke  
This thrilling, extremely cool anthology will make the horror fans in this world sit up and take notice. The stories in this collection are written by a group of young adult authors who offer up some of the scariest stuff every printed. And whatever your opinions of the Stephen King-ville world are, horror fans devour tales such as these and will have this book added very soon to their own dark, disturbing libraries.

The young woman who selected these stories, April Genevieve Tucholke, tells the readers that fear for young people will be the next big thing in literature. There are no “Goosebumps” in this anthology, but unreal tales of ghouls, monsters and creatures that are ready to go to town on anyone or anything that stands in their way.

Each of the tales is inspired by something found in movies, songs, TV, or another artistic path. These are listed at the back of each story so readers can see what inspired the author. Like most anthologies, there are good and bad and go back and forth between moderate to all-out frightening prose. The scariest are the ones that offer stories of enduring terror; stories that take a traditional subject and give it a really horrible life. It’s very likely that some of these grisly visions will linger in your mind, as the best horror always does. And from the inscription in the beginning of the book that reads: “For everyone who read Stephen King when they were way too young,” it seems obvious after reading these, no one is TOO young to read the “King” in 2015.

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

THE TRAIL  
By Ray Anderson  
From the moment a blue Kelty was packed, I was right back there, on the trail, feeling the weight from that over-stuffed pack pulling down on my shoulders. Like many long-distance, or as they say, thru-hikers, Karl Bergman was running from or hiding his depression—in his case, PTSD from Desert Storm—and felt the lonely pull to lace up boots and walk a couple of thousand miles as a way to stay ahead of the storm. What he couldn’t know was that right behind him was the worst case of a storm the Appalachian Trail had ever seen, in the form of Paul Leroux, a serial killer on the run from the authorities.

I can’t help but make comparisons with my own Appalachian Trail novel, “Blood on His Hands,” as Anderson’s new trail thriller has so many similarities. The killer on the loose followed unexpectedly by someone who has made it a mission to capture them at all costs. Anderson’s plot thankfully strays enough from these themes to make a darn good read. Leroux develops a penchant for dispatching several young ladies while hiking on the AT, leaving Bergman a host full of clues to help bring about the final scene’s death struggle.

Thankfully, crimes along our nation’s trails have been kept to a minimum, and it takes a fellow hiker with a lot of imagination to bring terror back to the trail, as this psychological thriller most definitely has with a vengeance.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of “Blood on His Hands” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine  

OLIVE AND LET DIE  
By Susannah Hardy  
The newest book in the A Greek to Me Mystery series, has readers meeting up with Georige Nikolopatos once again. Georige is not only running the restaurant owned by her mother-in-law, but her husband, Spiro, has finally admitted that he is gay, which means it’s only a matter of time before their marriage officially ends. Georige gets along very well with both mother and husband, but is afraid that she will be out of a job when she is no longer “family.”

Georige loves managing The Bonaparte House, which is a historical landmark in upstate New York. She is familiar with local legends and is a terrific chef of Greek recipes. She has found a soulmate in Captain Jack Conway, and as her husband is soon to be her ex, Georige’s future is beginning to look bright. Of course, life isn’t that easy…

Her own mother, who she has been on bad terms with, turns up unexpectedly to supposedly make amends, which Georige finds very hard to believe. In addition, a cousin that Georige has never met turns up dead outside of Spiro’s new restaurant. And Spiro’s partner, Inky, ends up on the suspect list. Georige has enough on her plate but agrees to find out what’s going on before the family gets any more twisted than it already is.

Very well-written, with murder suspects coming out of the walls, this tale will keep readers guessing. Not to mention, the Greek recipes in the back are a yummy addition.

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

HOST  
By Robin Cook  
“HOST” will be spellbinding to some and scare others to their very core. Exactly what fans want when a new Cook book arrives.

In this medical drama we meet Lynn Peirce and Michael Pender, fourth year medical students at the Mason-Dixon University Medical Center, which is part of the Middleton Healthcare Corporation. Graduation is almost upon them, with Michael heading for Boston and Lynn looking forward to a marriage proposal from Carl, her significant other. Carl is hospitalized for an operation on his knee which is not a big deal. Unfortunately...it’s a far bigger deal than anyone could possibly have imagined.

After the operation Carl winds up in a coma. Thankfully the Shapiro Institute is nearby that can take care of Carl’s comatose condition. This facility is associated with a company called Sidereal Pharmaceuticals, which is a very highly technical drug manufacturer owned by a Russian billionaire. Lynn and Michael, risking their own careers in the medical world, think that the Shapiro Institute is not playing with a full deck, and intend to uncover what’s going on.

As the hardy med students stumble over some extremely disturbing facts, they learn that any hospital that is associated with Middleton Healthcare, including the Medical Center where Carl was operated on, have very high rates of anesthesia complications. They also have a lengthy list of patients who end up with terminal illnesses during simple operations.

Robin Cook’s methods when it comes to outstanding medical plotting are once again revealed. Greed and medicine is what this is all about. There are lots of grand words that the reader may not understand, and a few Russian ex-special forces assassins to ramp up the story. Toss those in with chase scenes and medical nightmares, and “HOST” is Robin Cook at his very best...as usual.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion
> THE DARLING DAHLIAS AND THE ELEVEN O’CLOCK LADY
> By Susan Wittig Albert

Set in the summer of 1934, in the town of Darling, Alabama, this book with the odd title will have readers cheering.

A somewhat shocking killing shakes up the town as well as the ladies of the Darling Dahlias’ Garden Club. The Dahlias, after hearing about the murder, will let no one get in their way to crack the case. The poor victim, Rona Jean Hancock, was a telephone switchboard operator who earned the nickname “The Eleven O’Clock Lady” because her shift ended at exactly eleven… and her wild nightlife began. This night, as Rona left work, it was the last time she was seen until her body was found strangled by her own stocking.

In the small town of Darling the gossip starts immediately. Rona had always had a reputation and was the subject of a lot of rumors, which makes the list of possible suspects even longer. When the Darling Dahlias start to learn about Rona Jean’s past, they uncover a link to the local CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp Camp). Ophelia Snow, Garden Club Veep, is working at the camp and snooping around to find out the truth about Rona. She not only wants to solve the case, but also find out more information about the strangers at the camp before someone else ends up dead.

Another gem in this author’s incredible series, *The Darling Dahlias*, Susan Wittig Albert, and her husband, Bill Albert, are both authors of many books, and they never seem to run out of great plots. If readers have not read the other *Darling Dahlia* mysteries, after this one you will want to go back and enjoy them all!

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

> ONE MAN’S FLAG
> By David Downing

In the spring of 1915, as WWI was just getting to the boiling point, Jack McColl, a spy for Britain’s Secret Service, is stationed in India doing his duty for the Empire against Bengali terrorists and their German allies. Back in England, Caitlin Hanley, a suffragette reporter, is trying to rebuild her life after her brother’s execution. Her brother was an IRA follower whose terrorist plan was stopped by Caitlin’s former lover, Jack McColl.

As the narrative in this story splits between the two, Jack is in India completely upset about the end of his affair with Caitlin and waiting for news of his own brother. McColl is told to help locate and intercept a German arms shipment in India. While he is gathering intelligence about the weapons, Catlin goes to Berlin to meet her brother’s associates, and the constant twists and turns provide not only action and suspense, but the stories of Jack and Caitlin draw readers in and never let them go.

This thriller is the second in this author’s *Jack McColl* series, so reading the first brilliantly told tale, “Jack of Spies,” is a recommendation. Downing provides pictures of espionage during WWI that are perfect. Readers will try to keep up with Jack and Caitlin, as the book builds in curiosity and power. Downing sends us from place to place and the characters grow closer as the book strives to bring them back together. I say… bring on the next *Jack McColl* adventure ASAP!

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

> THE 3RD WOMAN
> By Jonathan Freedland

In the very beginning, a woman is murdered. The victim’s sister is a journalist, Madison Webb, and the rest of the tale is told about ‘Maddy’ as she searches for the truth regarding the death of her sister, Abigail.

Looking into Abigail’s killing, she finds that Abigail is not the first where this killer is concerned; instead, she is the third life he has taken. Maddy will not accept the official police line that they wish to uphold—that Abigail’s death was an “isolated crime.” When Maddy discovers new evidence that kills their theory, however, she is told point-blank to give up her investigation or face the consequences.

An entire conspiracy theory begins to emerge, with the country of China actually becoming one of the main protagonists in the story, and an extremely dangerous foe when Maddy is snooping around and getting closer and closer to the truth. Once the connection is uncovered, Maddy finds herself in a devastating situation, considering there is a very real serial killer afoot. The murders of these three women finally become an issue in the California Governor’s election and bring Maddy into a conflict with the politics of one candidate; the current mayor of Los Angeles.

Jonathan Freedland is also a journalist and has created yet another perfectly in-depth crime and conspiracy thriller for the masses with this one. It’s a tale that will keep readers guessing until the very end. Maddy is finding things out fast but she is, after all, an investigative reporter, so the speed, the twists and turns—everything is on these pages to keep the reader both excited and surprised at all times.

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

> THE MISER’S DREAM
> By John Gaspard

The fun keeps right on coming with the third installment in the *Eli Marks Mystery* series. Eli, a magician, has gotten some new competition in his profession as of late. Magician, Quinton Moon, is a magic maker with abilities that can charm and fascinate audiences and has made quite an impression on Eli’s girlfriend. The green eyed monster is trying to take Eli over, but before he can say Abracadabra, he becomes involved in a murder case. But this one is so hard to figure out that Eli will have to conjure up as many tricks as possible to find the killer.

It seems that the projectionist at the movie house next door has been found murdered, but he is also locked in his projection booth with the gun that killed him and cash in the amount of $75,000 inside. The rumors have it that the projectionist was a middle man in a scheme where people who are interested can buy and sell movie memorabilia on the black market. In addition, empty film canisters are found that used to contain a very pricey copy of a lost silent movie: *London After Midnight*. Competing, of course, with Eli to solve this locked-room killing is the rival magician who has plans for both his competitor and Eli’s girlfriend.

“The Miser’s Dream” is an interesting mixture of noir and cozy, with a lot of characters and magic to hold the attention. Very fun for mystery and magic buffs who are looking for something other than the standard crime fiction, this narrative was much like a magic trick: one minute you know just how something happened, and the next, you’re off on another trail. This is a very good mystery with an easy ending… if you just know how to find it.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
The start of a brand new series by this national bestselling author, is one that all puzzle lovers will delve right into.

American writer, Eden Elliott, is taking off to visit the village of Glenkillen in Scotland to research a new book. Eden has had a very hard year, as she lost her mother and is now going through a painful divorce. She is very much in need of a new start and has decided to write a book that will involve some time away to get her mind back on track while having a nice, quiet vacation. What seems to be a good thing, meeting a woman by the name of Vicki McBride, soon brings forth a dramatic mystery, and her peaceful vacation is over before it has even begun.

They reach the town and find that the local sheep shearer has been found killed with his own shears. The townspeople suspect Vicki, who is an outsider that has just inherited a very rich sheep farm from her recently deceased father. As Eden becomes involved in what is a family situation, along with a murder, she isn’t always sure of her facts. Eden does not believe that Vicki is a killer and tries to prove that she's being framed. However, the closer she gets to the truth, the closer Eden comes to a murderer's shears.

“Off Kilter” is a great beginning to the Scottish Highlands Mystery series. Eden, as a lead character, is a little older than the usual heroine, which means more background, more pains and more accomplishments. She and the other characters are extremely strong. “Someone’s been kilt… ” and it’s a charmer. I look forward to a second trip to Glenkillen in the very near future.

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

TRUFFLED TO DEATH
By Kathy Aarons

With the second in the Chocolate Covered Mystery series, readers will not only find a savory puzzle, but the recipes in the back will make the mouth water.

Best friends and roommates—Michelle, a chocolatier, and Erica, a bookstore manager—come together to own and operate a business called Chocolates and Chapters. They are hosting a reception that is part of a celebration; a bequest made by a local family of Mayan artifacts to a local museum. The morning after the event, the ladies discover that the collection was stolen on its way to its new home. The museum curator, Dr. Moody, immediately accuses Erica, and when Dr. Moody is found murdered, the women go on the hunt to find out who really is behind the theft.

They discover that the collection is worth much more than the figures originally told to them, and one piece in particular has come to the attention of an international art trafficker. They insist that they are not looking into the theft and murder, but find themselves in endless trouble with the local law. There are lots of suspects that include the people who gave the collection, and some very creepy, tall, dark strangers who have recently blown into town.

The subject of the Mayan civilization was very interesting in this tale, and all communities need a store like Chocolates and Chapters. Who wouldn’t love chocolate and a good book in the same building? Aarons did a remarkable job by offering a fresh plot, cool characters, and suspects that are downright odd.

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

WITH VICS YOU GET EGGROLL
By Diane Vallere

This is the third book in the A Mad for Mod Mystery series, and continues the fun found in the first two titles. Talk about a terrific trio of cozy mysteries, Diane Vallere certainly has the humor.

To begin, the supreme Doris Day fan and modern designer, Madison Night, has scarcely had time to recover from her previous adventure, when suddenly women are being abducted in the Dallas area. In addition, someone is trying to involve her friend and possible love interest, Detective Tex Allen, in the crimes. Tex decides to take a leave from the police department so he won’t get in the way of the investigation but, of course, he is determined to find the kidnapper himself and Madison is determined to help.

She’s in the middle of a job restoring a mid-century home when her client becomes a new victim of the kidnapper. As Madison is busy working and also trying to help Tex, the suspects seem to turn up on a daily basis. Soon, an unrelated event leads back to the kidnappings, and a copycat crime occurs that is covering a ruthless plot to destroy someone that Madison is very fond of.

The characters in this series are really great and you laugh and cry along with them when necessary. Madison and Tex are a terrific pair, and the story (as well as the title) will definitely keep readers entertained. It’s not easy trying to figure out who the abductor is, and after you’re done reading you will very much want to find a Doris Day movie to enjoy as much as this book.

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

THE SCENT OF SECRETS
By Jane Thynne

It is the year 1938, and war in Europe is advancing little by little. Clara Vine is a movie star in Germany; she has just finished her work day and is taking a day off to enjoy herself away from the strain of all that comes with a looming Nazi Germany.

Clara is the daughter of a pro-Nazi aristocrat and a German mother who has decided to build up her acting career in Germany rather than England. To make things more difficult, everything Clara says or does is false, seeing as she is a spy for the British and carries false papers that have been changed so the Nazi’s will not find out that she is the grandchild of a Jew.

Clara has been asked to become “friends” with Hitler’s girlfriend; Eva Braun is a movie fan and Clara will be able to get close in order to get hold of a diary that Braun is said to have that may list some of Hitler’s plans. She meets Eva, who’s delighted because she has no friends to speak of. She is so happy that she makes a special perfume for Clara. But as the war comes closer, Clara continues her search for a book that seems non-existent. The only reason she remains on the trail is the feeling that she’s being followed.

This “Nazi” tale is extremely interesting because it has never been told like this before. The main characters are mostly women, and the plot covers subjects that are not explored often. Clara is written so well that she comes across as being a very real person. And Eva will be pitted, as readers will feel like she was snared by Hitler.

The author gives a peek at her next book, “The Pursuit of Pearls,” that will start with the insanity that was Hitler’s Germany after the war broke out. This new fan of Thynne’s cannot wait to read it!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
THE ONES WE TRUST

By Kimberly Belle

“The Ones We Trust” is a terrific, well-written story of a journalist, Abigail Wolff, who resigned from her job when a story she wrote ended up in an utter disaster. Abigail now works for a health website and is content with her choice of career. Soon she receives, in secret, a package of documents in the mail that suggest a military cover-up has occurred in the death of a soldier, and she tries to decide whether or not to betray the people she loves the most in order to help a family who deserves the truth about how their loved one died in Afghanistan.

A strong and difficult drama unfolds about a grieving family. The power emerges on each page as the story shows how tragedy is dealt with and how wanting to discover the truth is sometimes harder than the loss itself. Two stories are told side-by-side with character backstories surrounding the death of a soldier. Abigail keeps her past mistake in mind and hopes that this is a chance to do something to help a family and perhaps redeem herself.

There is much more, but if revealed, it would spoil the story for the reader. Suffice to say, Abigail came from a military family and is adamant about finding the family of the soldier and talking to them about the cover-up. She’s working hard for both sides and each person in the story will be required to look into their own hearts, explore their own feelings, and decide just how far they would go to uncover the story. As the mystery grows, readers will find out what happened and why one man will do anything he can to discover the truth behind a mysterious death.

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

THE QUESTION OF THE UNFAMILIAR HUSBAND

By E.J. Copperman and Jeff Cohen

The main character in this book is Samuel Hoenig, who runs a very unusual business called, Questions Answered. Mr. Hoenig is very good at effectively answering any questions that come his way. Samuel also has Asperger’s Syndrome. An associate, Ms. Washburn, helps him interpret people’s problems. And the newest one is a real doozy.

Samuel is portrayed as the only proprietor of the business and puts his personality, as well as his lot in life, to good use. One question, however, from his newest client, Sheila McInerney, brings him a cause/case that is both odd and unwelcome. Her question: “Who is the man in my bed who calls himself my husband?” makes him cringe. Sheila does have a reason to wonder after being a guest at a costume party and meeting a man dressed as Zorro. After drinking some wine and falling asleep, she woke up next to Oliver Lewis who said that they had eloped overnight, and even was able to produce a marriage license to back his story up. Samuel thinks the whole thing is a little offensive but he can’t afford to turn away a client. So he asks Ms. Washburn to help him find a way through a tier of society he doesn’t quite understand. But all this gets taken care of when Oliver Lewis’s dead body is found in the Questions Answered office and Sheila McInerney mysteriously disappears.

A fun read and Samuel will certainly grow on readers. He is appealing, the one-liners are hysterical, and the mystery is genuine.

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

BELIEVE NO ONE

By A.D. Garrett

DCI Simms has been sent off on a six-month exchange with the St. Louis Police Department in the States to help look into cold cases in this, the second book in a series featuring Detective Chief Inspector Kate Simms and Professor Nick Fennimore. Her ‘cold case’ team has uncovered evidence of a serial killer who dumps bodies along a six-hundred-mile extension of Interstate 44.

Professor Fennimore is touring the Midwest to promote his latest book, and is asked to consult on a case in Oklahoma that concerns a woman and her missing child that connects with (surprise, surprise) Kate’s investigation.

As the unplanned task force that involves Simms, Fennimore, the County Sheriff’s office, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and an FBI Behavioral Analyst come closer to identifying the killer, they find a link to a twenty-year-old crime. Fennimore is bewildered and upset by this case of a missing child, since his own child has been missing for many years, and is not about to let this killer escape.

This book is pure crime thriller, with a narrative that will perfectly describe the work of the investigators, the killer, and even the young boy who is in the killer’s sights and is on the run. The killer is exceptionally eerie and some of the scenes are a bit disturbing, but are not dragged out.

This complex plot with terrific characters is a fantastic collaboration between two very talented people: Margaret Murphy, thriller writer; and forensic scientist, Professor Dave Barclay. It will be interesting to see what comes next from A.D. Garrett.

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

THE SHADOW OF SETH

By Tom Llewellyn

Seth Anomundy is a sixteen-year-old from Tacoma, WA, who grew up in a tough neighborhood. He’s a good kid, goes to high school, has a part time job and is, for the most part, content. Until . . . he receives the news that his mom has been killed.

Seth’s mom, Eve, is found dead in her car and the police think it’s pretty cut and dried as to who is responsible. Eve had had a fight with her best friend, Miss Irene, on the day that she died, and Miss Irene has since disappeared. Seth does not believe that Miss Irene is guilty, however, so he decides to do his own investigating. He is a tough kid and highly street smart, but when he starts asking questions about his mother’s last day alive, trouble finds him.

Seth has a flaw that will probably hurt him in the long run. He’s not afraid of anyone or anything. And as the police don’t seem to be interested in actually solving the death of his mother, Seth will take that no-fear attitude and face down a gang of high school jock baseball-bat beaters; deal with his girlfriend’s father who thinks that Seth is just not good enough for his little baby; and, last but not least, will meet King George, a teenage hood that Seth has managed to keep away from up until now because George wants Seth dead.

This book certainly passes muster as a street-smart, suspenseful YA, with Seth being a good kid who ends up getting himself into a mess of mammoth proportions. A teenager who is doing his best to live in a violent world without becoming one of the violent, Seth finds his path in life collapsing and must do his best to stay alive, while finding out why his mother was murdered.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
ASHLEY BELL  
By Dean Koontz

In every industry there exist ‘artists’ that are not only unforgettable, but know their craft better than the rest. Dean Koontz, yet again, proves that he is among these artisans. A story about a girl; a girl who is brave, a bit angry, resilient, determined, and has the ability to put up a façade in order to make sure all who see her witness her toughness. Her name is Bibi Blair. She has had heartbreaks and successes, but what she has now, no one quite knows. Bibi is ill. She is taken to an ER to be studied and told that she may have brain cancer. At best, all the doctors can really tell Bibi is that she has one year to live. But her soul decides that one year is not nearly enough. And in some odd miracle that cannot be explained, she recovers.

A meeting alters her future, when Bibi is told that she survived for a reason. She must save a person named Ashley Bell. From then on, Bibi’s world is filled to the brim with everything from a dog to a masseuse to the leader of a cult on a horrible mission. All the while she searches desperately for a stranger in order to save her from something Bibi knows nothing about.

Going back and forth in time to tell the tale, there is so much to say about this treasure. The mystical plays a part, the reality of life on the edge plays a part and…nothing can be given away. What can be stated is that Koontz was born with that unbelievable gift to, in one paragraph, write a line that makes the reader want to hide under their bed, followed by a joke that makes them laugh, and end with a line so beautiful the reader is stunned. If there was ever an author that deserved praise, it is, was, and remains, Dean Koontz. Do not miss this!


PAINT THE TOWN DEAD

By Sybil Johnson

This is a new Library Lover’s Mystery—and who isn’t one of those? Beginning with a ‘bang’ and continuing at top speed, readers will note that the “calm” reputation of a library…has changed.

Lindsey Norris is the Director of Briar Creek Public Library in Connecticut. One day, she travels by water taxi to Star Island in order to deliver some books to two elderly brothers who she delivers reading material to on a regular basis. Usually Peter Rosen, one of the brothers, meets her at the dock as he doesn’t want anyone to come into the house. But this time Peter is nowhere to be found, so Lindsey and Sully, the water taxi driver, go to the house…having to dodge many booby traps along the way. Although the two brothers are definite hoarders, Lindsey never expected to find the dead body of Peter Rosen among the junk; not to mention the fact that Stewart Rosen has disappeared.

When the chief of police arrives, she falls upon a booby trap that puts her ankle in a cast. But soon, no one seems to be remotely interested in hunting for Stewart to see if he’s okay or, perhaps, the murderer. Lindsey feels bad so she decides to plant herself on the trail, and solve the case. Trials and tribulations commence as she gets into more and more trouble. But when she uncovers some mysterious secrets that were buried on the island for years, an even larger mystery ensues.

This book is a breath of fresh air, as the author creates a very realistic library along with all of its small-town issues, staff and customers who get down and dirty in the middle of a very cool murder investigation. I can’t wait to read the next one!

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

THE OTHER SON

By Alexander Söderberg

This book is a translation from the Swedish. Although a good suspense novel, at times the hardship of translation causes the book to suffer just a little.

To begin, the main character, Sophie Brinkmann, is a nurse in Stockholm and a single mother. Sophie meets Hector Guzman in her hospital after he has been run down by a gang of criminals. Hector, she finds out, is also on the wrong side of the law.

In this very forceful story, Hector is in a coma after this botched hit and his associates have pushed Sophie into acting as the Guzman business spokesperson to help convince the other gangs that Hector is still very much alive and kicking. Sophie is really not keen on doing this, and ends up seeing some kidnappings, killings, and a whole bunch of collateral damage, as the Guzman gang comes under the interests of a Columbian drug ring run by Don Ignacio Ramirez, and a German gang called the Hanke Brothers. With so much interest dedicated on Hector, things get more than a little antsy. Soon Sophie gets with the program after she discovers that she, too, will have bullets coming straight at her.

This book is set mostly in Stockholm, and the gang parts reflect pure Mafia actions. It is extremely fast paced, the characters are many, and it will remind readers of the Corleone Family business. Even with the translation, readers will no doubt find themselves riveted to this book and wanting the next one as quickly as possible.

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

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LONG UPON THE LAND

By Margaret Maron

Judge Deborah Knott’s father, Kezzie, finds a dead body on his land. Though he tells her he doesn’t know the guy, it turns out that isn’t the exact truth. Deborah’s husband, Deputy Dwight Bryant, investigates and finds the connection between the dead man’s family and the Knott family.

While this is going on, Deborah is doing an investigation of her own about a lighter that once belonged to her mother that bears an inscription. She is determined to find out how her wealthy ‘to-do’ mother wound up with a bootlegger. No one has ever talked much at all of how they met, but Deborah has to know.

A story comes out about how the Knott family is covering up the murder. Deborah isn’t trying to do Dwight’s job for him, but after the news, she feels like she has to do all she can to show her family as innocent.

“Long Upon the Land” is a good book, and this author knows how to draw you in! The family interaction made me so curious that it was impossible to put down.

Reviewed by Ashley Dawn, author of “Shadows of Pain” published by Suspense Publishing an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

MISS RUFFLES INHERITS EVERYTHING

By Nancy Martin

Honeymbelle Hensley was once, in her heyday, the toast of her hometown of Mule Stop, Texas. It is here where she performed, wearing a white Stetson and “diamond earrings the size of pinto beans,” at the University football games. Half of the town actually has this woman in their prayers, considering that Honeymbelle used her late husband’s money to continue the success of Hensley Oil and Gas. In other words, without her persistence, they would have no work.

The great Honeymbelle dies and the entire town is part of the funeral that is one fit for the Queen of England. Her intimate family, however, seem to be quite calm over the grand dame’s departure. As with most of the wealthy, her family is just waiting to distribute the cash amongst themselves. Honeybelle gets the last laugh when her lawyer, Max, reads her Will, announcing that all the riches have been left to her dog, Miss Ruffles.

The bulk of the money is put in trust for the pooch, with some of the millions going to Honeybelle’s cook, Mae; her butler, Mr. Carver; and, her secretary, Sunny McKllip. Each of these “underlings” receive a million dollars on the condition that they keep the dog safe and healthy for a year before then finding her a good home. Surprise, surprise, the dog goes missing and the recipients of the cash are afraid that they will never see her again.

Sunny is the dog sitter of the crew, but knows the least about Texas. There is also someone keeping a very wary eye on her while she tries to uncover the bad guy and get the dog returned, while trying to learn and understand the Lone Star State’s ways: Whether it be the “pistol packing football fans,” or “the sweet talking yet ruthless ladies of the garden club.”

A hugely fun, creative and unforgettable mystery, all readers need to meet Miss Ruffles and the gang.

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

MURDER ON ST. NICHOLAS AVENUE

By Victoria Thompson

This great story is the next installment of the Gaslight Mystery tales, starring Frank and Sarah Malloy. But, this time around, the Malloy’s are on their honeymoon when their nursemaid, Maeve Smith, decides to assist a friend of Frank’s mother, Mrs. O’Neill, with a problem she’s having. A big problem...

It seems that Mrs. O’Neill’s married daughter, Una, has been arrested, charged with killing her husband, Randolph Pollock. The police certainly have a good case, seeing that Una was found holding his bloodied head in her lap. But even with that visual, Mrs. O’Neill is certain that her daughter is innocent.

When Maeve visits the Pollock’s house to see if there are any funds to pay for Una’s defense, she is astonished to find piles of money, thousands in cash, as well as a strange ledger located in a hidden safe. Policeman, Gino Donatelli, who is sweet on Maeve, is willing to assist her in her search for the truth as things get odder by the minute.

Gino has been asked to try and get information on the crime from his cohorts; not to mention, they also need an attorney. That’s when Mrs. Decker, Sarah Malloy’s mother, who is a formidable lady enters the picture, and it doesn’t take her long to scare the maid into letting her and her husband into the house. Soon you have a quartet of sleuths uncovering a huge con that just happened to involve the dead man... and far more money than they think.

Each Gaslight Mystery is a fantastic tale, and even though there is a group of them, this is definitely a standalone novel where the two secondary characters, Maeve and Gino, are allowed to shine.

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

HARBOUR STREET

By Ann Cleeves

Detective Joe Ashworth and his daughter, Jessie, are on their way home from a caroling service during the Christmas season when the Metro has to stop because of snowfall covering the tracks. Near a place called Newcastle, the people on board are asked to leave and catch a bus. But Jessie, worried about an old lady on the train who was asleep and most likely didn’t hear the instructions, returns to the train to wake her. Sadly, the lady has been stabbed...in front of many, many passengers.

The victim is identified as Margaret Krukowski, someone who lived and worked in a small hotel on Harbour Street owned by a widow, Kate Dewar, and her teenage children. Detective Inspector Vera Stanhope is placed on the case. It seems that the victim was dearly liked by everyone that knew her. She had fallen on bad times as of late, but always helped the underprivileged and anxious women find a home at the Haven, which is supported by a local church. As the case progresses, Vera and Joe dig a little deeper and soon find that the people of Harbour Street are harboring secrets. When another young woman is found dead, and a body that has been buried for quite a long time is discovered, Vera and Joe must delve into the lies told on Harbour Street to find the truth and stop a murderer.

Building slowly and uncovering many mysteries, this is a vivid work when it comes to the town, itself. The emotions and sheer loyalty of the people within the small-town community take center stage, as they close ranks to protect all who live there. The characters are very well written, and the team of Vera and Joe never let the readers down.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
GUilty AS CINNAMON
By Leslie Budewitz

Pepper Reece doesn't believe in ghosts. What she does believe in is the value of providing the highest quality spices to her customers at Pepper's Spice Shop, located in the Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington. Eager to expand her customer base, Pepper jumps at the chance when a local chef, Tamara Langston, asks Pepper to provide all the spices for her soon-to-open restaurant. To seal the deal, Pepper gives Tamara a sample of one of the Spice Shop's specialties: the dangerously hot Indian spice bhut capsicum, which loosely translates to ghost chili.

Pepper and her dog, Arf, love to stroll around the Pike Place Market area after closing time. That is, until their regular evening stroll brings them to Tamara's restaurant and they discover the young chef dead, her life extinguished by an overdose of the ghost chili. A police investigation of Tamara's death determines the chef was murdered—forced to ingest the ghost chili until it asphyxiated her.

Pepper is outraged that something from her shop was misused in this way and, although she's not suspected of the crime herself, is determined to find out who's responsible. She begins by asking questions about Tamara, and discovers there's no record of anyone by that name up until two years before. It's as if Tamara didn't exist until then. With the unexpected assistance of a tiny Indian woman who may or may not be a ghost, Pepper is able to unravel the truth about Tamara's life—and death—before she becomes the killer's next victim.

“Guilty as Cinnamon” is the second in the Spice Shop Mystery series penned by Leslie Budewitz. It's a zesty mix of a mystery with all the right ingredients to keep readers turning pages as quickly as possible. Delicious! Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Funerals Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •

IN LIKE FLYNN
By Rhys Bowen

Get ready for a new book featuring Molly Murphy, PI, from the pen (keyboard) of bestselling author, Rhys Brown.

Molly is a beloved (by readers) private eye in the world of masculine detectives and investigators. She is having a difficult time getting consistent work in New York, but does agree to work undercover for the New York Police Department to expose a pair of psychic sisters as the tricksters and con-artists they supposedly are.

Molly begins this undercover case by selling herself as a cousin from Ireland, staying at the Hudson River mansion of Senator Barney Flynn. The senator's wife, Theresa, has found that these Sorensen Sisters might be running a scam. She is hoping that the sisters can contact her dead son, kidnapped years ago and never found. The law is sure that the sisters are frauds. But after a more than weird séance, Molly isn't quite so sure the sisters are fakes. What she does know for a fact, however, is that the cops have messed up on the kidnapping.

Molly's becoming sidetracked as her Sorensen Sisters investigation is put on the back burner to look into the kidnapping that has laid dormant for many years. Things go from bad to worse for Molly, as the plot brilliantly comes together in order to prove who's in the wrong.

This back and forth plot will definitely keep readers guessing as Molly, who seems to be at home in all circumstances, puts together clues to solve this new case. The author of this series has won many prestigious awards, and when it comes to her amazing writing, she will win even more. This lady is a terrific author who continually provides her readers with fantastic tales.

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

STEALING TIME
By K.J. Waters

Caught in the path of Hurricane Charley as it churns through Orlando, Ronnie, against the wishes of her Scottish friend Stephanie, braves the storm to spend time with her current beau, Jeffrey, a lab tech at the Florida State Weather Laboratories.

While Steph is dealing with the weather, and a possible new love interest, Ronnie and Jeffrey get cozy as the storm blows in from the coast. Jeffrey has been experimenting with a new serum, and as the reader we assume it’s for something to spice up their love life, only to be as astonished as Ronnie is when we discover that the beautiful new bracelet is a time-travelling device that allows her to travel through a portal to eighteenth century England.

Suddenly caught up in witch trials and finding herself about to be hung, Ronnie, now mistakenly identified as Regina Ingram, turns to her one ally, Matthias, her alleged German cousin. As he battles to rescue her from the gallows, and we battle to figure out why Jeffrey, a mild-mannered storm lab tech, would possess the capabilities to transport Ronnie, Waters leads us through a living nightmare as we wait on tenter-hooks to see if the rescue can be pulled off at the last minute. Not wanting to give away the final dramatic outcome, let me say this, I can't wait to see what happens in book two of this sexy, but saucy, time travelling thriller.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of “Blood on His Hands” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine •
ANOTHER MAN’S MOCCASINS
By Craig Johnson

Here’s another great novel to add to the Longmire Mystery series featuring Sheriff Walt Longmire.

To begin, the body of a murdered Vietnamese woman, Ho Thi Paquet, is found dumped on the Interstate, causing Longmire to remember a previous case he investigated during the Vietnam War years before. Upon investigating, Longmire sees only one person that could be responsible for the woman’s murder. A homeless Crow Indian, Virgil White Buffalo, is said to be mentally ill and is found in a culvert very near to the body.

This tale is extremely interesting, taking Longmire and Henry Standing Bear back to their memories of Vietnam as they seek to discover the girl’s real killer, and the facts behind the Indian. When the man’s story comes to light, it is a heartbreaker, making Longmire believe that there is no way the man could have committed the crime.

The past haunts this tale, as Walt finds a frightening photo in the dead woman’s purse. This photo is a picture of him and a Vietnamese barmaid taken back in 1968, when he served as a Marine investigator in Vietnam. The older case of a bar girl’s death begins to receive the same attention as this current case, as readers slowly watch the past and present converge. With Henry’s help, Longmire delves into where and when this new dead woman showed up in the area, uncovering links to a California human trafficking ring.

This latest Longmire novel is an emotional tale, offering a tender look into the tough, gritty main character that readers have come to love. Looking into the lives of the two Vietnamese women, separated by forty years, Longmire involves himself in a brilliant mystery. And always remember, if you wish to see Longmire up close and personal, the show is in its fourth season on NETFLIX so that everyone can get a look at the tough man who saves others.

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

SIDNEY SHELDON’S RECKLESS
By Tilly Bagshawe

As it is with many writers who have left this world, Sidney Sheldon is one most remembered by readers. His stories were magic; filled with everything from the hottest couples to suspense-filled mysteries that everyone loved solving. This latest tale, motivated by the late Sidney Sheldon and written beautifully by Tilly Bagshawe, announces loud and clear that strong female leads still sell books.

A long-time favorite of Sidney Sheldon’s characters is Tracy Whitney, a former con artist and thief who now works for the CIA. This time around, a terrorist group calling themselves “Group 99” turns out to be an international group of hackers who are out to attack big business. The name refers to the 99% of us who are excluded from that extremely wealthy 1% who own the world. In the past, this group stuck to hacking computers, but now they have graduated to murder.

Executing a British soldier and putting the killing out on the Internet for all to see, they have also kidnapped an American investigative journalist, and blown up an international industrialist. Add in a shadowy lady known as Althea who swears she’s worked with Tracy in the past, yet has become the most sought after criminal by the CIA, and you have a plot that never stops racing.

Extremely sinister and a whole lot of fun, the review must stop here so that nothing in this extraordinary book will be given away. Especially when the ending is beyond exciting.

Sheldon’s writing earned him many awards (Oscar, Tony and Edgar), placing him in the category of the best of the best when it came to thriller authors. His main characters were usually very strong women who always made themselves known at the very start of the book, and Sheldon would be extremely proud and excited that British author, Tilly Bagshawe, continues to celebrate these women in literature. This is Grade ‘A’ material!

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

THE READAHOLICS AND THE POIROT PUZZLE
By Laura DiSilverio

This is another Agatha Christie-type goodie that is perfect for gift-giving purposes. This is the second in the already beloved Book Club Mystery series, and readers will love it.

Amy-Faye Johnson’s book club, The Readaholics, is absorbed in the Christie great, “Murder on the Orient Express,” and discussing Poirot’s point of view when it comes to the murderer. As this book is a piece of classic fiction, Poirot’s results are the topic of discussion.

Amy-Faye is also helping her brother, Derek, get ready for the opening of his new brew/pub when unfortunately, Gordon—Derek’s financial partner in the business—is found dead in a dumpster. Of course, Derek is suspect number one, which calls in the book club folks to go to work clearing the poor man’s name.

There are umpteen suspects, all with many reasons to want Gordon dead. Seeing as that the book club just read about the crime written on the Orient Express, they take a page from Poirot and investigate this suddenly complex murder. But as the clues they uncover reach into very unlikely places, the club soon begins to wonder if truth will end up being far stranger than fiction. Add in that while trying to find out the truth of Gordon’s killing, Amy-Faye is also busy working on her events business and building her romantic relationship with the police detective put in charge of the case.

The characters in this series are great, written as people we would all like to know. And with Amy-Faye written in first person, readers are offered wonderful descriptions of her hometown and surroundings. Let’s face it: Old Agatha Christie would be proud.

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

WOMAN WITH A BLUE PENCIL
By Gordon McAlpine

Readers will not get too deep into this book before they see that this tale is definitely not like any other murder mystery now in print.

A new author, Takumi Sato, has penned a debut novel that features a Japanese central character. But since this is right after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the woman with the blue pencil, Sato’s editor, Maxine Wakefield, suggests that he consider some plot revisions in order to not anger the readers. Taking his editor’s advice, Takumi eliminates his former character, Japanese amateur PI Sam Samida, and replaces him with a Korean character named, Jimmy Park.

This tale then follows the fictional character as he is tossed aside and erased from the manuscript. On the evening before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Sam Sumida, who initially is an academic, takes over the role of amateur PI, investigating his wife’s killing that has been ignored by the LAPD. Sam is grief stricken, but the worst is still to come as Sam finds out that he’s no longer recognized by his former friends because he has become nothing more than a discarded fictional character. Sam’s path leads directly to this Korean PI named Park who he must deal with; a PI that has definite anti-Japanese attitudes about the horror of Pearl Harbor.

The story of the actual author is told in chapters, whereas the story of Sam is told in others. When the author is relocated with his own family to an internment camp in California, readers are placed into many historic events, from Pearl Harbor to FDR’s Infamy Speech, as this Japanese/American writer works to “Americanize” his story in order to get it published.

Intricate. Unique. Although strange at times, this book was a definite work of art. Readers get an in-depth view of the bigotry that commenced during this time period, even when it was focused on American-born Japanese who were treated as if they, too, were the ultimate enemy.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion •
DEAD WITH THE WIND
By Miranda James

This fun series by Miranda James involves the beloved main characters, An'gel and Dickie Ducote—a duo of elderly spinsters who own an estate in Athena, Mississippi. In the first great book of this series, "Bless Her Dead Little Heart," the duo took in a young college student named Benjy, as well as a dog, Peanut, and a cat named Endora.

This time out, the whole group jumps in the car and heads for Louisiana, where the women are attending the wedding of their granddaughter. They haven’t seen this coyote in several years so they go down a few days early, looking forward to having a small family reunion and catching up before the nuptials begin.

When they arrive, however, they find the household in a tizzy, with a bride-to-be who makes Bridezilla look more like Mary Poppins. Her actions are taking a lot out of the entire family, and the tension mounts as one problem after another precedes a real event of massive thunderstorms that blow through the area. At the end of the storm, a body is found dead on the grounds. Some guests are saying the person was a victim of Mother Nature, but the girls think that excuse just doesn’t fit the facts.

As it is with the storms, this plot brings forth the mystery at top speed, ending with a fantastic climax with everything explained and the tale making perfect sense. (Ala Miss Agatha Christie.) Readers will love the original five characters making the trip, as well as the other strong characters who make readers turn these pages non-stop to meet the killer. The setting is a mansion in the American South that is a bit like the famous "Tara," with great twists along the way. As always, readers will be dying to see these Mississippi ladies again.

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

PERFECT TOUCH
By Elizabeth Lowell

Offered to readers from a true "mistress" in the field of romantic suspense, this novel is a tale of an ex-soldier, now a rancher and designer, who wants to take down a violent killer.

The story opens with Sara Medina, owner of the design studio, Perfect Touch. Also an art dealer, she is on her way to Jackson, Wyoming. Being that she grew up on a dairy farm, she is a firm believer in the fact that the last place she ever wanted to head was to cowboy country, but she has to travel.

She has had to provide expert testimony for Captain Jay Vermilion in a legal battle over the disputed ownership of a priceless art collection, and hopes to handle the collection’s sale if he wins. Vermilion, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, has struggled to keep his family ranch going. Since coming home he has had to put up with the chaos caused by his former stepmother’s legal battles, and it has not been easy. Before he can start restoring the ranch, he has to wait and see if the court will rule in his favor. However, nothing compares to the meeting of the two main characters and the impression that they have on each other. Although they seem to have an instant connection, Jay and Sara have very different plans for the future of the ranch and the art.

All this drama comes to a head with a double murder at the ranch and a very close-to-home issue of treachery. The two will hurry to find the killer and also run for their own lives before the end of the story, giving readers the classic romantic suspense tale with all the usual thrills, chills, and emotion that Elizabeth Lowell is so highly regarded for.

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

WOMAN WITH A SECRET
By Sophie Hannah

Nicki Clements is on her way to her son’s school to bring him his gym bag when she finds herself stuck in a traffic jam. Unfortunately, while being in the line of angry drivers, she sees the face of the police officer she never wanted to see again. Pulling a U-turn, Nicki escapes, only to be called the very next day by the police. A newspaper columnist by the name of Damon Blundy has been murdered, and just happened to have lived on the same road she escaped from the day before.

Nicki doesn’t wish to answer any of the questions: perhaps she has no idea about the road, the man, or…she doesn’t want to tell them that she made her strange exit because of a secret that could ruin her life. So although she’s innocent of any crime, she finds herself arrested for murder.

Two married British cops, Simon Waterhouse and Charlotte ‘Charlie’ Zailer enter the picture. They are assigned to investigate Nicki’s case and discover facts regarding this mother of two, unfaithful wife, who has recently moved from the city to this very rural town. Seems that this dead man was having an affair with Nicki online…yet no one can actually prove it.

The victim was certainly not a pleasant person. Turns out that the person who had it in for Blundy showed up at his house with a knife, a knife sharpener, and wearing a hazmat suit, leaving a note on the wall stating: “He is no less dead.”

Much like Gillian Flynn’s "Gone Girl," this is a tricky one. It will take a lot of concentration and a quiet room to understand the depth of the tale and each of the characters within it. Nicki has lied her whole life about everything. But the difference between lying and being capable of murder are two completely different things. It should not surprise readers if this, too, finds its way to the big screen.

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

COLLISION OF CENTURIES
By John J. Le Beau

This story is the third in a series featuring Franz Waldbaer, Kommissar of the Bavarian police. This terrific page-turner begins when someone strikes and kills Andreas Pilcher, the man in charge of maintaining the castle of Count von Winterloch. The fatal blow was struck with a broadsword inside the isolated residence locked in the Bavarian forests of Germany. In another location far away from the crime, a clinic in Madagascar, a doctor is collecting insects that just happen to be carrying the bubonic plague…. Kommissar Waldbaer is assigned to the murder at the castle, and quickly becomes curious as to why there is no blood on the corpse. Running into obstacles that stem from von Winterloch’s lack of cooperation, Waldbaer suspects that the Count knows far more about this killing that took place in his very own castle than he’s letting on.

Three ugly deaths occur rapidly, with the autopsies revealing that some of the victims were found to be infected with a plague that has no known cure. Soon, the plague is found to be the disease that everyone thought had been eliminated centuries ago. Said disease is being detected in Bavaria, and taking out victim after victim. Waldbaer is not to be denied, as he thinks there is a link between the killings and the castle. But the master of the castle is not cooperating and the plague is spreading fast.

The police, along with their International Infectious Disease Specialists, go on a path that will lead to a massive confrontation with a twisted mastermind who wants the Dark Ages to be reborn, leaving millions of dead bodies in its wake once again. And to make matters even worse, the killer has a terminal disease, which means he has absolutely nothing to lose.

Get ready for another excellent book by Mr. Le Beau; this Collision series is a masterful piece of writing that readers will love.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion
THE INNOCENT
By Ann H. Gabhart

It’s been two incredibly long and frightening years for a woman by the name of Carlyn Kearney, wondering if her husband will return from the Civil War. But when the battle finally concludes, the Union Army can grant her no information except for the fact that her husband went missing. In debt, scared, being forced to leave the home she loves, Carlyn has to find a way to live, while hoping that she and her husband could one day be reunited.

Sheriff Mitchell Brodie comes to Carlyn with Curt Whitlow. Apparently, Curt is the man who owns the property. The guy is not a good one, seeing as how he wants to make a deal with her that can stay on the property but only if she awards him certain “favors.”

She finally heads to the nearby Shaker village, Harmony Hill. She is accepted in the village, but without her beloved dog, Asher, who the sheriff gives a good home to. Finally, safe, it is still a huge challenge on a daily basis for Carlyn in the village. Everyone dresses alike and there are many rules that must be followed; she feels a bit like she’s being watched.

Sister Edna is assigned to be Carlyn’s guide but is very vocal on the fact that she does not like her, finding fault with her all the time. One day, Carlyn hears an argument between Brother Henry Stratton of the village and the evil Curt Whitlow, and the following night the horse barn catches fire. Brother Henry is found dead under a hay bale and Curt has gone missing. Add in the fact that Carlyn is accused of shoving Sister Edna down some steps, and this once peaceful Shaker village turns into a frightening locale.

With a great understanding of Shaker life, this historical feels as if the reader is right in the midst of the past.

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

REST YE MURDERED GENTLEMEN
By Vicki Delany

This is the perfect kick-off for a new series by Vicki Delany. The story is set in Rudolph, New York (more commonly known as Christmastown), and just about everyone living there has that good old Christmas spirit, but... And yes, there always is a ‘but,’ there seems to be a Grinch among them who has decided to ruin this year’s favorite holiday in Christmastown.

Merry Wilkinson, the owner of Mrs. Claus’s Treasures, a store that provides the rare Christmas gifts for tourists who flock into town during the holiday, is the featured character. Merry’s family is really unshakable in making Christmastown a success. Her father is Santa, and her mother is a retired opera singer who teaches and sings fantastic Christmas carols at all the holiday events and activities. The rest of the residents are extremely devoted to making sure that the holiday season is a huge success, as well. But... mishaps happen; including, tractor sabotage and accusations of murder.

When a journalist shows up to write a story on Rudolph everyone is beyond excited, until Merry finds his dead body in the park while walking her dog. The police suspect his death was caused by a gingerbread cookie made by her best friend, Vicky. As far as Merry is concerned, the gloves are off, the Jingle bells are not jingling, and she will begin her own investigation to clear Vicky’s name and find out who the real Scrooge in town is. And why he/she is attempting to ruin the town’s lovely reputation.

Talk about fun. This is an enjoyable mystery with characters that will definitely need to be seen more of by readers. As Christmas is most folks’ favorite holiday, a featured character that owns a holiday gift shop in a place called Christmastown is good thinking; you can never get enough of them.

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

THE BOX JUMPER
By Lisa Mannetti

This novella focuses on the world of one of the most mysterious people in history, and is a truly awesome read.

No one knows why there are particular people that continue to hold the world’s fascination. Whether they be bad guys, like Jack the Ripper and Rasputin, or good guys, like the incredible Harry Houdini—fans want to learn more about their lives. Many stories have been told regarding Houdini. From works of fiction to non-fiction, Houdini has been shown to the world as being extremely intelligent. How he was one of the best businessmen in the world, using advertising and gimmicks to make himself a household name. The stories have told of his family, and his love for both magic and the fans who cared about him so much. We have read stories about that moment in the Hippodrome in NYC when he made his beloved elephant disappear in front of the wide open eyes of a huge crowd, and we have learned of his passion and hard work when it came to being the best at his craft.

“The Box Jumper” touches upon a variety of those things, yet the story leans much more to the dark side. The term, “Box Jumper” is actually a nickname given to the magician’s assistant who, throughout history, has been one stunning woman whose main job was to distract the audience’s attention. This tale is told by Leona, that beautiful woman who was in love with Houdini. As the narrator, Leona takes readers through life, but uses Houdini’s actual magic as only an environment. A habitat where the story takes place. Using memories, dreams, and images that are one with an illusionist of Houdini’s caliber, Leona tells a dark, sad, moody and romantic tale from the depths of a frightening, schizophrenic mind.

A great story to read. Only problem is, the reader will want at least two hundred more pages before having to close the cover.


THE CIRCLE
By Bernard Minier

This is the second in a truly outstanding series featuring Commandant Martin Servaz of the Toulouse, France Crime Squad.

This novel begins where “The Frozen Dead” came to a close, with Commandant Servaz in a snit, brooding over the prison escape of serial killer, Julian Hirtmann.

Desperate to move his attention and focus elsewhere, Servaz receives a late night call from his college sweetheart, Marianne. She tells him that her son, Hugo, has been arrested for the murder of a woman who is a professor at a prep school in the town of Marsac. This is the same school that Servaz attended and the one that his daughter, Margot, presently attends. Hugo, apparently, was found at the scene of the crime, but his mom insists that Hugo could not have committed the murder, even though that’s exactly how it looks to the law. Servaz also has his doubts, however, some of which are quite valid. Servaz does think that the look of the murder scene points directly to Hirtmann being back in the area, and back at work.

Servaz still has feelings for Marianne which might cloud his judgement in the matter. But his daughter is also conducting her own investigation from inside the school and giving clues to her father. All the while, Hirtmann remains a frightening presence, just waiting and watching the investigation that draws Servaz and his daughter into some very hazardous spots. Culminating in a surprising and wicked ending, this book is perfectly set up for the next installment, leaving readers with high expectations for what’s to come.

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

**VENDETTA**
By Lisa Harris

In this new book, the first in the *Nikki Boyd Files* by author Lisa Harris, Nikki takes the readers on a quick ride into a dangerous case. Nikki is employed by the Tennessee Missing Task Force and is looking into the case of her sister, who is still missing after ten years. When Nikki sees a Polaroid picture of a new missing girl, she recognizes a likeness to the past and the case becomes very personal to her. As Nikki gets closer to the perpetrator, she begins to feel that this case has become the case of her life.

As no one needs to follow Nikki around to see if she can handle the missing person’s case because of the abduction of her sister, she quickly sees the similarities between the present case and her own past. It seems that the kidnapper is trying to send her a direct message instead of just taking other girls in a way that resembles her abduction of her sister. But the closer that Nikki seems to come to the abductor, the more she feels that he is looking for her and her alone. Instead of being the hunter, Nikki knows that she has turned into the hunted.

As soon as the reader gets into this story, Harris will take them on a fast-paced search for answers that will last up until the very fearful finish. The story is fueled with misleading dangers, and the character is so fascinating that fans will be waiting impatiently to see what adventure Nikki Boyd will have next.

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

**THE GROWNUP**
By Gillian Flynn

This book by Gillian Flynn, the highly-acclaimed author of “Gone Girl,” is a short story. A tale that sports all of sixty-two pages, yet still makes the goosebumps arrive and that eerie feeling appear in the stomach. First seen in an anthology called, “Rogues,” edited by George R.R. Martin in 2014, this tale is now being republished on its own.

The narrator remains nameless. She calls herself a psychological intuitive, making believe she can read a person’s aura and heal their problems. The money is good so, what the heck! What people believe they believe, and she certainly isn’t hurting anyone by fibbing about her skill. However, when she meets Susan Burke, a particular client who opens her appointment by saying: “My life is falling apart,” things get odd.

Susan lives in a dark, dank mansion called Carterbrook Manor. A world made of carved stones that are unique and highly elaborate, framing long, slightly gothic windows. She has a stepson, Miles, who is a little…off. And when the narrator consents to go to Susan’s house (in order to land that big, fat check for doing nothing), she gets a lot more than she bargained for.

In the first part of this tiny tale, readers meet this main character that is on the cusp of likeable and unlikeable; wise beyond her years (she thinks), sometimes funny and sometimes extremely critical, readers will be interested to see how she takes this horror story on. Good, solid surprises, and characters that are unique, to say the least, but this tale most definitely needs another two hundred pages to flush out. A good read when sitting for an appointment waiting for the doctor, but it would be much more fun to read an entire collection of these dark short stories from this extremely good writer.

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

**THE GUILTY**
By David Baldacci

The Will Robie series just gets better and better with every Baldacci trick.

Will Robie, a black ops CIA sniper, unintentionally kills an innocent while doing his job. On his next operation, he freezes, unable to pull the trigger. Will’s handler takes him out of the field and gives him time to get his head on straight. While this “downtime” occurs, it comes to Will’s attention that his own father, who he hasn’t seen for many years, has been arrested for murder in Will’s hometown of Cantrell, Mississippi.

Running away from Cantrell a long time ago, Will returns to see his father and confront his upsetting past, in an attempt to get his professional work back on track. But, like most people who go home again, Will finds that his old stomping ground is vastly different than the one he remembers.

Once a lawyer, his father is now the county judge and lives in a huge mansion with his new wife and child. Sherman Clancy, the man Will’s father is accused of killing, had a fortune once that plunged for unknown, shady reasons. A man who abused him, Will doesn’t really look forward to seeing his father again, yet he does want to discover what’s going on. Quickly, he finds himself wrapped up in a series of events that cause the death count to grow higher, which sends in his agent buddy, Jessica Reel, to help.

The mystery is very complex; full of dead ends, red herrings, and a shocking ending that will leave thriller readers overwhelmed. It is not news to anyone to say this is excellent writing. After all, Baldacci shines when it comes to stories that grip the reader by the throat and do not let go. But the emotional battles between Will and his father actually feel as if the great Alfred Hitchcock whispered a bit in this author’s ear. Whether or not this is true, what does remain is that David Baldacci never disappoints.

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

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**THE SWIMMER**
By Joakim Zander

“The Swimmer” is a debut thriller that truly provides the swiftness and power of a Robert Ludlum story.

To begin, Klara Walldeen was orphaned and raised by her grandparents in Sweden. As an adult, she lives in Brussels and works as a political aide. Many miles away, in another country, a spy who has always made his family take a backseat to his career, now thinks about the choices he made in his life and finds himself having regrets. His only comfort is swimming.

Klara is learning about the world of politics, but recently she has seen something that she shouldn’t have seen on a laptop containing sensitive information that people will kill to keep quiet. She takes off on a race across Europe, and the retired spy finds out who she is as he, too, becomes entangled in the chase. Soon Klara figures out that this man, a man she doesn’t even know, is the only one who can save her.

The author’s debut goes in-depth with the story of the young Swedish woman and the washed-up American spy, and is not what you would expect as the “normal spy thriller” that the older genre of writers brought to life. Yes, it is action-packed and stunning like Ludlum, but Joakim Zander is a breath of fresh air for a ‘died in the wool’ spy/thriller reader like me. I advise everyone to pick this one up and fall into this very fascinating story that is actually a translation from Swedish. Although many times translations are difficult to read, this one is not. And after the characters, the action, and the exciting plot, readers will be singing Zander’s praises.

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

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*SuspenseMagazine.com*
THE NIGHT SISTER
By Jennifer McMahon

Many will remember the incredible title, “The Winter People” by this author, and have been gnashing their teeth waiting for a new tale to arrive.

In this particular story, a lot will remind you—including letters written by one of the main characters to Alfred Hitchcock—of that unforgettable movie, Psycho. You see, it was in the 1950s when a tower was built alongside a motel in London, Vermont. The father built this small version of The Tower of London for his wife, who had come from London, England. This is a motel that never had a vacancy. People would stop to see Lucy the famous Vermont cow, as well as two young sisters and their mind-blowing circus involving hypnotized chickens. But as time went forward, a highway was built through London, Vermont, and no one ever stopped at the motel again...allowing it to fall into disrepair.

Norman Bates was not present. What does play out is a story that pops back and forth, starting with a tragic mystery that happened in the 1960’s between a girl named Rose and her beautiful sister, Sylvie. One of these sisters did something terribly wrong, which directly effects Piper and Margot, who are also sisters, and their friend Amy. This group, in the 1980’s, find clues regarding a 29th room being located somewhere inside the motel that only has 28, and puts them on the path to solving the disappearance of Sylvie from long ago. Which then pops forward to the 2000’s where Amy, now all grown up, ends up shooting members of her family in the middle of the night, as well as herself, and has the town assuming she was simply insane.

The writer easily flows these three eras together and holds the reader’s interest while building excitement for the grand finale. The characters are rich, the location extremely creative, yet the ending is not quite as exciting as the overall tale.


THE PROMISE
By Robert Crais

The best part of this new Robert Crais novel is the fact that he combined his Elvis Cole/ Joe Pike series with his incredible novels featuring Officer Scott James and his cool K-9 partner, Maggie. Talk about a great idea, and a true gift for fans.

To begin, Elvis has been hired to find a missing person; one, Amy Breslyn, who might have disappeared with a stranger that she met online. He’s looking for said person when he comes across the information that the woman who has gone missing is an expert in explosives. Worse yet, she works as a contractor for the Defense Department. This missing person just became a top priority.

The person who hired Elvis is not really looking for Amy as much as wanting Elvis to find out the identity of the man. And the client, Meryl Lawrence, is a bit of an oddball. She is the queen of fear. She pays in cash, demands instant meetings in large parking lots and then never gets out of her car.

In the meantime, Officer Scott James and his dog follow a fugitive into a house that is full of explosives, not to mention a dead body. As the story unwinds, the two cases come together as Elvis, Pike, James and Maggie are introduced. Sadly, Scott comes face to face with the fugitive and, as a result of this encounter, Scott and Maggie become targets. Cole and Scott, with help from Pike and Maggie, begin a huge fight to find Amy before she is killed and before the same fate befalls them.

This is an outstanding book; a great crime thriller with terrific characters that readers want to see again and again.

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

THE CHOCOLATE FALCON FRAUD
By JoAnna Carl

This book is yet another winner in Carl’s great Chocoholic Mystery series. Lee Woodyard is making a specific candy in her store, TenHuis Chocolade, when she looks up to see her ex-stepson, Jeff Godfrey. They haven’t seen each other in a few years. In fact, the last time he was in town he was accused of murder. But...past is past, right?

This time around, Jeff is in town to attend the annual film festival dedicated to noir movies, a genre that he and Lee like more than any other. It is called, “Tough Guys and Private Eyes Film Festival,” and the activities kick-off with a showing of The Maltese Falcon. Jeff and Lee want to catch up, so he invites her and her husband, Joe, Aunt Nettie and her husband, Hogan, out to dinner that evening. The problem is, when the four people arrive at the appointed place, Jeff doesn’t show. And after calling and looking for him, Lee begins to worry that something may have happened.

It is certainly odd that the classic film is being shown, because it soon feels to Lee like oddities from the ‘Maltese’ plot are appearing in her very real life. She knows that Jeff is now a college graduate, yet he still acts like the very immature boy that she had to bail out of trouble in the past. It doesn’t help his case when an old girlfriend of Jeff’s is hot on his trail, as well as some characters who sound a lot like Bogart and friends from the movie. As the mystery moves forward, Lee tries to bring clues together in order to find Jeff. Yet, as she unveils more and more about his disappearance, Lee begins to wish real life was nothing more than a movie.

This is a joy to read. Great plot. Great suspects. Chocolates. What more could you want?

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

ROBERT LUDLUM’S THE PATRIOT ATTACK
By Kyle Mills

“The Patriot Attack” is not about the Middle Eastern terror mongers. This time around, readers are off on a journey with a possible war between China and Japan at its core. A battle that might have the United States coming to Japan’s side to honor treaty obligations once made.

There is an attack on a Japanese warship that pulls Japan and China to the edge of a conflict. In the meantime, Covert-One operative Colonel Jon Smith is sent on a mission to recover mysterious materials from the ruins of the Fukushima nuclear reactor. When Col. Smith doesn’t return, Randy Russell, CIA Agent, goes to find him...off the record.

What Randy does find is that the missing materials might be confirmation that Japan, behind closed doors, has been developing a new weapons system which just might turn a conflict into a mass of bloodshed. If the Covert-One team can’t stop Japan from moving forward on its path of murder, most of the world as we know it will disappear for many centuries to come.

The writings of Mr. Robert Ludlum really can’t be copied; he had the amazing gift of combining anticipation, elation, fear and conspiracy theories with characters that couldn’t be beat. Jason Bourne, anyone? But Kyle Mills certainly does this master proud. Kudos must be given for this tale, because Mills grabs the reader at the very beginning and holds on tight, as the story of suspense, thrills and action unfolds.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of The Write Companion
It All Comes Down to 40 Seconds.

Peri Reed is a highly trained government agency operative turned renegade—and she’s done taking orders.

“A kick-ass start to a new series!”
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—ROMANTIC TIMES BOOK REVIEWS (STARRED REVIEW)

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IN THE HEART OF THE SEA
2015
Genre – Adventure/Action/Biography (PG-13)

Director Ron Howard (Rush, J. Edgar, Frost/Nixon), arguably one of the better directors when it comes to consistently good mainstream filmmaking, helms this fictionalized account of the real life story that became the inspiration for the classic book “Moby Dick.”

The story is told in retrospect to author Herman Melville (Ben Whishaw), from the viewpoint of a young boy, Thomas Nickerson (now an older man played by Brendan Gleeson), who was on the Essex when it sailed on its fateful voyage to bring home 200 barrels of whale oil.

After the crew hears of this legendary sea where whales are abundant, they make the error of discounting tales of a monster white whale who protects the pods. Encountering said whale, their ship comes off second best and is scuttled. What follows is a harrowing account of survival.

Stars Chris Hemsworth (Thor), Ben Whishaw (Spectre), Brendan Gleeson and Cillian Murphy, all do a fine job. The filmmakers tried to ugly down Chris Hemsworth for the role by giving him a few scars, but he still looks stunning.

The film looks beautiful, with rich on-screen colors, and some magnificent and thrilling scenes, but parts sometimes lack pace. Still, it's an unusual story, and something new on screen. Certainly it's grand in scope and deserves a big screen viewing. Maybe the film is not the stuff of legends, but it's still good entertainment.

Reviewed by Susan May, author of “Deadly Messengers” (www.susanmaywriter.com) ■

THE REVENANT
2015
Genre – Adventure/Drama/Thriller (R)

Without a doubt this is my favorite film so far this year. With all the films releasing in December in time for award nominations, expect this one to grab many and win in several categories, if not for best film. Compelling, gripping, hard to watch, brutal, beautiful, and extraordinary. These words don't do this film justice. It is a masterpiece of filmmaking. If Leonardo DiCaprio doesn't win an Oscar, I'll eat my reviewer's hat.

DiCaprio, Tom Hardy, Domhnall Gleeson, Will Poulter, and the rest of the cast are barely recognizable as mountain men who are among the few survivors of an Indian attack made on their camp. They are forced to make a grueling and dangerous journey to the safety of the nearest town.

Based on the book by Michael Punke, The Revenant is the unbelievable true story of Hugh Glass and his three thousand mile journey of survival, and eventual revenge, in the brutal winter of 1820. After an attack by a bear, a barely alive Glass is carried by his fellow hunting team members as far as they can manage, until an impassable mountain forces them to leave him behind. John Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy), young Jim Bridger (Will Poulter), and Glass's son Hawk (Forrest Goodluck) volunteer to stay with him so he can be given a proper burial when his inevitable death arrives in the next few hours.

Events that then unfold are the stuff of legends.

Glass is betrayed in the worst possible way and then abandoned to die. Alone, barely alive, and without even a weapon or warm clothing, this superhuman will crawl, then stagger, then walk on a journey to save himself, and then, after that, another journey of revenge. It's man versus man, versus the wild, versus the elements, versus anything that can kill you. There are moments where you will gasp out loud. In others, you will marvel how the film was actually made in such conditions with such authenticity.

Directed and written by Oscar winning director, Alejandro González Iñárritu (Birdman, Babel, 21 Grams), The Revenant is a film you will never forget. The imagery and visceral experience will amaze and haunt you. A must see on the big screen.

Reviewed by Susan May, author of "Deadly Messengers” (www.susanmaywriter.com) ■
Featured Artist
Interview by Suspense Magazine

Babette van den Berg
A Lifetime of Artistic Expression

Bal du Mask 9
Babette van den Berg was already using a pencil or brush to draw and paint when she was just a little girl. Her lineage was all about creativity: with a father in the advertising game, and a grandfather who crafted beautiful oil paintings, it was no surprise that Babette was granted those same artistic genes from her quite talented family.

Beginning her career as a digital artist, Babette moved on to start her own art company in 2013. From book covers to CD covers to spiritual cards, her commercial as well as private designs are among the most stunning to be found. First speaking with Babette back in 2014, she was gracious enough to sit down with us once again to catch us up on all the new things that have occurred since we last met.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): In the past year and a half, what do you think has changed the most about your artistic vision?

Babette van den Berg (B.V.D.B.): My art always varies from fantasy to dark art. I continue to develop myself, transforming my creations to reach even more beautiful and higher works of art. In the last one and a half years, a lot has changed. I develop spiritual cards now, and also started my own company called, Bab’sArtCreations, where I make art for individuals as well as businesses. By branching out in this way, I have created more variety in my work.

S. MAG.: If you had to pick just one piece of your work for this presentation, what would it be and why?

B.V.D.B.: I find that to be quite a difficult choice, considering I make many works. But I think if I have to choose, I’m going for my, Venice, ball du Mask. The woman with the mask looking in the mirror. I find the atmosphere in this piece very intoxicating.

S. MAG.: What is more important to you when it comes to creating your art, the content or technique, and why?

B.V.D.B: Of course, both of these are important. It is the representation of what you, the artist, want to show to the entire world. The artwork must tell a story, which I find to be a very important piece of the puzzle. After all, my work comes from my own emotions. Personally, I think the viewer finds that to be most important as well—what they think and how the work makes them feel. Technology is good to help the artist develop, finding ways and learning how to paint a more vivid and memorable image for the viewer.

S. MAG.: What is your favorite part of the development of a new piece?

B.V.D.B.: From the beginning to the end, I love it all. Collecting ideas, working them out, and finally viewing the result. Each part of the process is equally exciting.

S. MAG.: What memorable reactions have you had to your work?

B.V.D.B.: I get many lovely, sweet, and heartwarming reactions about my art. I am very grateful for that, and it gives me an enormous boost when creating new pieces. It stimulates me every time.

S. MAG.: Tell us a little about your home country/hometown...
“Each part of the process is equally exciting.”
that we would not be able to find in a travel brochure.

B.V.D.B.: What we do not have in any travel brochure is the “Elf Fantasy Fair and Castle Fest,” which are fantasy events I attend every year. It’s a huge costumed affair that is not only fun, but also spurns that artistic creativity. It’s great to be in.

S. MAG.: What is your greatest personal and professional accomplishment?

B.V.D.B.: Currently, the spiritual playing cards. The Mystical Elf Oracle and the Spiritual relationship cards that I’ve worked on for two years with author Maria Hartjes. This is a milestone for myself and my work.

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

B.V.D.B.: Yes, I’ve had those creative blocks, but most of the time they do not last very long. I stimulate myself using my surroundings. Nature is a good remedy to gain new insights. Travel is also a very good option, and the Fantasy Fairs always bring back the spirit to create something new.

S. MAG.: What do you think are your three best qualities? Worst?

B.V.D.B.: I think my best qualities are; optimism, creativity and perseverance. A negative is that I’m a perfectionist.

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

B.V.D.B.: I find it hard to look into the future; no one has a program when it comes to the concert of life. Carpe Diem. But, I hope I can make a great deal of art over the next five or ten years, and that my business, Bab’s Art Creations, becomes extremely successful.

We’d like to thank Babette for spending time with us. To learn more about her work, please visit her website at: www.babartcreations.com or https://www.facebook.com/BabsArtCreations.
December Marks Many Things. It’s the holiday season and people are in the giving mood. This is also when you start hearing nominations for the upcoming award shows, letting you know the best music, movies, etc., of the year. To Suspense Magazine, December means that we give you our “Best of the Year” in books and one author who has achieved “The Crimson Scribe” award.

Last year we had a surprise at the top with Terry Hayes and “I am Pilgrim.” It was a book that caught fans and the literary world off-guard. Terry was a debut author and came out of nowhere. This year, the winner of the award is an author who has been putting out great books for years, and finally getting some of the recognition they deserve.

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

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

You only have a small window left until Christmas to buy these fantastic authors—not only the titles we’ve highlighted but also their backlists—and put some joy in someone’s life; or be selfish and keep them for yourself, either way is fine with us. I could go on and on talking about how tremendous they are, but I won’t bore you with any more details. I will simply let the “Best of 2015 List” as presented by Suspense Magazine, and “The Crimson Scribe” award winner, speak for themselves. Now on with the show!

John Raab
CEO/Publisher
Suspense Magazine
“DRAPE EXPECTATIONS” by Karen Rose Smith (Kensington: July 2015): These days, home stager Caprice De Luca’s calendar is a full house. Her grandmother’s health is failing, her wayward uncle is stirring the pot, and she’s torn between two equally eligible suitors. With so much drama in her personal life, Caprice is grateful to have Ace Richland, a former 80s rock star, ask her to stage his girlfriend’s house. But Alanna Goodwin is a tough customer who balks at Caprice’s ideas and all but commandeers the staging. Caprice almost isn’t surprised when the snappish Southern belle is strangled to death with a tieback from her tacky velvet drapes. But just as she draws back the curtains on the truth, Caprice realizes she may be next on a murderer’s set list…

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

Karen Rose Smith (K.R.S.): Having “Drape Expectations” chosen as “Best of” by Suspense Magazine means the world to me. After writing romance for twenty years, I wasn’t sure about branching out into the new genre of cozy mysteries. But once I started my Caprice De Luca series, I fell so in love with her and her family that murder/mystery plots came easily. I hope to be writing many more novels in the series. Having Drape chosen for this honor propels my creative spirit.

S. MAG.: If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

K.R.S.: If I could write a message to future aspiring authors and save it in a time capsule, this would be my advice. Find your voice in the genre that wraps around your heart and soul. Be steadfast in writing every day to hone your craft. Be persistent in chasing your dream and catching it.

“DEATH BY TIARA” by Laura Levine (Kensington: June 2015): For freelance writer Jaine Austen, working behind the scenes at a teen beauty pageant has shown her that sometimes beauty is in the eye of the murderer…

Teen contestant Taylor Van Sant has a talent for singing, but she can’t write a song. So her über-pushy stage mom Heather has hired Jaine to pen lyrics the judges will love. Unfortunately, the hotel hosting Miss Teen Queen America is a dump, the cattiness is out of control, and Candace—the perfectly-coiffed, whip-cracking pageant director—is making even Jaine’s life miserable. When Candace’s assistant Amy is found bludgeoned to death with a silver tiara, there are more suspects than sequins on a pageant gown—and Heather is first on the list. Taylor begs Jaine to help clear her mom’s name, but finding the culprit is going to be trickier than walking the stage in stilettos…

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?


Laura Levine (L.L.): Never let your inner critic slow you down. No matter how bad things seem at the beginning of a book, just KEEP WRITING! You can always come back and fix it later.
S. MAG.: Who’s your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

L.L.: My favorite fictional villain is the sociopathic killer in Ira Levin’s “A Kiss Before Dying.” Talk about scary. Reading that book, I was afraid to be alone in the room with it.

As for mystery heroines, I’m crazy about Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone. If reincarnation works, I want to come back as Kinsey. What punk! What wit! What great hair! And how I admire Ms. Grafton for keeping the series so sharp twenty-four letters into the alphabet.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

L.L.: I thought you’d never ask. In my heroine Jaine Austen’s next adventure, “Murder has Nine Lives,” Jaine’s cat, Prozac, gets tapped to star in her very first TV commercial—for Skinny Kitty, a new diet cat food. Jaine shows up at the shoot with visions of royalties dancing in her head, only to have them dashed when the egomaniacal inventor of Skinny Kitty is killed on the set—poisoned with his own cat food.

“CHECKED OUT” by Elaine Viets (Penguin Publishing Group: May 2015): PI Helen Hawthorne goes undercover at a local library to find a painting and solve a murder in the national bestselling mystery series.

Wealthy socialite Elizabeth Cateman Kingsley has hired Helen to find a missing John Singer Sargent painting, owned by her late father. After his death, many of Davis Kingsley’s books were donated to the Flora Park Library, and his daughter suspects the small watercolor—worth a million dollars—was tucked away inside one of those dusty tomes.

To search the stacks, Helen applies for a job as a library volunteer and discovers the library has a catalog of complaints—from a mischievous calico cat to the mysterious disappearance of various items that some of the staff are attributing to a ghost. Things only get worse when a dead body turns up in a parking lot. Now Helen is bound and determined to find the killer as well as the painting—before she’s taken out of circulation herself.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

E.V.: Two new books—one light, one dark. I’m returning to the dark side with a novel of psychological suspense, “Brain Storm,” featuring Death Investigator Angela Richman. At a crime scene, Death Investigators are in charge of the body and the police handle the rest of the investigation. I’ve just signed a two-book contract with Thomas & Mercer for the new Death Investigator series, which debuts in late summer, 2016. In May, I have a new Dead-End Job mystery, “The Art of Murder,” set at a whimsical South Florida museum.

“KILLER IN THE KITCHEN” by Donald Bain and Jessica Fletcher (NAL: April 2015): Jessica may not know everything about food, but she knows what she likes—and she definitely likes the Leg & Claw restaurant. Opened last summer by young couple Brad and Marcie, the Leg & Claw is their dream come true, combining Marcie’s sunny personality with Brad’s deft hand in the kitchen. But now their dream is turning into a nightmare.

Gerard “Pepe” Lebeouf is a renowned New York City chef who has a summer home in Cabot Cove. And now he’s decided to open two new restaurants in Cabot Cove—in an old warehouse right next to the Leg & Claw.

As Lebeouf and his crew renovate the warehouse, the people of Cabot Cove slowly come to the realization that the town’s newest celebrity may be more trouble than he’s worth. His “assistants” are little more than thugs, and the haughty Lebeouf is nowhere near as charming as he seems—leading to a nasty confrontation with Brad.

So when Lebeouf is found dead with a knife planted in his chest, Brad naturally becomes suspect number one. But plenty of others had a motive to kill Pepe, and it’s up to Jessica to uncover who really added a murder to the menu.
“THE FAITHFUL” by S.M. Freedman (Thomas & Mercer: September 2015): FBI agent Josh Metcalf believes he has uncovered a decades-long conspiracy involving missing children. His obsession has led him to compile hundreds of cases. All involve children rumored to have psychic abilities—and all have no witnesses, no leads, and no resolution.

Meanwhile, Rowan Wilson, a meteorite hunter for NASA’s Spaceguard Program, is losing her grip on the past. Memories of the childhood she thought she’d had are vanishing, and dark recollections of kidnappings, mind control, and an isolated mountain ranch are taking their place.

When Rowan’s shadowed past converges with Josh’s research, they uncover a deadly plot to reshape humanity. With the world’s survival dependent on stopping a vast network of conspirators, can they decipher—and expose—the truth in time?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

S.M. Freedman (S.M.F.): I once heard writing a first draft described as creating word vomit, and it really stuck with me. My biggest struggle in writing is the desire to correct and edit as I go, instead of just letting that first draft be written in a glorious explosion of stink. So that would be my message: Let your words be like vomit. You can clean them up later.

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

S.M.F.: I’m more used to being the fan than having fans. Six months before “The Faithful” was published, I dragged my young son to a book signing for an author I admired. As we reached the table, book held out for signing, my son decided he needed to explain that it was HIS mom who was the famous author. My spluttering explanations only spurred my son to repeat this assertion with more force, then turn to ask me why my face was so red.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

S.M.F.: The sequel to “The Faithful” will be published in 2016. It is the dark-hearted middle child of the trilogy. I’m currently taking a small break from the series and writing a hard-boiled detective mystery set in Palm Springs, in which a family of four goes missing. I expect to spend part of the coming year working on that, before getting back to the final book in The Faithful trilogy.

“THE RED QUEEN” by Victoria Aveyard (HarperTeen: February 2015): Mare Barrow’s world is divided by blood—those with common Red blood serve the Silver-blooded elite, who are gifted with superhuman abilities. Mare is a Red, scraping by as a thief in a poor, rural village, until a twist of fate throws her in front of the Silver court. Before the king, princes, and all the nobles, she discovers she has an ability of her own.

To cover up this impossibility, the king forces her to play the role of a lost Silver princess and betroths her to one of his own sons. As Mare is drawn further into the Silver world, she risks everything and uses her new position to help the Scarlet Guard—a growing Red rebellion—even as her heart tugs her in an impossible direction. One wrong move can lead to her death, but in the dangerous game she plays, the only certainty is betrayal.

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

Victoria Aveyard (V.A.): Three way tie between JRR Tolkien, George RR Martin, and JK Rowling.

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

V.A.: The answer is always going to be Darth Vader. One of the best to ever exist. Favorite fictional hero? I want to say Princess
Leia. But just so my answers aren't entirely Star Wars, I've always loved Indiana Jones.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

V.A.: “Glass Sword,” the continuation of the Red Queen series, releases on February 9th! I'm equal parts nervous and excited for readers to find out what happens next to Mare Barrow. •

“IN A DARK, DARK WOOD” by Ruth Ware (Gallery/Scout Press: August 2015): What should be a cozy and fun-filled weekend deep in the English countryside, takes a sinister turn in Ruth Ware’s suspenseful, compulsive, and darkly twisted psychological thriller.

Leonora, known to some as Lee and others as Nora, is a reclusive crime writer, unwilling to leave her “nest” of an apartment unless it is absolutely necessary. When a friend she hasn't seen or spoken to in years unexpectedly invites Nora (Lee?) to a weekend away in an eerie glass house deep in the English countryside, she reluctantly agrees to make the trip. Forty-eight hours later, she wakes up in a hospital bed injured but alive, with the knowledge that someone is dead. Wondering not “what happened?” but “what have I done?”, Nora (Lee?) tries to piece together the events of the past weekend. Working to uncover secrets, reveal motives, and find answers, Nora (Lee?) must revisit parts of herself that she would much rather leave buried where they belong: in the past.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

Ruth Ware (R.W.): Wow, this is hard. How far in the future is this time capsule going to be opened? Are there still paper books? Are people still reading? Is all story-telling taking place in a virtual reality sphere, or via a psychic mind-meld? I guess regardless of the answers to all those questions, people have been telling stories in one form or another since they could grunt, so I’m sure we’ll still be doing it, in which case my perennial advice would probably apply—keep reading (or enjoying your psychic mind-meld), keep writing, and pay attention to what makes you excited, what makes you annoyed, and what makes you jealous you didn’t write it first.

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

R.W.: I think my favourite crime villain is probably Moriarty, because he’s such a masterpiece of smoke and mirrors—you scarcely see him, but Conan Doyle builds up this brilliant atmosphere of suspense before he even makes an appearance. Also, I can’t think of him without imagining TS Eliot’s Macavity the Mystery Cat (he’s called the Hidden Paw) which is one of my favourite poems and always makes me smile. Favourite hero/heroine is a hard one as there are so many candidates... but assuming we’re talking crime, I’m very fond of Dorothy L. Sayer’s Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

R.W.: I have a new book coming out summer 2016. It’s called “The Woman in Cabin 10” and it’s about a murder on a cruise... •

“THE GATES OF EVANGELINE” by Hester Young (G.P. Putnam’s Sons: September 2015): When New York journalist and recently bereaved mother Charlotte “Charlie” Cates begins to experience vivid dreams about children in danger, she's sure that she's lost her mind. Yet these are not the nightmares of a grieving parent. They are warnings that will help Charlie and the children she sees, if only she can make sense of them.

After a little boy in a boat appears in Charlie’s dreams asking for her help, she finds herself entangled in a world-famous thirty-year-old missing-child case that has never ceased to haunt Louisiana’s prestigious Deveau family. Armed with an invitation to Evangeline, the family’s sprawling estate, Charlie heads south, where new friendships and an unlikely romance with the estate’s landscape architect—the warm and handsome Noah Palmer—begin to heal her grief-stricken heart. But as she uncovers long-buried secrets of love, money, betrayal, and murder, the facts begin to implicate those she most wants to trust—and her visions reveal an evil closer than she could have imagined.

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

Hester Young (H.Y.): I get some really wonderful emails from fans, and they are much appreciated. I loved hearing that my novel had somehow found its way to a woman living on a dairy farm in New Zealand. And I just about fell off my chair when I received a note from a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist whose work I’d read in college. Apparently, my book made her cry.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

H.Y.: My favorite author these days is Tana French. She is that rare writer who produces well-crafted suspense novels relatively quickly, and the quality of her prose never seems to suffer. If anything, her last two novels have gotten even better.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

H.Y.: “The Gates of Evangeline” was the first in a trilogy. The second book in the series will be coming out in 2016. •

SuspenseMagazine.com
“HOVER” by Anne A. Wilson (Forge Books: June 2015): Helicopter pilot Lt. Sara Denning joins a Navy battle group with little fanfare—and that’s just the way she likes it. After her brother Ian’s tragic death, her career path seemed obvious: step into his shoes and enter the Naval Academy, despite her fear of water. Sara’s philosophy is simple—blend in, be competent, and above all, never do anything to stand out as a woman in a man’s world.

Somewhere along the way, Sara lost herself—her feminine, easygoing soul is now buried under so many defensive layers, she can’t reach it anymore.

When she meets strong, self-assured Lt. Eric Marxen, her defenses start to falter. Eric coordinates flight operations for a Navy SEAL team that requests Sara as the exclusive pilot. This blatant show of favoritism causes conflict with the other pilots; Sara’s sexist boss seems intent on making her life miserable, and her roommate and best friend, the only other woman on the ship, is avoiding her. It doesn’t help that her interactions with Eric leave her reeling.

The endgame of the SEALs’ mission is so secret, even Sara doesn’t know the reason behind her mandated participation. Soon, though, the training missions become real, and Sara must overcome her fears before they plunge her into danger. When Sara’s life is on the line, can she find her true self again and follow the orders of her heart before it is too late?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Anne Wilson (A.W.): “All the Light We Cannot See” by Anthony Doerr. Oh, those beautiful words! Just exquisite. I savored every sentence.

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

A.W.: It means a great deal, especially since this is the first time “Hover” has ever been recognized in a “Best of” list of any kind. For a debut author, this is beyond thrilling. And seeing my name grouped with so many accomplished writers? Just...wow.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

A.W.: My second novel, “Clear to Lift,” will release in July. It’s a love story about a female search and rescue helicopter pilot in California’s Sierra Nevada. I used my experience flying high altitude, technical mountain rescue in the Navy to write this one.


Mariana Rodriguez is the eldest daughter of a Colombian drug lord. Growing up in Villanueva, Colombia, she has never wanted for anything. Private schools, a lavish lifestyle, and the safety of the Cartel that her father works for.

At nineteen, she’s got her entire life mapped out, and what a good life it’s going to be: graduate from college, move to America, and finally be free from the stifling grip of the Cartel.

Only, her father messes up. A shipment of cocaine—a very large, very valuable shipment—is seized by the authorities whilst under his care and he becomes liable for the debt. Half a million dollars’ worth of cocaine. Half a million dollars he does not have.
But he has a daughter, a very smart one, a daughter who would give up her very existence and offer herself as payment for her father's sins, to ensure her family survives.

But falling in love with the man who owns her isn't part of the plan...

“DEVOTED IN DEATH” by J.D. Robb (G.P. Putnam's Sons: September 2015): When Lieutenant Eve Dallas examines a body in a downtown Manhattan alleyway, the victim's injuries are so extensive that she almost misses the clue. Carved into the skin is the shape of a heart—and initials inside reading E and D...

Ella-Loo and her boyfriend, Darryl, had been separated while Darryl was a guest of the state of Oklahoma, and now that his sentence has been served they don't ever intend to part again. Ella-Loo's got dreams. And Darryl believes there are better ways to achieve your dreams than working for them. So they hit the road, and when their car breaks down in Arkansas, they make plans to take someone else's. Then things get messy and they wind up killing someone—an experience that stokes a fierce, wild desire in Ella-Loo. A desire for Darryl. And a desire to kill again.

As they cross state lines on their way to New York to find the life they think they deserve, they will leave a trail of evil behind them. But now they've landed in the jurisdiction of Lieutenant Dallas and her team at the New York Police and Security Department. And with her husband, Roarke, at her side, she has every intention of hunting them down and giving them what they truly deserve...

“BEYOND LIMITS” by Laura Griffin (Pocket Books: January 2015): FBI agent Elizabeth LeBlanc is still caught in the aftermath of her last big case when she runs into the one man from her past who is sure to rock her equilibrium even more. Navy SEAL Derek Vaughn is back home from a harrowing rescue mission in which he found evidence of a secret terror cell on US soil. Elizabeth knows he'll do anything to unravel the plot—including seducing her for information. And despite the risks involved, she's tempted to let him. Together with the forensics experts at the Delphi Center, Derek and Elizabeth are closing in on the truth, but it may not be fast enough to avert a devastating attack…

Laura Griffin (L.G.): I believe there is something fundamentally timeless about the way people crave stories. No matter what technology people are using to read stories in the future, I believe it will always be the writer's job to intrigue people, to spark curiosity, to pose questions. So what I would say to “future” aspiring writers is the same as what I say to the aspiring writers I meet today: Believe in what you do, believe in your words. If you are determined to be an author, then develop a thick skin and don’t give up!

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

L.G.: “Beyond Limits” would be fun to see on the big screen. That story opens with a harrowing SEAL rescue mission overseas, and the hero uncovers clues to a terrorist plot on American soil. He comes home determined to thwart the attack. As for a leading actor... It would definitely be an action role, so Chris Hemsworth or Chris Pratt would be a good fit.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

L.G.: It’s an exciting year coming up with book #10 in the Tracers series in May! “Deep Dark” is the story of a white-hat hacker who teams up with an Austin police detective to track down a serial killer who is using the Internet to target women. Also in 2016, I’m kicking off a new digital series featuring an elite team of SEALs. The first book in the new series, “At the Edge,” comes out in March.

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

L.G.: It’s such an honor! I’m thrilled to see “Beyond Limits” chosen, especially because it features some of my favorite characters in the Tracers series. You put your heart and soul into a book and it is so gratifying when it connects with readers.
“THE LIBRARY AT MOUNT CHAR” by Scott Hawkins (Crown: June 2015): Carolyn's not so different from the other people around her. She likes guacamole and cigarettes and steak. She knows how to use a phone. Clothes are a bit tricky, but everyone says nice things about her outfit with the Christmas sweater over the gold bicycle shorts.

After all, she was a normal American herself once.

That was a long time ago, of course. Before her parents died. Before she and the others were taken in by the man they called Father.

In the years since then, Carolyn hasn't had a chance to get out much. Instead, she and her adopted siblings have been raised according to Father's ancient customs. They've studied the books in his Library and learned some of the secrets of his power. And sometimes, they've wondered if their cruel tutor might secretly be God.

Now, Father is missing—perhaps even dead—and the Library that holds his secrets stands unguarded. And with it, control over all of creation.

As Carolyn gathers the tools she needs for the battle to come, fierce competitors for this prize align against her, all of them with powers that far exceed her own.

But Carolyn has accounted for this.

And Carolyn has a plan.

The only trouble is that in the war to make a new God, she's forgotten to protect the things that make her human.

“POSITIVE” by David Wellington (Harper Voyager: April 2015): Anyone can be positive...

The tattooed plus sign on Finnegan's hand marks him as a Positive. At any time, the zombie virus could explode in his body, turning him from a rational human into a ravenous monster. His only chance of a normal life is to survive the last two years of the potential incubation period. If he reaches his twenty-first birthday without an incident, he'll be cleared.

Until then, Finn must go to a special facility for Positives, segregated from society to keep the healthy population safe. But when the military caravan transporting him is attacked, Finn becomes separated. To make it to safety, he must embark on a perilous cross-country journey across an America transformed—a dark and dangerous land populated with heroes, villains, madmen, and hordes of zombies. And though the zombies are everywhere, Finn discovers that the real danger may be his fellow humans.


David Wellington (D.W.): I re-read “The Once and Future King,” a book I read as a child and which has stuck with me all through my life. Though I was surprised to realize how little of it I actually understood back then. It's a deeply complex book, more a series of meditations on politics and love and growing up and getting old than an actual reworking of the Arthur legend, and you really need to dig into it. It's one of those books everybody should read, say once every twenty years, to see how you have changed in the way your reaction to it matures.
S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

D.W.: There would have to be a list, of course. Terry Pratchett and Iain Banks would both be on it—two authors we recently lost, and the world is worse for it. I also reread all the Sherlock Holmes stories this year, and realized just what a master Arthur Conan Doyle was, how he could get across so much in a relatively small number of pages. For authors still working today, I'm a huge fan of Jonathan Howard and Felix Gilman, who together are building a whole new kind of fantasy.

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

D.W.: It's an immense honor. The kind of books I write don't tend to receive a lot of awards—I write pulpy, action-heavy stuff. “Positive” was something different, though. It was the book where I felt like I'd finally grown up a little, and learned how to write a book that was about something, that really had a heart, while still being fun to read. I'm very proud of the book, and to get this kind of recognition is wonderful. Proof that I actually achieved something good. Which I think, if we're honest, is what most authors are looking for—someone to tell them they wrote a good story. So this feels absolutely wonderful.

“SAINT ODD” by Dean Koontz (Bantam: January 2015): Odd Thomas is back where it all started...because the time has come to finish it. Since he left his simple life in the small town of Pico Mundo, California, his journey has taken him to places strange and wonderful, mysterious and terrifying. Across the land, in the company of mortals and spirits alike, he has known kindness and cruelty, felt love and loss, saved lives and taken them—as he's borne witness to humanity’s greatest good and darkest evil. Again and again, he has gone where he must and done what he had to do—for better or worse—with his courage and devotion sorely tested, and his soul forever changed. Every triumph has been hard won. Each sacrifice has taken its toll.

Now, whatever destiny drives him has finally steered his steps home, where those he cares for most surround him, the memory of his tragically lost true love haunts him, and one last challenge—vast and dreadful—awaits him. For Odd Thomas, born to serve a purpose far greater than himself, the wandering is done. Only the reckoning remains.

“THE LAST AMERICAN VAMPIRE” by Seth Grahame-Smith (Grand Central Publishing: January 2015): In Reconstruction-era America, vampire Henry Sturges is searching for renewed purpose in the wake of his friend Abraham Lincoln's shocking death. Henry's will be an expansive journey that first sends him to England for an unexpected encounter with Jack the Ripper, then to New York City for the birth of a new American century, the dawn of the electric era of Tesla and Edison, and the blazing disaster of the 1937 Hindenburg crash.

Along the way, Henry goes on the road in a Kerouac-influenced trip as Seth Grahame-Smith ingeniously weaves vampire history through Russia's October Revolution, the First and Second World Wars, and the JFK assassination.

SuspenseMagazine.com
“WHAT WE LEFT BEHIND” Z is for Zombie Book 1 by Peter Cawdron (Kindle Press: January 2015): Hazel is a regular teenager growing up in an irregular world overrun with zombies. She likes music, perfume, freshly baked muffins, and playing her Xbox—everything that no longer exists in the apocalypse.

Raised in the safety of a commune, Hazel rarely sees Zee anymore, except on those occasions when the soldiers demonstrate the importance of a headshot to the kids.

To her horror, circumstances beyond her control lead her outside the barbed wire fence and into a zombie-infested town.

“BAD MEDICINE” by Caroline Fardig (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: June 2015): Lizzie Hart is overjoyed that six whole months have passed without a single murder in the sleepy town of Liberty. It’s also been six months since Blake Morgan heartlessly dumped her, but she’s determined to get over him. She’s slimmed down, ready to party, and injury-free, except for a little nagging pain in her ankle. She’s also very single, but her friends are doing everything in their power to fix that—including setting her up on one disastrous blind date after another.

Lizzie’s reprieve is short-lived when an old friend of hers is found dead from an apparent drug overdose. She wants to write it off as bad behavior after having seen the guy cheating on his wife with the new chiropractor in town. However, when she sees that same chiropractor playing doctor with another man who ends up dead, she worries there could be murder afoot.

Doing her best to stay on the right side of the law this time, Lizzie decides to go straight to the police with her suspicions. Unfortunately, the only cop available to speak with her is the stern, yet hot, new detective who has already given her a traffic ticket and a reprimand for public intoxication. Not surprisingly, he brushes her off, leaving her no choice but to begin snooping on her own. Lizzie soon learns she’s going to need help to get to the bottom of this mystery, but her best partner in crime solving, Blake, has turned into her worst enemy.

Can Lizzie and Blake find a way to work together to catch the killer…or will they kill each other first?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Caroline Fardig (C.F.): “Zombie, Ohio” by Scott Kenemore. Even though horror isn’t generally my thing, I’m all about Halloween, and during October I like to read scary books and watch scary movies. The book was published a few years ago, but it just came onto my radar this year. I absolutely loved it. I totally fell for the main character, Peter Mellor, and I rooted for him even when he was eating someone’s brains. It was a fun read with the perfect mix of humor, horror, and heart (even though it was about zombies).
S. MAG.: Who's your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?

C.F.: I always love a good villain. The best villains for me are the ones you don't see coming; the ones who twist the plot so much it makes your head spin. I have a couple of favorites. First, Amy Dunne of Gillian Flynn's “Gone Girl.” You worried that something bad had happened to the poor woman, then you were angry she pulled the disappearing act, then you felt for her when her plan started to unravel, and by the end you wanted to kill her yourself. A close second is Tyler Durden from Chuck Palahniuk's “Fight Club.” That guy is a nutcase, and when you find out he and the Narrator are two sides of the same coin, it only makes the story better and more twisted.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?


“SPLIT SECOND” by Douglas E. Richards (Paragon Press: September 2015): What if you found a way to send something back in time? But not millions of years back, to the age of the dinosaur. Not even a minute back. What if you could only send something back a fraction of a second? Would this be of any use? You wouldn’t have nearly enough time to right a wrong, change an event, or win a lottery.

Nathan Wexler is a brilliant physicist who thinks he’s found a way to send matter a split second back into the past. But before he can even confirm his findings, he and his wife-to-be, Jenna Morrison, find themselves in a battle for their very lives. Because while time travel to an instant earlier seems useless, Jenna comes to learn that no capability in history has ever been more profound or far-reaching.

Now, as Jenna fights to defeat the powerful forces arrayed against her, nothing less than the fate of humanity hangs in the balance...

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

Douglas E. Richards (D.E.R.): I’m not sure I have a favorite author right now, but as a kid my favorite was Isaac Asimov, hands down. I read the “Foundation Trilogy” when I was ten, and I never looked back. Since the good doctor wrote more than five hundred books, he certainly kept me busy.

I loved Asimov’s science fiction and his science fact. He was the first author I encountered who cared deeply about getting the science right. He was brilliant. His writing was unadorned, his plot twists elaborate, and the sheer scope and range of his ideas unequaled.

But the most amazing thing about Asimov is that he was able to be so prolific—using a typewriter. Impossible, I tell you. I can state with absolute certainty that I could never have been an author before the age of word processing. Not only could I not have completed a single novel, I doubt I could have completed a single chapter.

For those of you not as ancient as I am, who never experienced the horrors of the typewriter, allow me to explain. This was a device that launched mechanical arms, with steel letters at their ends, upward until they slammed into a ribbon of ink and a piece of paper. If you wanted to change the location of a paragraph you had typed, rework a sentence multiple times to get it just right, or even change a single word, you could forget about it. When composing a paper for school, mistyping a single letter could spell disaster. If you did happen to hit the wrong key, your only option was to get a tiny glass bottle of white paint, brush over the offending mark, and then try to line up the typewriter so the correct letter could be placed on the dried white paint. Good luck with that. Most often, a single mistake would force you to retype the entire page. Barbaric, right?

And spelling was my Achilles’ heel. For every ten minutes of writing, I’d have to spend twenty minutes leafing through a dictionary. So if you ask me, anyone able to write an entire book on a typewriter, let alone five hundred books, was more of a god than a man. And humanity’s greatest invention wasn’t the wheel, or even fire. Without question, mankind’s greatest invention was the word processor and the computerized spell-checker, to which I owe my career.

S. MAG.: What does having your book chosen as a “Best of” by Suspense Magazine mean to you?
D.E.R.: It's a great honor to be recognized by a single reader, let alone have one of my novels selected as a “Best of” by a popular magazine. Anyone who has read “Split Second” or my novel, “Mind’s Eye,” knows my origin story. I was a biotech executive who put a novel on Amazon in the hope that five or ten people might read it (since I worked so hard to write it), and I hit the lottery. It went viral and became a New York Times bestseller. I reflect on just how lucky I am every day, and I'm grateful for every single person who reads one of my novels. I've been fortunate enough to receive numerous kind emails and Facebook posts from readers who appreciate my work. These readers, and recognition such as that provided by Suspense Magazine, really keep me going when the writing just isn't clicking, and I'm fantasizing about throwing my computer through the window. :)

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

D.E.R.: Basically more of the same. I’m working on a stand-alone technothriller, and I’m considering writing a sequel to “Split Second” after that. As with all of my novels, my goal will be to provide plenty of food for thought, and to blend ethics, philosophy, and accurate science into fast-paced thrillers with plenty of twists and turns. As before, the plots of my novels in 2016 will be centered on game-changing scientific advances that are just around the corner, focusing on the impact of these advances, both good and bad, and their potential to elevate humanity, or bring it to its knees. •

“MEANWHILE, BACK IN DEADWOOD” Deadwood Humorous Mystery Book 6 by Ann Charles (Ann Charles: August 2015): Meanwhile, Back in Deadwood...the mystery and mayhem continue. Between the butchered body parts, creepy killers, dogged detectives, ghoulish ghosts, and ever-present TV cameras, Violet Parker’s purple boots are itching to skedaddle.

But there is no escaping another murder investigation or her new deadly reputation. Not even if both risk the lives of those she loves most.

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

Ann Charles (A.C.): I am a lucky author. When I think back over the last five years since I published the first book in my Deadwood Mystery series, I have many memorable fan experiences that make me smile. Some of my readers drive hundreds of miles just to say “Hi” in person when I do book signings, which humbles me clear to my toes. Then there are all of the fun and thoughtful gifts they have sent me over the years, including several chicken-related items that play on a chicken named Elvis in my Deadwood series. Many of my fans have become online friends thanks to the interaction opportunities of social media, and I feel fortunate to get to share in a part of their lives.

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

A.C.: One of my current favorite fictional villains is Boyd Crowder from the series Justified. I really don’t want Raylan Givens to ever succeed in taking Boyd down for good.

As for fictional heroines, I’m a huge fan of Melissa McCarthy in The Heat and Spy. I love heroines (and heroes) who make me laugh while kicking butt. The characters Valentine and Earl in Tremors are still two of my all-time favorite heroes.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

A.C.: First, in late January we’ll be heading down to Jackrabbit Junction, Arizona, for more fun with the notorious Morgan sisters in the 4th book of my Jackrabbit Junction Mystery series titled, “The Rowdy Coyote Rumble.” Then, come summer we’ll head back to Deadwood for the 7th book in my Deadwood Mystery series, titled “TBA.” I would love to include the 2nd book in my Dig Site Mystery series at the end of 2016, but we’ll see if my fingers and brain can get along enough to pull off three full-length novels in one year. •
“THE GIRL FROM KRAKOW” by Alex Rosenberg (Lake Union Publishing; September 2015): It’s 1935. Rita Feuerstahl comes to the university in Krakow intent on enjoying her freedom. But life has other things in store—marriage, a love affair, a child, all in the shadows of the oncoming war. When the war arrives, Rita is armed with a secret so enormous that it could cost the Allies everything, even as it gives her the will to live. She must find a way both to keep her secret and to survive amid the chaos of Europe at war. Living by her wits among the Germans as their conquests turn to defeat, she seeks a way to prevent the inevitable doom of Nazism from making her one of its last victims. Can her passion and resolve outlast the most powerful evil that Europe has ever seen?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Alex Rosenberg (A.R.): This summer I reread Alan Furst’s “Night Soldiers” for the third time. I return to it every five years or so, noticing the subtle hints to how things will turn out that Furst lays down early, only to pick up again sometimes a decade later in his story, or even in another book about a different character.

S. MAG.: If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

A.R.: You were right not to give up working on that novel, but it still needed one more round of revising before you let it go.

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

A.R.: Not exactly a fan experience, but more than once a long lost friend has found me by encountering a book of mine and realizing we knew each other in a former life.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

A.R.: I’m going to take that question literally. More than one reader of “The Girl From Krakow” has suggested it would make a great screenplay. I think a mini-series would be needed to do it justice, of course.

Who’d play Rita? If I had a time machine it might be Lauren Bacall. Lacking one I’d say Keira Knightley with her hair died a lighter color. The character needs a haunted look.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

A.R.: For literary greatness combined with world changing impact, I’d have to go with Solzhenitsyn. “The Cancer Ward” is a novel that will change your life. But every few years I find myself waiting for Alan Furst’s next book. So he’s probably my favorite.

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

A.R.: I must have spent an hour, wandering through my fictional Hall of Fame, until I realized that it’s George Smiley, the unlikely hero of John le Carré’s counterespionage classic, “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy” and its successors.

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

A.R.: I wanted to write a serious novel that will leave people thinking and maybe arguing. But I knew that my first job was to get reader’s attention and hold it through a narrative that lasts a decade. Having “The Girl From Krakow” chosen by Suspense Magazine as “Best of 2015” means I may have managed to do that.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

A.R.: I have finished a new book, tentatively titled “Autumn in Oxford, Winter in Brixton.” It’s a mystery set in Britain in the late 1950s, about an American history professor named Tom Wrought, who comes to Oxford where he is framed for murder.
His lover and his (female) solicitor have to figure out whether it was the American FBI, the Soviet KGB, or the British MI5 who framed him. To do that they have to learn a great deal about Tom's past; back through the war to the late 1930s. So it's a historical novel as well as a mystery.

“THE LAST SUMMER AT CHELSEA BEACH” by Pam Jenoff (MIRA: August 2015): Summer 1941

Young Adelia Montforte flees fascist Italy for America, where she is whisked away to the shore by her well-meaning aunt and uncle. Here, she meets and falls for Charlie Connally, the eldest of the four Irish-Catholic boys next door. But all hopes for a future together are soon throttled by the war and a tragedy that hits much closer to home.

Grief-stricken, Addie flees—first to Washington and then to war-torn London—and finds a position at a prestigious newspaper, as well as a chance to redeem lost time, lost family…and lost love. But the past always nips at her heels, demanding to be reckoned with. And in a final, fateful choice, Addie discovers that the way home may be a path she never suspected.


Pam Jenoff (P.J.): “Pretty Baby” by Mary Kubica was awesome. I also loved “My Very Best Friend” by Cathy Lamb and “The Girl from Krakow” by Alex Rosenberg.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

P.J.: I would love to see “The Last Summer at Chelsea Beach” made into a movie. I’m not sure if he could play one of the guys in it, but I’m desperate to get it into Bradley Cooper’s hands—I think it would be perfect for him to produce!

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

P.J.: In 2016, I will be getting ready for the release of my next book in February 2017. The working title is “The Aerialist,” and it is inspired by two actual stories. It tells of a girl who rescues an unknown infant from a train headed for a concentration camp and finds shelter with a circus that is sheltering Jews. A bit longer to wait but stay tuned!

“THE ALCHEMIST’S DAUGHTER” by Mary Lawrence (Kensington: April 2015): In the year 1543, of King Henry VIII’s turbulent reign, the daughter of a notorious alchemist finds herself suspected of cold-blooded murder…Bianca Goddard employs her knowledge of herbs and medicinal plants to concoct remedies for the disease-riddled poor in London’s squalid Southwark slum. But when her friend Jolyn comes to her complaining of severe stomach pains, Bianca’s prescription seems to kill her on the spot. Recovering from her shock, Bianca suspects Jolyn may have been poisoned before coming to her—but the local constable is not so easily convinced.

To clear her name and keep her neck free of the gallows, Bianca must apply her knowledge of the healing arts to deduce exactly how her friend was murdered and by whom—before she, herself, falls victim to a similar fate…

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

Mary Lawrence (M.L.): It gives my title credibility. “The Alchemist’s Daughter” has been snubbed for review by trade journals, newspapers, and ignored by over 90% of the libraries in my home state of Maine. It took over 20 years of effort to finally get published. Suspense Magazine’s “Best of” is my drop the mic moment.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

M.L.: I’m being self-serving here, but I think “The Alchemist’s Daughter” is a great possibility. Quasi-apocalyptic worlds with strong characters are popular right now. Pair that with the recent increased interest in the 1500s and Tudor England. People were under constant threat from plague, the sweating sickness, and epidemics that they had no understanding of. They also had to navigate the policies of a brutal government where any misstep could result in public humiliation and a nasty end. As for who would play Bianca—I’m impressed with Tatiana Maslany of Orphan Black.

“GIRL WAITS WITH GUN” by Amy Stewart (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: September 2015): Constance Kopp doesn’t quite fit the mold. She towers over most men, has no interest in marriage or domestic affairs, and has been isolated from the world since a family secret sent her and her sisters into hiding fifteen years ago. One day a belligerent and powerful silk factory owner runs down their buggy, and a dispute over damages turns into a war of bricks, bullets, and threats as he unleashes his gang on their family farm. When the sheriff enlists her help in convicting the men, Constance is forced to confront her past and defend her family—and she does it in a way that few women of 1914 would have dared.
“JEWISH NOIR” Contemporary Tales of Crime and Other Dark Deeds Edited by Kenneth Wishnia with Contributor Jedidiah Ayres (PM Press: November 2015): This anthology includes the work of numerous authors, such as Marge Piercy, Harlan Ellison, S. J. Rozan, Nancy Richler, Moe Prager (Reed Farrel Coleman), Wendy Hornsby, Charles Ardai, and Kenneth Wishnia. The stories explore such issues as the Holocaust and its long-term effects on subsequent generations, anti-Semitism in the mid- and late-20th-century United States, and the dark side of the Diaspora (e.g., the decline of revolutionary fervor, the passing of generations, the Golden Ghetto, etc.). The stories in this collection include, Trajectories, Marge Piercy’s story of the divergent paths taken by two young men from the slums of Cleveland and Detroit in a rapidly changing post-WWII society; Some You Lose, Nancy Richler’s empathetic exploration of the emotional and psychological challenges of trying to sum up a man’s life in a eulogy; and Yahrzeit Candle, Stephen Jay Schwartz’s take on the subtle horrors of the inevitable passing of time. These works include many “teachable moments” about the history of prejudice, the contradictions of ethnic identity, and assimilation into American society and culture.

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

Jedidiah Ayres (J.A.): I signed an autograph for somebody at the bar at Bouchercon who thought I was Johnny Shaw. I might have told him I was Johnny Shaw hoping he’d buy me a drink. It might have been Johnny Shaw.

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

J.A.: Massimo Carlotto’s Giorgio Pellegrini is my current favorite series character. Villain for sure, but such an electrifyingly, amoral protagonist—he makes Parker seem like a sentimental softie.

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

Kenneth Wishnia (K.W.): It’s great. It means we’re getting early attention, which bodes well for the upcoming awards nomination season.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

K.W.: We will use the success of “Jewish Noir” to promote the vast Jewish conspiracy to take over global banking and media.

“ELMORE LEONARD: FOUR NOVELS OF THE 1980s” by Elmore Leonard and Edited by Gregg Sutter (Library of America: September 2015): It was during the 1980s that Elmore Leonard came into his own as the most popular and critically acclaimed crime writer in America. The four novels collected here show him at the top of his form, each in its own distinct way: City Primeval is a modern-day Western pitched on the border between law and lawlessness, with Detroit as the frontier; LaBrava, set in Miami, orchestrates a complex scheme involving a long-forgotten film noir actress and an ex-Secret Service man turned photographer; Glitz plunges
into the seedy world of Atlantic City casinos and into the twisted mind of the unforgettable Teddy Magyk, one of Leonard's most indelible bad guys; and *Freaky Deaky* sets in motion a tumultuous '60s flashback, laced with harsh and outlandish comic touches, as a pair of morally dubious veterans of Ann Arbor revolutionary politics try out some new scams.

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This is the first book about the Detection Club, the world’s most famous and most mysterious social network of crime writers. Drawing on years of in-depth research, it reveals the astonishing story of how members, such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers reinvented detective fiction.

Detective stories from the so-called “Golden Age” between the wars are often dismissed as cozily conventional. Nothing could be further from the truth: some explore forensic pathology and shocking serial murders, others delve into police brutality and miscarriages of justice; occasionally the innocent are hanged, or murderers get away scot-free. Their authors faced up to the slump and the rise of Hitler during years of economic misery and political upheaval, and wrote books agonizing over guilt and innocence, good and evil, and explored whether killing a fellow human being was ever justified. Though the stories included no graphic sex scenes, sexual passions of all kinds seethed just beneath the surface.

“The Golden Age of Murder” rewrites the story of crime fiction with unique authority, transforming our understanding of detective stories and the brilliant but tormented men and women who wrote them.

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

**Martin Edwards (M.E.):** When I was just coming up to my ninth birthday, my parents took me to an amazing event that received national publicity. An American man who had just retired from MGM bought a country house in a little village near where we lived, and held the village fete on the grounds of his house. To make it unforgettable, he arranged that the world film premiere would be shown in a marquee. This was Agatha Christie’s Murder Most Foul. He also wanted a celebrity to open the fete. An ambitious man, he approached Brigitte Bardot, who strangely enough wasn’t available! But Margaret Rutherford, who played Miss Marple, arrived in a helicopter and was greeted by thousands of people, including the young Martin Edwards. I loved the film, started reading Agatha Christie’s “The Murder at the Vicarage” that evening, and decided that one day I, too, would like to write a detective novel that entertained others as much as Christie entertained me.

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

**M.E.:** Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime, is a wonderful character. I’ve written several Sherlockian stories, collected in “The New Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes,” and most recently I’ve written a story about Moriarty for an anthology. Very different from my contemporary Lake District Mysteries featuring DCI Hannah Scarlett and Daniel Kind, but great fun.

**S. MAG.:** What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

**M.E.:** The paperbacks of “The Golden Age of Murder” and “The Dungeon House” (the latest Lake District Mystery) will appear in the first half of the year. Those are two books I’m really excited about. But that’s not all. The British Library will also be publishing two more collections of Golden Age short stories that I’ve edited, “Murder at the Manor” and “Serpents in Eden,” as part of their highly successful Crime Classics series. And I’ve contributed to “The Sinking Admiral” by the Detection Club, an august body of which, I’m delighted to say, I’ve just become President.

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**“TRIGGER WARNING”** Short Fictions and Disturbances by Neil Gaiman (William Morrow: February 2015): “Trigger Warning” explores the masks we all wear, and the people we are beneath them, to reveal our vulnerabilities and our truest selves. Here is a rich cornucopia of horror and ghost stories, science fiction and fairy tales, fabulism and poetry that explore the realm of experience and emotion. In Adventure Story—a thematic companion to *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*—Gaiman ponders death and the way people take their stories with them when they die. His social media experience *A Calendar of Tales* are short takes inspired by replies to fan tweets about the months of the year—stories of pirates and the March winds, an igloo made of books, and a Mother’s Day card that portends disturbances in the universe. Gaiman offers his own ingenious spin on Sherlock Holmes in his award-nominated mystery tale *The Case of Death and Honey*. And *Click-Clack the Rattlebag* explains the creaks and clatter we hear when we’re all alone in the darkness.
Falling Leaves, Warm Cider, and the Perfect Suspenseful Read...

"Perfectly relaxing and readable."
—Kirkus Reviews

"In-depth historical research and rich details make the story come alive. Tantalizing."
—RT Book Reviews, 4.5 Stars, Top Pick

"You’ll flip for this new series. A tasty mystery with a side of scenic country charm."
—Leslie Budewitz

"Like a nuclear reactor, this story heats up fast!"
—Anderson Harp

“A chilling, suspenseful read... will have readers guessing until the very end."
—RT Book Reviews, 4 Stars

The Lady of Ashes Mystery Series
The Witch City Mystery Series
The Country Store Mystery Series
The Morgans of Nashville Series
“SHUTTER” by Courtney Alameda (Feiwel & Friends: February 2015): Micheline Helsing is a tetrachromat—a girl who sees the auras of the undead in a prismatic spectrum. As one of the last descendants of the Van Helsing lineage, she has trained since childhood to destroy monsters both corporeal and spiritual: the corporeal undead go down by the bullet, the spiritual undead by the lens. With an analog SLR camera as her best weapon, Micheline exorcises ghosts by capturing their spiritual energy on film. She’s aided by her crew: Oliver, a techno-whiz and the boy who developed her camera’s technology; Jude, who can predict death; and Ryder, the boy Micheline has known and loved forever.

When a routine ghost hunt goes awry, Micheline and the boys are infected with a curse known as a soulchain. As the ghostly chains spread through their bodies, Micheline learns that if she doesn’t exorcise her entity in seven days or less, she and her friends will die. Now pursued as a renegade agent by her monster-hunting father, Leonard Helsing, she must track and destroy an entity more powerful than anything she’s faced before...or die trying.

Lock, stock, and lens, she’s in for one hell of a week.

“AN EMBER IN THE ASHES” by Sabaa Tahir (Razorbill: April 2015): Laia is a slave. Elias is a soldier. Neither is free.

Under the Martial Empire, defiance is met with death. Those who do not vow their blood and bodies to the Emperor risk the execution of their loved ones and the destruction of all they hold dear.

It is in this brutal world, inspired by ancient Rome, that Laia lives with her grandparents and older brother. The family ekes out an existence in the Empire’s impoverished backstreets. They do not challenge the Empire. They’ve seen what happens to those who do.

But when Laia’s brother is arrested for treason, Laia is forced to make a decision. In exchange for help from rebels who promise to rescue her brother, she will risk her life to spy for them from within the Empire’s greatest military academy.

There, Laia meets Elias, the school’s finest soldier—and secretly, its most unwilling. Elias wants only to be free of the tyranny he’s being trained to enforce. He and Laia will soon realize that their destinies are intertwined—and that their choices will change the fate of the Empire itself.

“A Fuzzy Mud” by Louis Sachar (Delacorte Books for Young Readers: August 2015): Be careful. Your next step may be your last.

Fifth grader Tamaya Dhillwaddi, and seventh grader Marshall Walsh, have been walking to and from Woodridge Academy together since elementary school. But their routine is disrupted when bully Chad Hilligas challenges Marshall to a fight. To avoid the conflict, Marshall takes a shortcut home through the off-limits woods. Tamaya, unaware of the reason for the detour, reluctantly follows. They soon get lost. And then they find trouble. Bigger trouble than anyone could ever have imagined.

In the days and weeks that follow, the authorities and the U.S. Senate become involved, and what they uncover might affect the future of the world.
“REPEAT OFFENDER” by Bradley Nickell (WildBlue Press: April 2015): Millions in stolen property, revolting sex crimes and murder-for-hire were all in the mix for a Las Vegas police detective as he toiled to take Sin City’s most prolific criminal off the streets for good.

Las Vegas Police Detective Bradley Nickell brings you the inside scoop on the investigation of the most prolific repeat offender Las Vegas has ever known.

Daimon Monroe looked like an average guy raising a family with his diffident schoolteacher girlfriend. But just below the surface, you’ll learn he was an accomplished thief with an uncontrollable lust for excess. His criminal mind had no bounds—he was capable of anything given the proper circumstances.

You will be revolted by Monroe’s amassed wealth through thievery, his plot to kill Detective Nickell, a judge and a prosecutor, and the physical and sexual abuse to which Monroe subjected his daughters.

“A IS FOR ARSENIC” by Kathryn Harkup (Bloomsbury Sigma: September 2015): People are fascinated by murder. The popularity of murder mystery books, TV series, and even board games shows that there is an appetite for death, and the more unusual or macabre the method, the better. With gunshots or stabbings the cause of death is obvious, but poisons are inherently more mysterious. How are some compounds so deadly in such tiny amounts?

Agatha Christie used poison to kill her characters more often than any other crime fiction writer. The poison was a central part of the novel, and her choice of deadly substances was far from random; the chemical and physiological characteristics of each poison provide vital clues to the discovery of the murderer. Christie demonstrated her extensive chemical knowledge (much of it gleaned by working in a pharmacy during both world wars) in many of her novels, but this is rarely appreciated by the reader.

Written by former research chemist Kathryn Harkup, each chapter takes a different novel and investigates the poison used by the murderer. Fact-and fun-packed, “A is for Arsenic” looks at why certain chemicals kill, how they interact with the body, and the feasibility of obtaining, administering, and detecting these poisons—both when Christie was writing and today.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Kathryn Harkup (K.H.): “Forensics” by Val McDermid. It is a fascinating and lively account of the development of forensic science.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

K.H.: I suppose I should say Agatha Christie, and I really do love her books. Despite her novels being full of murders, settling down on the sofa with a Christie has a very reassuring and cozy feel to it. But, I also love the crime novels by Reginald Hill. His characters are funny, charming and infuriating, but I love them for it.

S. MAG.: Who’s your favorite fictional villain? Favorite hero/heroine?
K.H.: A couple of years ago I would have chosen Hercule Poirot, but having re-read the entire Christie back-catalogue as research for “A is for Arsenic,” I have a new found love for her heroes Tommy and Tuppence. I couldn’t possibly tell you my favourite Christie villain as that would give away whodunnit.

“AMERICAN PAIN” How a Young Felon and His Ring of Doctors Unleashed America’s Deadliest Drug Epidemic by John Temple (Lyons Press: September 2015): The king of the Florida pill mills was American Pain, a mega-clinic expressly created to serve addicts posing as patients. From a fortress-like former bank building, American Pain’s doctors distributed massive quantities of oxycodone to hundreds of customers a day, mostly traffickers and addicts who came by the vanload. Inked muscle-heads ran the clinic’s security. Former strippers operated the pharmacy, counting out pills and stashing cash in garbage bags. Under their lab coats, the doctors carried guns—and it was all legal…sort of.

American Pain was the brainchild of Chris George, a 27-year-old convicted drug felon. The son of a South Florida home builder, Chris George grew up in ultra-rich Wellington, where Bill Gates, Springsteen, and Madonna kept houses. Thick-necked from weightlifting, he and his twin brother hung out with mobsters, invested in strip clubs, brawled with cops, and grinned for their mug shots. After the housing market stalled, a local doctor clued in the brothers to the burgeoning underground market for lightly regulated prescription painkillers. In Florida, pain clinics could dispense the meds, and no one tracked the patients. Seizing the opportunity, Chris George teamed up with the doctor, and word got out. Just two years later Chris had raked in $40 million, and 90 percent of the pills his doctors prescribed flowed north to feed the rest of the country’s insatiable narcotics addiction. Meanwhile, hundreds more pain clinics in the mold of American Pain had popped up in the Sunshine State, creating a gigantic new drug industry.

“American Pain” chronicles the rise and fall of this game-changing pill mill, and how it helped tip the nation into its current opioid crisis, the deadliest drug epidemic in American history. The narrative swings back and forth between Florida and Kentucky, and is populated by a gaudy and diverse cast of characters. This includes the incongruous band of wealthy bad boys, thugs and esteemed physicians who built American Pain, as well as penniless Kentucky clans who transformed themselves into painkiller trafficking rings. It includes addicts whose lives were devastated by American Pain’s drugs, and the federal agents and grieving mothers who labored for years to bring the clinic’s crew to justice.

“The West Wing meets Law and Order in a highly-charged political thriller about an ambitious first lady caught in a web of murder, deceit and betrayal.

IS THE FIRST LADY PLOTTING TO OVERTHROW THE PRESIDENT?

This question seems inconceivable to journalist Jack Rudley, but so did the murder of his own father, Senator William Rudley. Now his father is dead and all roads lead to the White House. Roads Jack must take if he is ever to know the truth. Roads twisted by deceit, revenge, power and murder. Roads First Lady Carolyn Alden Lane navigates with great skill.

When she learns she’s a pawn in a deadly bid for the White House, her world comes crashing down. Driven by desperation, she refuses to take the fall alone. But how far will she go to even the score? Against all odds, Jack searches for the truth, a truth that may cost him his life, while Carolyn struggles to survive in a web of savage political corruption.

“...THE FIRST LADY PLOTTING TO TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY? YOU WON’T PUT IT DOWN!”

—John Saul, New York Times Bestselling Author

KATHLEENANTRIM.COM
“THE FELIX CHRONICLES: FRESHMEN” by R.T. Lowe (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: May 2015): Reeling from a terrible accident that claimed the lives of his parents, Felix arrives at Portland College hoping only to survive the experience. In time, however, his reality star roommate shows him there is more to higher education than just classes, shared bathrooms and bad dorm food, and Felix gradually dares to believe he can put his past behind him. But a fateful storm looms on the horizon. In the nearby woods, two hikers become the latest victims in a series of gruesome murders; a disfigured giant embarks on a vicious cross-country rampage, killing teenagers who fail his ‘test’; and an ancient society of assassins tasked with eradicating the wielders of a mysterious source of power awakens after a long silence. Only one man—the school’s groundskeeper—knows that the seemingly unrelated events are connected, and that an eighteen-year-old boy stands in the center of the storm. •

“MENAGERIE” by Rachel Vincent (MIRA: September 2015): When Delilah Marlow visits a famous traveling carnival, Metzger’s Menagerie, she is an ordinary woman in a not-quite-ordinary world. But under the macabre circus black-top, she discovers a fierce, sharp-clawed creature lurking just beneath her human veneer. Captured and put on exhibition, Delilah is stripped of her worldly possessions, including her own name, as she’s forced to “perform” in town after town.

But there is breathtaking beauty behind the seamy and grotesque reality of the carnival. Gallagher, her handler, is as kind as he is cryptic and strong. The other “attractions”—mermaids, minotaurs, gryphons and kelpies—are strange, yet, but they share a bond forged by the brutal realities of captivity. And as Delilah struggles for her freedom, and for her fellow menagerie, she’ll discover a strength and a purpose she never knew existed.

“MAGIC SHIFTS” A Kate Daniels Novel by Ilona Andrews (Ace: August 2015): After breaking from life with the Pack, mercenary Kate Daniels and her mate—former Beast Lord Curran Lennart—are adjusting to a very different pace. While they’re thrilled to escape all the infighting, Kate and Curran know that separating from the Pack completely is a process that will take time.

But when they learn that their friend Eduardo has gone missing, Kate and Curran shift their focus to investigate his disappearance. Eduardo was a fellow member of the Mercenary Guild, so Kate knows the best place to start looking is his most recent jobs. As Kate and Curran dig further into the merc’s business, they discover that the Guild has gone to hell and that Eduardo’s assignments are connected in the most sinister way…

An ancient enemy has arisen, and Kate and Curran are the only ones who can stop it—before it takes their city apart piece by piece. •

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

Rachel Vincent (R.V.): Forget about the format. Forget about the trends. Forget about the politics of publishing. Write a story that will still have relevance after all that changes.

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

R.V.: Quite a lot, actually! I’ve never worked harder or longer on a book than I worked on “Menagerie,” and it means the world to me to know that the story and characters are reaching people. Thank you!

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

R.V.: “The Flame Never Dies” (Delacorte), which concludes my current YA duology, comes out in August 2016, and “Masquerade” (MIRA Books), the first sequel to “Menagerie,” will be out in October 2016. And the first in both series will be out in paperback in 2016 as well. •
“Why is this town called Mother’s Rest?” That’s all Reacher wants to know. But no one will tell him. It’s a tiny place hidden in a thousand square miles of wheat fields, with a railroad stop, and sullen and watchful people, and a worried woman named Michelle Chang, who mistakes him for someone else: her missing partner in a private investigation she thinks must have started small and then turned lethal.

Reacher has no particular place to go, and all the time in the world to get there, and there’s something about Chang...so he teams up with her and starts to ask around. He thinks: How bad can this thing be? But before long he’s plunged into a desperate race through LA, Chicago, Phoenix, and San Francisco, and through the hidden parts of the Internet, up against thugs and assassins every step of the way—right back to where he started, in Mother’s Rest, where he must confront the worst nightmare he could imagine.

Walking away would have been easier. But as always, Reacher’s rule is: If you want me to stop, you’re going to have to make me.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

Lee Child (L.C.): All successful writers are readers first. Read.

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

L.C.: Favorite villain: John Doe from the movie Se7en. I just watched it again and it really holds up. Favorite heroine: Would it be wrong of me to choose the heroine in the book I’m writing now? Because I can’t talk about her yet. But since she’ll be with me for months, she’s definitely crush-worthy.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

L.C.: Expect the next Reacher novel and the movie sequel, Jack Reacher: Never Go Back, in the fall of 2016. •

“THE KILLING LESSONS” by Saul Black (St. Martin’s Press: September 2015):
When the two strangers turn up at Rowena Cooper’s isolated Colorado farmhouse, she knows instantly that it’s the end of everything. For the two haunted and driven men, on the other hand, it’s just another stop on a long and bloody journey. And they still have
many miles to go, and victims to sacrifice, before their work is done.

For San Francisco homicide detective Valerie Hart, their trail of victims—women abducted, tortured and left with a seemingly random series of objects inside them—has brought her from obsession to the edge of physical and psychological destruction. And she’s losing hope of making a breakthrough before that happens.

But the murders at the Cooper farmhouse didn't quite go according to plan. There was a survivor, Rowena's ten-year-old daughter Nell, who now holds the key to the killings. Injured, half-frozen, terrified, Nell has only one place to go. And that place could be even more dangerous than what she's running from.

**Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.):** What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Saul Black (S.B.): *If I'm being honest, my favourite book this year was actually a re-read. "In the Cut" by Susanna Moore. (If a book's not worth reading twice, it's probably not worth reading once.) Superficially, "In the Cut" is a thriller, but that's reductively misleading. Moore is a writer who renders all categories absurd. It's genuinely chilling, refined, filled with casual, piercing insights, and it has the most aesthetically courageous ending I've ever encountered. I urge readers to get their hands on it—immediately!*

S. MAG.: If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

S.B.: *Try to remember that quality does not guarantee success, and vice versa.*

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?

S.B.: It changes, naturally, but at the moment Graham Greene, whose novels I’ve been working my way through for the last year or so. Every book is a masterclass in oblique suspense, economy of expression, elegance of structure and psychological acuity. Greene is woefully neglected in these brash and deafening days, but he manages more depth and grace in a couple of hundred pages than most writers achieve in their entire oeuvre. He also understands the centrality of alcohol.*

**“PLAYING WITH FIRE”** by Tess Gerritsen (Ballantine Books: October 2015): In a shadowy antiques shop in Rome, violinist Julia Ansdell happens upon a curious piece of music—the Incendio waltz—and is immediately entranced by its unusual composition. Full of passion, torment, and chilling beauty, and seemingly unknown to the world, the waltz, its mournful minor key, its feverish arpeggios, appear to dance with a strange life of their own. Julia is determined to master the complex work and make its melody heard.

Back home in Boston, from the moment Julia's bow moves across the strings, drawing the waltz's fiery notes into the air, something strange is stirred—and Julia's world comes under threat. The music has a terrifying and inexplicable effect on her young daughter, who seems violently transformed. Convinced that the hypnotic strains of Incendio are weaving a malevolent spell, Julia sets out to discover the man and the meaning behind the score.

Her quest beckons Julia to the ancient city of Venice, where she uncovers a dark, decades-old secret involving a dangerously powerful family that will stop at nothing to keep Julia from bringing the truth to light.

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

Tess Gerritsen (T.G.): *The perfectly normal looking man who told me he enjoyed my book “The Surgeon” (about a killer who mutilates victims) because it allowed him to “enjoy his fantasies.”*

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

T.G.: “Playing With Fire.” Love, tragedy, war and Venice! Plus the soundtrack is already composed! I don't know whom I'd cast as the hero and heroine because they're both so young. Unknowns, perhaps.
S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

T.G.: #12 in the Rizzoli and Isles series.

“SHADOW PLAY” by Iris Johansen (St. Martin's Press: September 2015): Eve Duncan is the most sought-after artist in the field of forensic sculpting. Dedicated to her work ever since her daughter Bonnie was taken and killed at the age of seven, Eve feels a sense of duty to those whose lives were lost and whose bones are now in her hands. When a sheriff in California contacts her with a request for help on the reconstruction of the skull of a nine-year-old girl whose body has been buried for eight years, his intensity and investment in the case puzzle her. But when the ghost of the girl begins communicating with her, Eve finds herself wrapped up in the case more intensely than she could have ever imagined. Not since Bonnie has Eve had such an experience, and suddenly she finds herself determined to solve the murder and help the little girl find peace. Except that the killer is still out there, and he knows Eve is on the case. And he won't rest until anything and anyone that could reveal his identity is eliminated…

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

Iris Johansen (I.J.): I always love the interaction with fans I receive at autographings. Perhaps one of the most memorable occurred several years ago when I was doing a question and answer session followed by an autographing. I had just started the Q and A when I saw a lovely young woman accompanied by an equally lovely Golden Retriever dog enter the room. Naturally, I was intrigued, but I finished the Q and A and did the signing. The young woman waited until everyone else had finished and then brought her dog up to the table. She told me that she had read my book that featured a woman who worked in Search and Rescue with her dog, Monty. She said that she had been so touched and inspired that she had become a Search and Rescue worker herself. She then introduced me to her Golden Retriever that she had named Monty. It was my turn to be grateful and inspired by their courage and dedication. I'd only written a book, they had changed and saved lives.

S. MAG.: If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

I.J.: What would I write to put in a time capsule for aspiring writers? I suppose I'd advise them to write what they love and always finish what they write. I'd also remind them what they are creating is both different and special. It is one of the only mediums in which a writer can tell a story, describe a character, add nuances, and then give it to the reader. Then something magical happens. Because the story relies on the reader's imagination and experience it becomes their story. Magic, indeed.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

I.J.: What do I have coming out in 2016? It's going to be a busy year for me. In April, I have “Hide Away,” the second in the Eve Duncan trilogy, coming out. In July, the third Eve, “Night and Day,” will be on the shelves. In October, my son, Roy, and I will have a new Kendra Michaels, “Night Watch,” out that we're very excited about. I hope you enjoy all of them.


More than twenty years ago, Claire and Lydia's teenaged sister Julia vanished without a trace. The two women have not spoken since, and now their lives could not be more different. Claire is the glamorous trophy wife of an Atlanta millionaire. Lydia, a single mother, dates an ex-con and struggles to make ends meet. But neither has recovered from the horror and heartbreak of their shared loss—a devastating wound that's cruelly ripped open when Claire's husband is killed.
The disappearance of a teenage girl and the murder of a middle-aged man, almost a quarter-century apart: what could connect them? Forming a wary truce, the surviving sisters look to the past to find the truth, unearthing the secrets that destroyed their family all those years ago...and uncovering the possibility of redemption, and revenge, where they least expect it.

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

Karin Slaughter (K.S.): I have one as a fan myself. Before my book came out, I was at Bouchercon, and I had the chance to meet one of my all-time favorite authors. I was an absolute idiot in front of her, and she just smiled at me like I was a crazy person (she actually clutched her purse to her chest, like she needed to protect herself) and extricated herself from my presence as quickly as possible. I thought she hated me. I later found out that she is very, very shy, and I realized that people never recognize shyness in other people. So, this was an important lesson for me and I try to remember it when I meet my readers, because I have a tendency toward shyness, and I don't want people to be disappointed.

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

K.S.: I think Jack Reacher is probably my favorite hero. Let's set aside that he is an amazing slab of man. He's actually a feminist, too, which is just as sexy as the whole man slab thing. The women Reacher meets aren't damsels in distress. They don't need to be saved. They can save themselves. I know that Lee set out to write an American James Bond, but I think he was subverting the genre in more ways than one. As a female reader, I know that I can read about Reacher and not feel like women are nothing but sidekicks and sex objects. It's actually one of the best things about the series.

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

K.S.: I am thrilled. I know it's not supposed to matter and writing is its own reward and yakkity-yakkity-yak, but this kind of thing means the world to me.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

K.S.: I am currently working on the next Will Trent/Sara Linton novel. It's called “The Kept Woman” and will be out around this time next year. I can't give away much about the plot, but basically, it starts out like most Will Trent books: Will is very, very happy, then something awful happens.

“THE STRANGER” by Harlan Coben (Dutton: March 2015): The Stranger appears out of nowhere, perhaps in a bar, or a parking lot, or at the grocery store. His identity is unknown. His motives are unclear. His information is undeniable. Then he whispers a few words in your ear and disappears, leaving you picking up the pieces of your shattered world.

Adam Price has a lot to lose: a comfortable marriage to a beautiful woman, two wonderful sons, and all the trappings of the American Dream—a big house, a good job, a seemingly perfect life.

Then he runs into the Stranger. When he learns a devastating secret about his wife, Corinne, he confronts her, and the mirage of perfection disappears as if it never existed at all. Soon Adam finds himself tangled in something far darker than even Corinne's deception, and realizes that if he doesn't make exactly the right moves, the conspiracy he's stumbled into will not only ruin lives—it will end them.

“HOSTAGE TAKER” by Stefanie Pintoff (Bantam: August 2015): In the hushed quiet of early morning Manhattan, in front of the towering bronze doors of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, a young woman holds a sign that reads: HELP ME. For one FBI agent, a madman's terrified hostages, and an entire city, a long and harrowing day is about to unfold.

The hostage taker's identity is unknown. But he knows who FBI agent Eve Rossi is—and everything about her past. Along with her presence, he demands five witnesses: ordinary people with some hidden connection. Defying her superiors, Eve begins a deadly
dance with an adversary whose intentions are surely sinister, whose endgame is anything but certain, and whose cunning keeps him one step ahead at every turn.

As Eve manages a taut hostage situation, she relies on the combined skills of her team—a secret unit inspired by France’s most notorious criminal and made up of ex-convicts with extraordinary talents, oversized egos, and contempt for the rules.

Eve is up against a rapidly ticking clock. But the dangerous man calling the shots has a timetable of his own—and a searing question for his targets: What are you guilty of? As shocking revelations surface, so does another crisis nobody could anticipate—one not even Eve and her team may be able to stop.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Stefanie Pintoff (S.P.): Stephen King’s “The Bazaar of Bad Dreams.” While King’s book was one of many I loved, what makes it special is the peek inside the writing process that King offers to preface each story.

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

S.P.: It’s hard to pick an absolute favorite fictional villain, but one of my top favorites is Hannibal Lecter from ”The Silence of the Lambs”—perhaps the creepiest and most memorable villain ever created.

Even harder is picking a favorite hero/heroine. I’d have to include Arya from George R.R. Martin’s Game of Thrones series and Jack Reacher from Lee Child’s Reacher series. What appeals to me about each is that they’re strong characters—but also flawed and completely unpredictable. For a hero whose talents are brilliantly cerebral, my favorite is Jeffery Deaver’s Lincoln Rhyme.

S. MAG.: What can fans expect to see from you in 2016?

S.P.: The sequel to “Hostage Taker” will be out in 2016. It’s called “Whistleblower”—and it’s about the kidnapping of the New York City Police Commissioner’s daughter, set against the backdrop of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

“THE ENGLISH SPY” by Daniel Silva (Harper: June 2015): The target is royal. The game is revenge.

Stretched topless upon the foredeck, drink in hand, her flawless skin baking in the sun, was the most famous woman in the world. And one deck below, preparing an appetizer of tuna tartare, cucumber, and pineapple, was the man who was going to kill her....

She is an iconic member of the British Royal Family, beloved for her beauty and charitable works, resented by her former husband and his mother, the Queen of England. But when a bomb explodes aboard her holiday yacht, British intelligence turns to one man to track down her killer: legendary spy and assassin Gabriel Allon.

Gabriel’s target is Eamon Quinn, a master bomb maker and mercenary of death who sells his services to the highest bidder. Quinn is an elusive man of the shadows—“a whisper in a half-lit chapel, a loose thread at the hem of a discarded garment”—but fortunately Gabriel does not pursue him alone. At his side is Christopher Keller, a British commando turned professional assassin who knows Quinn’s murderous handiwork all too well.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): What’s the best book you read in 2015?

Daniel Silva (D.S.): I enjoyed “Black Flags” by Joby Warrick and “Operation Troy” by Scott Shane. I also liked “The Truth and Other Lies” by Sascha Arango. I love films and books about writers, even writers who don’t actually write their own books. The unreliable narration of his villainous protagonist was wonderful.

S. MAG.: If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

D.S.: I always tell aspiring writers the same thing: try very hard to enjoy the process of writing that first manuscript because it
will never be quite the same once you are a published author.

S. MAG.: Who is your favorite author?


“TRIAL RUN” by Thomas Locke (Revell: August 2015): Cutting-edge research requiring controversial experiments. Startling dreams delivering cryptic communication from the dreamer’s future self. Ruthless rivals determined to control mind-bending new technology. When you’re balancing on the edge of what’s possible, trouble awaits, ready to push you into the abyss.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

Thomas Locke (T.L.): I would love to offer the future aspiring authors three suggestions: First, persevere. “Trial Run” went through four different versions over a three year period before I finally felt like I had what I wanted. Second, be flexible. I feel the success “Trial Run” has enjoyed is largely due to my willingness to grow beyond my comfort zone. Third, lift your gaze. Once I had the version I liked, I needed another two and a half years to find a publisher. It was different from anything I had done before, it was this, it was that...The only way I did not wallow in discouragement was by focusing on the goal. Much as I love this story and want to see it succeed, it has never been about this book. Because this is such a crucial element, allow me to repeat: It is never about the book. It is about your career.

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

T.L.: I am writing this in Singapore, where I have come to teach at a conference designed to lift the quality of publishing, editing, and writing in the developing world. My class has ninety students from thirty-one countries, and five simultaneous translators, including Laotian.

After my first class, a woman from Nigeria came up and said she needed to have a word. I am six-four, two hundred pounds, and this woman could have taken me with one hand and four more fingers tied behind her back. She was big to begin with, and was dressed in the rainbow-nation colored tribal gown and head-dress, which made her look like a dark volcano in the process of erupting. She scolded me, finger in the face, hard voice, angry eyes. When you are scolded by an angry Nigerian woman, you don't forget it. She said: ‘How dare you make me wait a year to find out what happens to those poor people in Trial Run?’

Okay, I'm laughing now. But believe me, I wasn't laughing then.

S. MAG.: Do you have a novel you would like to see made into a movie? Who would you like to see play your protagonist/antagonist?

T.L.: “Trial Run.” Oh my yes, please. Hugh Jackman as Charlie Hazard, and someone completely surprising in the role of Reese Clawson. A star who is yearning for the chance to play wicked. Elisha Cuthbert would kill that role. When do we start the shoot?

“THE EINSTEIN PROPHECY” by Robert Masello (47North: August 2015): As war rages in 1944, young army lieutenant Lucas Athan recovers a sarcophagus excavated from an Egyptian tomb. Shipped to Princeton University for study, the box contains mysteries that only Lucas, aided by brilliant archaeologist Simone Rashid, can unlock.

These mysteries may, in fact, defy—or fulfill—the dire prophecies of Albert Einstein himself. Struggling to decipher the sarcophagus's strange contents, Lucas and Simone unwittingly release forces for both good and unmitigated evil. The fate of the world hangs not only on Professor Einstein’s secret research, but also on Lucas’s ability to defeat an unholy adversary more powerful than anything he ever imagined.
“DECEPTIONS” by Kelley Armstrong (Dutton: August 2015): Olivia Taylor Jones’s life has exploded. She’s discovered she is not only adopted, but her real parents are convicted serial killers. Fleeing the media frenzy, she took refuge in the oddly secluded town of Cainsville. She has since solved the town’s mysteries and finds herself not only the target of its secretive elders, but also her stalker ex-fiancé.

Visions continue to haunt her: particularly a little blond girl in a green sundress who insists she has an important message for Olivia, one that may help her balance the light and darkness within herself. Death stalks both Olivia and the two men most important to her, as she desperately searches to understand whether ancient scripts are dictating the triangle that connects them. Will darkness prevail, or does Olivia have the power to prevent a tragic fate?

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): If you could write a message to future aspiring authors and place it in a time capsule to read years later, what would you write?

Kelley Armstrong (K.A.): My message to aspiring writers would be “don’t give up.” If you truly enjoy writing, you don’t need publication to justify it. Just write. Trying to get published is great—and it’s an amazing career—but don’t let rejection squash your love of storytelling. Just keep writing and keep trying.

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

K.A.: This is one of my most memorable. I was speaking in a library, and there was a man there who didn’t look like my typical reader. I presumed he’d just come in for a cool place to rest during a heat wave. At the end of the signing, he came up with a battered copy of “Dime Store Magic” (my 3rd novel.) He told me he’d started reading my books in prison and looked forward to finishing the series when he went back. Not “if” but “when.” That’s one case where I actually hope he doesn’t get a chance to finish my series, not if it means going back to prison to do it!

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

K.A.: It means a lot. I’ve always written suspense novels, but most have a supernatural twist to them, which means it can be much harder to “fit in” to the suspense/mystery/thriller genre. I’ve always considered my books to be more thriller than fantasy, but I’ve learned it’s easier to just go along with the fantasy label. Being recognized this way by Suspense Magazine is hugely validating. Thank you! •
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The one thing that we love about our jobs is that we have been able to forge friendships with some fantastic people. Tasha Alexander is not only one of the best suspense/mystery authors on the planet, but she is a very good friend of ours. We are so lucky that we have been able to share with you, the fans, the entire career of Tasha. We learned of her about eight years ago when she had only two books in her Lady Emily series, and now we are excited to bring you the tenth book, “The Adventuress.”

Tasha has been able to carve out her own genre, taking readers back to Victorian England, a time when things were simple, but murder was still murder. Tasha has dazzled fans with her ability to create complex characters, within a rich plot setting. By allowing the time and setting to become its own character, fans are able to get a real sense of life back then and the challenges and dangers that came along with it.

Below you’ll find our exclusive interview with Tasha, talking about her latest book and more. But first let’s take a quick look inside book ten of the Lady Emily series, “The Adventuress.”

In this newest entry in the New York Times bestselling series by Tasha Alexander, Lady Emily Hargreaves travels to the south of France where an apparent suicide may be something far more sinister.

Emily, and her dashing husband Colin, have come to the French Riviera for what should be a joyous occasion—the engagement party of her lifelong friend Jeremy, Duke of Bainbridge, and Amity Wells, an American heiress. Amity is the picture of perfection, a distinction that endears her all-to-quickly to the gentlemen of British society, but earns her something closer to disdain—even jealousy—from the fairer sex. And though Amity’s parents’ wealth affords them entry into society, their crass behavior and unrestrained flair for exorbitant parties is grating.

Still, Emily can’t complain about a trip to such a beautiful locale, with the Côte d’Azur right outside the windows of the lavish hotel where the wedding party convenes. But the merrymaking is cut short with the shocking death of one of the party in an apparent suicide. Not convinced by the coroner’s verdict, Emily must
“I never dreamed I would be lucky enough to get to this point, and I am so, so grateful to be here.”

employ all of her investigative skills to discover the truth and avert another tragedy.

Suspense Magazine (S. MAG.): “The Adventuress” is the tenth book in the Lady Emily series, what do you have in store for us this time?

Tasha Alexander (T.A.): Emily and Colin are in the South of France to celebrate the engagement of her dearest childhood friend, Jeremy Sheffield, Duke of Bainbridge. His fiancée, Amity Wells, a stunning American heiress, charms everyone but Emily, who is skeptical of pretty much everything about her. She insists she's not jealous of Amity, but her friends give her a hard time about her point of view.

S. MAG.: I know that it's probably weird to say this is the tenth book, how do you feel about it?

T.A.: I never dreamed I would be lucky enough to get to this point, and I am so, so grateful to be here. Writing this book was a blast, but I finished it more than a year ago, and I always find that the book I'm most in love with is the one I'm currently working on. Which means my mind is in Greece right now, even though I know I need to be talking about the South of France.

S. MAG.: From sitting in Starbucks writing your first book to now, how have you changed as an author?

T.A.: I trust myself much more than I did early on, and I know what process works for me. I no longer worry about how I should be working. I used to feel guilty about not outlining each book; no more! In the early days, I had a toddler at home, no babysitter, and no office. That taught me discipline, and even now I can work anywhere, anytime.

S. MAG.: Now you have written two novellas to bridge that gap between books, what was the thought process behind doing that?

T.A.: Shorter pieces are a blast—you get to focus on something fascinating that isn't quite big enough to make a whole novel. They also give me the opportunity to further explore Emily and Colin's relationship, as well as their kids, who I'm looking forward to seeing get older.

S. MAG.: If you were to write in another genre, what would it be?

T.A.: That's hard. I love what I'm doing now, but if I had to pick something else, I think I would do a novel with narratives in two time periods: one contemporary, one historical.

S. MAG.: Do you feel more pressure with each book, now that the series is so successful?

T.A.: There is always pressure, but it definitely changes as you get further along in your career. I always want to be improving and I want to satisfy my readers and my editor. You have to constantly up your game. In the beginning, you are writing for yourself. Later, you have an audience, an agent, an editor, a publisher, and are always conscious of wanting to meet sales expectations.
S. MAG.: Which villain in the series (you don’t have to name them) was the most fun to write?

T.A.: I really love writing villains because their motives fascinate me. I’m not a fan of the random psychopath—I prefer someone who acts as he does because he believes committing a crime is his only way forward in a difficult situation. You really see people’s mettle when they are pushed into a corner. Murderers react badly; the rest of us don’t cross that line. As for my favorite, I will always have a fond spot for Andrew Palmer, my first. He was extremely fun to write: charming, duplicitous, and shameless.

S. MAG.: Give us your funniest story from a book signing.

T.A.: This isn’t funny, but it really blew my mind. When I was signing in Ann Arbor one year, two girls had driven all the way from Ottawa, Canada, to see me—they said it took ten hours each way and that they read “Death in the Floating City” out loud during the trip. I was so incredibly touched and will never, ever forget meeting them.

S. MAG.: Many young authors don’t deal well with any negative reviews, how were able to handle things like that?

T.A.: Negative reviews are extremely difficult at first—you’ve put your heart into your work, and even though you know it is impossible to satisfy everyone, it still hurts when someone doesn’t like your book. The best thing is to try not to take reviews personally; glean any useful criticism from them, and then try not to fixate on them. Easier said than done, of course.

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

T.A.: I have finished next year’s book, “A Terrible Beauty,” which finds Emily in Greece. She and Colin arrive at their villa on the island of Santorini where they are greeted by Philip Ashton, Emily’s first husband, who was supposed to have died more than a decade earlier. Following that, I am starting research that will take me to St. Petersburg, Russia.

We would like to thank Tasha for taking the time to talk with us. Please visit her website to find out more about her, and the Lady Emily series at www.tashaalexander.com.
Chapter 1

“The English duke is dead.”

The words, muffled and heavily accented, hardly reached me through the voluminous duvet that, while I slept, had somehow twisted around me with such violence that it now more closely resembled mummy wrappings than a blanket. Struggling against its bonds, I managed to extricate one hand before realizing my head was under a stack of pillows. I flung them aside and sat up, turning to discover my husband was no longer next to me. The words came again, and this time vanquished in an instant all of the confusion clouding my mind after being awoken from a deep slumber.

“Monsieur, the duke, the English duke, he is dead.”

“Jeremy?” I leapt from the bed, dragging the duvet with me (I had not been quite so successful in the removal of it from my person as I had hoped), and started for the narrow patch of light coming into our room from the door, held open by my husband, his dressing gown pulled around him. A chasm seemed to open inside me, as if my heart were splitting and filling me simultaneously with intolerable cold and heat. Jeremy Sheffield, Duke of Bainbridge, my dearest childhood friend, who had tormented me in my youth not quite so much as I had tormented him, could not be dead. I tried to step forward, but my limbs would obey no commands.

“Is he in his suite?” my husband asked. The man standing in the corridor nodded. “I shall come at once.”

He must have closed the door, but I have no memory of him having done so. I collapsed in an undignified heap, my legs no longer able to support me.

“Emily,” Colin knelt at my side, scooped me into his arms and deposited me back onto the bed. “I must see what has happened and will return as quickly as possible. Will you be all right?”

“Yes, of course.” I rubbed my face. “No. No. I must come with you.”

“I don’t think you ought.” His dark eyes locked onto mine, and I could see pain and worry and just a bit of frustration in them.

“I have to see him. I—”

“No.” He squeezed my hand and slipped the dressing gown from his shoulders, finding and putting on the stiff boiled shirt he had discarded earlier in the evening with entirely no regard for its subsequent condition. After retrieving his trousers from the back of a chair and locating his shoes—one had disappeared under the bed—he shrugged into his tailcoat and walked to the door, pausing to turn back and look at me as he opened it. Had I not been so upset, I would have better appreciated the handsome dishevelment of his cobbled-together evening kit. “I am so terribly sorry, Emily.”

The tears did not come before the door clicked shut behind him, but then my eyes produced a worthy monsoon. Sudden storms are short, however, and this was no time for succumbing to emotion. I splashed water on my face and pulled on my dressing gown. There could be no question of returning to my own previously discarded garments: Ladies’ gowns are designed to require assistance, and while this may allow for a more beautifully designed bodice, it proves an immense frustration when one finds oneself on one’s own.

Fortunately, no one saw me slip out of our room as there were not yet other guests meandering through the Hotel Britannia, the most fashionable place to stay on La Croisette in Cannes, and arguably on the whole of the Côte d’Azur. A clock near the curved marble staircase told me it was nearly half past five in the morning. Anyone awake now would either be a servant or someone staggering in from a long evening, probably spent playing baccarat at the Cercle Nautique. I climbed one flight to the top floor, where Jeremy had insisted on staying. The view, he said, was incomparable. His door was closed and locked, so I tapped on it, and a man I did not recognize opened it without delay.

“Madame, you would not wish—”

I pushed past him and went straight through the sitting room to the bedroom, where I saw my husband standing with two other men. On the bed was the prostrate form of a gentleman in evening kit.

I recognized the wiry individual closest to the supine figure as the hotel doctor. He adjusted the tortoiseshell pince-nez on his long nose and placed his unopened bag on a bedside table. “We will need to further examine him, of course, but there is no question—”

“There is no question,” I said, stepping forward with no
regard for any of them, “because this is not the duke.”

“Emily—” Colin reached for my arm, but I pulled away and moved to the opposite side of the bed, closer to the body, determined to confirm the identity of the man. It was harder to move him than I had anticipated, but I managed to roll him over and reveal his face, the eyes staring and vacant.

“Chauncey Neville.” I was shaking rather violently now, and realized that I was barefoot and my teeth were chattering.

“It is not Jeremy. Not Jeremy.” Mr. Neville, a shy, soft-spoken gentleman from Cornwall, had always seemed an unlikely friend for Jeremy, but the two had been close since their days at school. We often joked that they tempered each other, Chauncey reeling in Jeremy when he got too out of hand, and Jeremy prodding Chauncey to embrace joviality. Shy though he was, Mr. Neville never proved awkward in social situations, but instead was kind and thoughtful, always on hand to support his friends in any of their schemes.

“Come, my dear,” Colin said. “You will catch your death of cold. You know how chilly the seaside gets at night.”

Any person who has had the privilege of forming even the barest sort of acquaintance with Colin Hargreaves knows he is not the sort of gentleman to make such trite remarks. Rather, he is the most trusted agent of the Crown, a particular favorite of Queen Victoria’s, and the individual most frequently called upon by the palace to assist in delicate matters that threaten the state of our great empire. My eyes focused better on the room now, and I saw the manager of the hotel wringing his hands.

“Fear not, Monsieur Fortier, this is not the first body I have seen,” I said. In fact, I had seen many. The work my husband and I shared—sometimes in official capacities, sometimes when we chose on our own to help those in need of assistance—had led us to reveal the identities of no fewer than nine cruel murderers. I was not a stranger to violent death. Whether my words soothed the concerned hotelier, I do not know. Colin removed me to our own suite of rooms before I could gauge the man’s reaction. Regardless, the untimely demise of one of our party would dramatically alter what had been intended as a celebratory holiday on the Côte d’Azur.

Nearly four months ago, at Christmas, I had received a telegram from Jeremy, announcing his engagement to Miss Amity Wells, an American heiress who had realized a telegram from Jeremy, announcing his engagement to the Duke of Bainbridge. Miss Wells’s mother, a veritable battle-axe of a woman, far better suited to roping steers on the range than moving in high society, insisted on throwing an engagement party to celebrate the match, but would not content herself with a ball in Mayfair. Instead, she had planned a trip to the south of France, where all the closest friends and family of the bride and groom would spend a fortnight, culminating in a party she assured us would be more spectacular than any we had ever seen. England, she explained in a coarse whisper, was such a little island it could not possibly be expected to hold all her big ideas.

Colin and I had met mother and daughter over New Year at Jeremy’s estate in Kent; the Wellses had cut short a trip to Egypt for the occasion. While Mrs. Wells could be described as a force of nature, one had to accept Amity as something akin to a dream. Her fresh-faced beauty, enviable figure, flair for fashion, and quick wit made her a favorite in London society. A favorite with the gentlemen, that is. I am sorry to say that my own fair sex proved far less generous with her, a judgment firmly rooted in the lair of envy. I scorned this, knowing it to be unfair, but must acknowledge that my reaction to Miss Wells proved somewhat more complicated than I should have liked.

The estate of the Duke of Bainbridge lay adjacent to that of my own excellent father, and Jeremy and I had been inseparable as children. When it came time for him to leave for school, I cried for three days straight, and marked on my calendar when he would be home between terms, counting the weeks until I would see him again. By the time he had finished at Harrow and was leaving for Oxford, we no longer climbed trees together, instead finding great amusement in the knowledge that both our mothers longed to see us (and our families) united in marriage. Neither of us could think of anything more ridiculous, for although we adored each other, our temperaments and our interests could not have been more at odds. I had grown up studious and intellectual; Jeremy had championed the goal of being the most useless man in England. When his father died suddenly during his son’s second year at university, everyone hoped the new duke would undergo a transformation à la Prince Hal and adopt a more solemn and appropriate demeanor. This served only to spur him into more questionable behavior.

Jeremy played the rake with consummate skill, but, at heart, his kindness and steadfast loyalty prevented him from ever becoming truly profligate. He claimed this to be his greatest disappointment. He took splendid care of his mother, refusing to let her be holed up in dowager quarters, and, knowing both what an asset she had been to his father and how much she had enjoyed helping to run the estate, insisted that she continue her work. He did as little as possible, squeaked through Oxford with a degree he claimed disgraced every Bainbridge ancestor, ran with a fast set, and, perhaps, drank too much on occasion, but he never got himself into irreparable trouble. Everyone in society fawned over him, particularly the legion of mothers who longed for the dashing, fun-loving duke (whose fortune was even more attractive than his bright blue eyes) to someday propose to one of their daughters.

Over the years, Jeremy’s steadfast resistance to marriage became the stuff of legends. He did everything in his not inconsiderable powers to avoid it, including pretending to court my close friend Margaret Michaels, née Seward. Their deception was borne out of mutual need. Margaret, an American, had been sent to England, much like Amity Wells, to catch a titled husband. She, however, had no interest in such things, wanting instead to study at Oxford. She and Jeremy spent a season pretending to be in and out of love. Eventually, when he threw her over (at her insistence, of course), she pled a broken heart and convinced her parents that they must not try to force her into marriage until she had quite forgot the
At the time, I was a young widow, my first husband having been murdered only a few months after our wedding. Out of mourning and back in society, I had fallen in love with Colin Hargreaves, and even after I had accepted his proposal of marriage, Jeremy refused to stop pressing his own suit. Not, mind you, because he actually loved me, but because he knew I would go along with his scheme. He viewed my engagement as a gift from the dear Lord himself. Society believed him to be heartbroken and devoted to a lady he could not have, and the legion of mothers could tolerate with relative equanimity waiting for him to recover from the blow my second marriage struck.

Colin accepted this arrangement with good humor, knowing full well Jeremy had never been a threat to our marital happiness. He also knew that one day, Jeremy would have to marry. He might play the profligate, but he would never leave his dukedom without an heir. Much as I enjoyed Jeremy’s little game, I had rejoiced when I read his telegram and knew it was over. I longed to see my friend as happily settled as I.

Then I met Amity Wells.

I am, perhaps, not being entirely fair. She failed to make much of an impression at our first meeting, but balls do not provide much of an opportunity for deep conversation. Our trip to Cannes was to offer us that. Yet almost from the moment I stepped into La Croisette with her, I knew we could never be friends. And I feared Jeremy would never forgive me for that.

Amity

Twelve months earlier

India did not suit Amity. The oppressive heat reminded her too much of her grandparents’ plantation house in Natchez, Louisiana, where she had spent more than one unhappy summer while her parents retreated from New York’s Fifth Avenue to their mansion in Newport. This arrangement came to the assistance of her grandmother, Varina Beauregard Wells, who was as unhappy at the Confederate loss in the War Between the States as she was that her Harvard-educated son had abandoned all his breeding and married a Yankee. She had always objected to sending him north for an education. The fortune he earned in copper tempered her displeasure, but she was not about to let her only granddaughter grow up with coarse northern manners. Her daughter-in-law made no effort to dissuade her. Learning to simper in that charming southern way could do nothing but enhance Amity’s value on the marriage market, and Birdie Wells had every intention of seeing her daughter married to an English nobleman. So far as she was concerned, this outcome was nonnegotiable. Her husband had no interest in arguing with her regarding this or anything else about which she felt strongly.

“She must be a duchess, don’t you think?” Birdie—Amity had never been able to think of her mother as anything but Birdie—made a habit of talking about her daughter as if she were not there.

“I am sure you know best, dearie.” Amity’s father loved to indulge his wife, who was delightfully unlike the southern belles his mother had traipsed before him, hoping he would take one of them as his bride. Their superficial charms were many, but none could compete with his Birdie, who spoke with a shocking degree of directness. The day they met she had looked him in the eyes and said, You are less of a fool than I expected, Wells, and he knew he had found his partner in life.

“I am doing this all for you, my dear. Vanderbilt’s daughter caught a duke and we cannot tolerate falling beneath that family. I should be unable to take so much as a step out of the house. We have got to take her abroad without delay.”

“I would never deny you something you want so badly, Birdie.” Mr. Wells folded up his newspaper and left for his office, where, after finalizing a deal that nearly doubled the family’s already enormous fortune, he set about making plans for their trip. That he chose to start with India reflected his priorities. An old friend who had wrangled himself a plum position after the dissolution of the East India Company had invited him to visit, with the object of convincing him to invest in what he was certain would prove a most profitable arrangement. They would be in India by February, and stay until the following winter, when they would remove themselves to Egypt, and form all the acquaintances necessary to make an appropriate splash in London the following spring. Birdie would have preferred to start in London, but understood her husband too well to suggest an alternative to his itinerary.

Within hours of their arrival in Bombay, Amity was being heralded as the belle of expat society. Invitations poured in, and the family found themselves in even greater demand than that to which they were accustomed in New York. Birdie’s exuberant parties proved a great success with the British community, although Amity noticed more than a few ladies looking down their nose at her mother, especially when she insisted they ride camels to the site of one of her picnics. Regardless, Amity allowed herself to be escorted to countless events by a series of young men Birdie had vetted, but she took little pleasure in the company of any of them. She did not object to making a good marriage, but felt that she ought at least to be allowed to like her future husband. Her new friend, Miss Christabel Peabody, shared this view. Miss Peabody, a young lady whose British manners and affability were approved of by Birdie, had traveled to India to visit her brother, who was serving there in the army. Within a fortnight of their introduction, she and Amity were inseparable.
“I do not think I shall ever adjust to being here,” Amity said, as she and Christabel lounged in the courtyard of the villa Mr. Wells had taken for their stay. “The humidity is intolerable.” She stretched out on a chaise longue and waved a large ostrich fan in front of her face.

“And it is not yet summer,” Christabel said. “You will adore Simla, though. Everyone spends the summer there. The society is incomparable.”

“Incomparable society in Simla?” A stocky man in uniform approached them, Birdie’s housekeeper following behind, doing her best to announce the visitor. “Christabel, you are giving this young lady the wrong idea altogether.”

“Captain Charles Peabody, Miss Wells!” The servant made a slight bow, her hands pressed together as if she were praying.

“Very good, thank you,” Amity said. “And Captain Jack Sheffield as well.”

Amity thanked the housekeeper again and inspected the new arrivals. Christabel’s brother, Captain Peabody, was a bit of a disappointment; Amity preferred her officers to cut rather more of a dashing figure in uniform. Fortunately for her, her companion filled the role admirably. Tall and lanky, Captain Sheffield moved with careless ease, and Amity was taken at once with his easy humor and self-deprecating ways.

“The society in Simla is the worst sort of colonial balderdash,” Captain Peabody said. “If one is to be in India, one ought to be there, not set up some sorry version of England instead.”

“Going native, Peabody?” Captain Sheffield’s grin brightened the room.

“I take all my opinions from you, old boy, so you ought not criticize me.”

“Quite right.” Captain Sheffield tugged at the cuffs of his bright red jacket. “India is magnificent: exotic and mysterious. How many forts have you ladies visited thus far?”

“Forts?” Amity asked, pursing her perfect lips and raising her eyebrows. “Why should I have even the slightest interest in visiting forts? Unless you can promise me more officers as charming as the two of you?”

“Not that sort of fort, Miss Wells,” Captain Sheffield said. “I speak of the ruins of ancient citadels, the towering walls and heavy gates that kept safe the maharajas and their jewels. You do know about the maharajas and their jewels?”

“What girl worth her salt wouldn’t?” Amity smiled. “Daddy promised me emeralds while we are here.”

“Good girl. Insist on rubies as well.”

“Sheffield is a terrible influence,” Captain Peabody said. “But you could not put yourselves in better hands should you want a guide to show you the area. I am afraid, Christabel, that I will not have quite so much liberty as I had hoped during your visit. Mother is furious, but I must do my duty.”

“Of course, Charles. No one would expect less from you,” Christabel said.

“I have brought my friend along as a peace offering. Mother has no interest in doing anything beyond taking tea with her old friends, and I do not wish to see you trapped doing only that. So far as she is concerned, she has already seen the best of India.”

“She and father were here for nearly a decade.”

“Yes, but she is very keen on you having a wander around, so long as it does not interfere with her routine. Sheffield is as good a bloke as I know. He will look after you well.”

“I am still in the room, Peabody.”

“Right. Well. I must be off. I shall leave the three of you to formulate a plan for your adventures.”

From that day forth, Captain Sheffield spent every waking hour not required of him by the army with Amity and Christabel. Birdie initially balked at the young man. Captain Sheffield would never make an acceptable candidate for her daughter’s husband—he was a dreaded younger son, and, hence, without title or fortune—but once she learned he was the brother of the Duke of Bainbridge, Britain’s most desirable bachelor, her feelings warmed slightly. That is to say, she no longer did her best to discourage the acquaintance.

Amity, Christabel, and Jack—for none of them required formality of the others any longer—began to refer to themselves as the Three Musketeers. They traveled (chaperoned, of course, by Birdie) to the Golden Temple at Amritsar, where Amity threatened to become a Sikh, but only if she would be allowed to wear a turban and carry a dagger. The dagger, Jack assured her, was a requirement. They lamented the sorry state of the Lake Palace at Udaipur, where the damp had taken hold and ruined much of the fine interior.

“I shall make it my mission to return here and restore every corner of this place,” Amity said.

“I have been laboring under the impression that India did not suit you,” Jack said. “It would be impossible to count the number of times you have told me you would prefer to be in Paris or London—”

“Oh or the Alps,” Christabel continued, crossing to her friends after she had finished photographing the remains of a frieze on one of the walls. Her brother had given her a camera for Christmas, and she had become something of an expert at using it. Carrying it on their trips often proved problematic, but they all agreed it was worth the aggravation when they saw her pictures. “Or Rome—”

“Stop, you wretched beasts! I repent,” Amity said. “I repent wholly. The subcontinent has grown on me. When are we to see the tigers?”

Birdie categorically refused to allow a safari of any sort, tigers or not. This did not give Amity more than the slightest pause. She appealed to her father, who never could resist her, and he organized a hunting party for them. Christabel very nearly begged off coming, but was persuaded in the end, although she was convinced, up almost to the last moment, that it was a wretched idea.

“Come now, Bel,” Amity said. “Think of us, camping in the wild, riding on elephants—”

“I do quite fancy riding on an elephant,” Christabel said. “I promise you will never regret it.”

“Oh, Amity, I can never say no to you!”

“Why would you want to?” Amity smiled. They departed for the Rajasthani hills the next morning. •
Chris Kuzneski is author of the adventure novels featuring Payne and Jones along with his new Hunters series. Graham Brown co-authors the NUMA Files series with Clive Cussler and has written three books featuring mercenary Hawker. Boyd Morrison is known for his series featuring engineer Tyler Locke, and he is now co-writing the Oregon Files books with Clive Cussler. This past summer the three of them got to experience something few authors would have ever imagined. Malta, an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, invited them to come visit. With the Malta Tourism Authority, the three authors spent a week exploring the island.

Kuzneski, Brown, and Morrison talked to Suspense Magazine about their writing, and this amazing opportunity.

**Suspense Magazine** (S. MAG.): Why do the three of you write adventure novels?

Chris Kuzneski (C.K.): I think the easy answer is Clive Cussler. All of us read his books when we were growing up, and they greatly influenced our writing styles. Plus, his books are so much fun, and ultimately that's my goal as a writer: I want to entertain my readers with tales of action, humor, and suspense.

Boyd Morrison (B.M.): I've always loved reading adventure novels, and as Chris mentioned, a big reason for that is Clive Cussler. The exotic locations, the mysterious historical artifacts, the intense action, and the fast-paced thrills of his books fascinated me. I couldn't read them fast enough. He's been a big influence on my own writing style, which is probably one of the factors in Clive asking me to write with him.

Graham Brown (G.B.): I second everything Chris and Boyd have said. I think another reason is to live vicariously through your characters. By the time I started writing seriously, I'd long-ago given up the notion that I was in any way cool, hip, tough, edgy or dangerous. Or any combination thereof. But on the page I could create characters who would take risks and do things I'd never be able to do, or could do in the most incredible, exotic places where I'd probably never be able to go. And—in a completely different way—as a writer you do kind of live the adventure. Some writers create a 500-page outline from which they then carve a 400-page book—I tend to write three or four-page outlines with some notes scribbled in the margins and jump right in. When you do it that way you end up creating situations that are death-defying and exciting and right in the middle of it you suddenly think: “How am I going to get the hero out of this?” That can be pretty exciting and terrifying in its own way. All from the comfort of your living room.

S. MAG.: Chris, what prompted you to mention Malta in “The Lost Throne”?
C.K.: My first international bestseller was called “Sign of the Cross.” When it first came out in the UK, I wasn’t expecting its sales to take off like they did. One night I received a fan letter from someone living in Malta, and for the life of me, I couldn’t figure out how my book ended up on an island nation in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. At that point in time, I was in the middle of writing my fourth book, “The Lost Throne,” and as an inside joke to myself, I decided to mention Malta in the story. Nothing big, mind you, just a throwaway line to amuse myself and to honor the fan that had reached out to me. A year later when “Throne” was released, the same fan wrote to me again and told me how excited he was to see Malta mentioned in my book. So excited, in fact, that he wrote a letter to a journalist at a Maltese newspaper, and they ended up doing a story on my book and me. After that, I decided to mention Malta in my next novel as well, and it soon became a “thing.” I’ve mentioned Malta in every book since.

S. MAG.: Boyd, how did you get the gig to write Oregon Files novels?

B.M.: When Clive was searching for a new co-author for the series, he and his wife, Janet, went to the Poisoned Pen in Scottsdale, Arizona, and asked the owner, Barbara Peters, for a recommendation of a thriller writer who might be a good fit. I had met Barbara when I visited the Poisoned Pen on the book tour for my first novel, “The Ark,” so she knew of my work and suggested a couple of my novels. Clive read them and loved them, so he called my agent, Irene Goodman, to ask if I would be interested. She called me, and of course I said yes. Who wouldn’t dream of working with their writing hero? She said, “Okay, Clive’s going to call you in two minutes.” I picked up my jaw off the floor and answered the call, and he asked if I’d like to come down to his place to start work on the next Oregon Files story. “Piranha” was the result, and now we’re just about finished with the next book in the series.

S. MAG.: Graham, how did you get the gig to write NUMA Files novels?

G.B.: It’s one of those odd things that happens in this business. I didn’t even know Clive was looking for another co-author, and I don’t think I’d have put my name in the hat if I had because I wasn’t very well-known at the time—in fact, my second book had only just come out. But as it turned out Clive had picked up a copy of “Black Rain” and he read it while he was on vacation in Morocco—which I thought was pretty cool because all my life I’ve been reading Clive Cussler books on my vacations. So his agent called me and said I’d be interested, and he said, “OK, Clive’s going to give you a call,” and I said that would be great. I assumed that meant when Clive got back from Africa. So I put the phone down and went outside to just soak in the moment and try to make sure I wasn’t dreaming. When I came back inside my phone said one missed call. And I thought you got to be kidding me. So I called Clive back in Morocco, and we had a pretty good conversation considering the spotty reception. As soon as he got back we went to work on “Devils Gate.” Which, to this day, is one of my favorites.

S. MAG.: How did Malta contact you, and what was their purpose?

B.M.: That was all Chris. I was just a hanger-on. Chris called and asked if I’d like to join him and Graham on a trip to Malta courtesy of the Malta Tourism Authority and get a personal tour of the island. We’ve all been friends for many years, so it really was the opportunity of a lifetime. My wife also got to join us and round out the group. I’ve never heard of another country setting up that kind of tour, which was to show off the islands in the hopes that it might inspire us to feature them in our books someday. Once we saw it for ourselves, it didn’t take much convincing. The beauty and rich history of the country speak for themselves. They’ve filmed a lot of movies on the islands, but they usually stand in for other countries, and I wonder why no James Bond movie has ever used the location. It would be perfect.

C.K.: Stephen Calleja, the writer of the original article on my books, emailed me. In his mind, I had done a lot for Malta over the years, and he felt I might be willing to do even more—perhaps setting one of my novels there—if I had a chance to see
Malta in person. He contacted the Malta Tourism Authority and convinced them that this was a unique opportunity to spread the word about their country, and they eventually agreed. When Stephen first told me about the possibility of a trip, I was flattered and excited. Once I stopped jumping up and down and giggling like a school girl, I suggested if his goal was to spread the word, then three voices would be better than one. Knowing that Boyd and Graham were working with Clive Cussler, I felt if they were to mention Malta in their books as well, then we’d get the word out to millions of readers around the globe.

S. MAG.: What was your idea about what you would see, and how did the reality of the island differ from your expectations?

G.B.: I had been to the Mediterranean twenty-five years ago and loved it, and I expected Malta to be similar to the other islands I visited. In some ways it was, but in many ways it was surprisingly different. For one thing a lot of the Mediterranean locales have a kind of lackadaisical attitude about getting things done. I can’t blame them—the weather’s great, the food is great, the wine is great. Who really wants to rush around and miss all that? But Malta had an energy that reminded me of New York, LA or London. Except the environment was still Mediterranean and the cafés were still packed. In some senses it was like a Clive Cussler novel or James Bond novel come to life when you’re cruising through the harbor with fortes that are 500, 700, 900 years old and there’s a sleek 350-foot mega yacht parked right in front of them and a modern navy gunboat tied up in front of the cannonades of an ancient plaza. The long and short of it is that there was far more there than I have found on any small island. Including a kind of after dinner drink I still can’t pronounce, but can’t wait to try again. And the people of Malta are justifiably proud of that.

C.K.: I knew some basics about Malta, but I didn’t really sense what the country was about until I got there. And the truth is that I was absolutely blown away by my experience. Everything about it—the location, its history, the topography, the food, and its people—far exceeded my expectations. I’ve traveled extensively over the years, and I can honestly tell you that Malta is one of my favorite places on earth.

B.M.: I knew some of the history of the islands, but I didn’t realize how extensive it is. Civilization there dates back to pre-historic times, and because Malta sits at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and has a huge natural harbor, it’s been the target of attacks by everyone from the Romans and Greeks, to the Ottomans, Napoleon, and the Nazis. I also didn’t realize how beautiful the islands are. I had seen photos online, which are amazing in themselves, but they really don’t do Malta justice. Valetta, the capital of Malta, has what I think is one of the most spectacular and picturesque harbors in the world. And until I was planning to go, I didn’t realize that everyone there speaks English, which is one of their official languages. That, and the fact that they use the Euro, makes it very easy for Americans to travel there.

S. MAG.: What did they show you during your visit?

B.M.: Our hosts planned a whirlwind trip and showed us as much as they could for the week we were there. We saw the Hypogeum, which is older than the Great Pyramid of Giza and is the only prehistoric underground temple in the world. They showed off many of the grand cathedrals in a country that is 98% devout Catholic. We walked the streets of the ancient city of Mdina, where some scenes from Game of Thrones were filmed. For a look at the modern side of Malta, we got a private tour of their huge container port, which is one of the biggest in Europe. And some of my favorites were the extensive catacombs outside Mdina and the enormous forts that top the strategic points all around Valetta harbor. So as you can tell, there are lots of locations and history to use in the types of thriller novels we write.

G.B.: I will only add that the amazing thing was a full week there being guided by expert tour guides and getting access to things that weren’t even open. That said, there are still at least a dozen sites we wanted to check out and have vowed to go back to see the big Ford in the harbor. Fort Saint Angelo’s going to open to the public in November. There’s another amazing walled city on
the island of Gozo next to Malta called the citadel that we didn’t get to see, and there were incredible churches that look like Notre Dame in the middle of the desert that we wanted to stop at but only had time to look at in passing.

S. MAG.: What is Malta’s future plans with authors?

C.K.: I’m not really sure, but whatever they are, I truly hope I’m involved. In fact, if Stephen or the MTA are reading this, please invite me back—and soon!

G.B.: I heard a rumor that we’re going to be made knights in the order of St. John and given territory to rule as our own. Nothing official on that yet though.

B.M.: I would be thrilled to participate in anything Malta would want to do in the future with authors. My wife and I have already been talking about when we can go back. And Chris, Graham, and I batted around the idea of holding a writer’s conference in Malta someday.

S. MAG.: How can authors help Malta, and how can Malta help authors?

B.M.: Awareness of Malta in general is how we can help. When I told people we were going to Malta, by far the most common question was, “Where is Malta?” (Answer: It lies in the Mediterranean between Italy and Libya, about 90 miles south of Sicily). Malta gets two million visitors a year, but only thirty thousand of them are from the US, and they’d love to increase that number. But first people have to know about it, and we may be able to help with that if we feature Malta in future books. Malta can help by providing information to authors who may be interested in visiting; or, for those who can’t visit in person, be receptive to answering questions about the country and islands by phone and email. Given how friendly and open everyone we met was, I’m sure they’d be happy to do that.

G.B.: As Boyd suggested, Malta could serve as a backdrop for any kind of story—action, adventure, romance—it’s just a beautiful place filled with beautiful people. There’s history there for a hundred centuries and certainly the last 1,500 years has built layer upon layer of intrigue. So I guess Malta can help authors mostly by being an incredible location with incredible history to choose from when crafting a story. As for authors helping Malta? Well, it only takes one book like “The Da Vinci Code” to create an entire tourist tsunami that is probably the only kind of tsunami the people on Malta would like to see. And since one of the jobs of an author who writes international intrigue is to show people a world that they haven’t had a chance to explore, perhaps tapping into the author’s imagination and observation skills is a great way for Malta to do that.

S. MAG.: Final thoughts?

G.B.: Traveling with other authors—who are also among your closest friends—is a fantastic experience… Right up until all three of you spot something interesting that you’d like to use in your next book. At that point it becomes chaos and bedlam. Halfway through the trip we were calling dibs on names, locations and happenings. Which actually just added to the fun. I highly recommend it, otherwise writing can become a lonely business.

We’d like to thank the newly minted, Malta Trio, for taking the time to share their short journey with us. For more information on this very talented group, go to: www.chriskuzneski.com, www.boydmorrison.com, and http://grahambrownthrillers.com.
“A CROSS BETWEEN GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ AND IAN FLEMING, LEONARDO WILD HURLS US DOWN A RABBIT HOLE OF PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOSIS, AND MURDER IN HIS DEBUT THRILLER.”
—Gayle Lynds, New York Times Bestselling Author of “The Assassins”

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A PARADIGM SHIFT THRILLER
10 Tips to Make Your Twitter Engagement Skyrocket

By Lynne Constantine

1. Don’t take weekends off—or at least schedule some tweets for Saturday and Sunday. Engagement is 17% higher for brands on weekends.

2. The early bird gets the worm. Start tweeting at 8:00 a.m. and continue until 7:00 p.m.—you’ll increase your engagement by 30%.

3. A picture is worth a thousand words—tweets with images get two times as much engagement as those without them.

4. Brevity is the soul of wit—tweets with less than 10 characters receive 17% higher engagement than longer tweets.

5. Don’t make empty promises—always provide a link with your tweets—you’ll get 86% more retweets than those without one.

6. Ask and you shall receive. Asking followers to retweet yields 12 times as many retweets (but spell it out “RT” gets 10X retweet rate vs. “retweet” with 23X).

7. Tag your tweets. Tweets with hashtags receive twice the engagement as those without them.

8. Everything in moderation. Limit hashtags to two per tweet—any more and you will decrease your engagement by 17%.

9. You reap what you sow. Tweet to others, retweet their content, respond when others tweet to you. Twitter is all about being social, responding and engaging.

10. Follow your passion. Follow new people everyday. Most will follow you back and you will steadily increase your following. What’s the sense in tweeting if no one is listening?

A bonus tip: Be on time. Install the Twitter app on your phone, and turn on your notifications. When someone tweets to you, take a second and answer right back. You will be amazed at how appreciative others will be at your responsiveness.

Research Source: Buddy Media

Lynne is a coffee drinking, Twitter addicted, fiction writer always working on her next book. She is the co-author of “Circle Dance,” a family saga written with her sister, as well as two other novels to be released soon. She is the managing partner of a social media consulting firm and gives talks on the role of social media in publishing and how to establish a solid author platform. Lynne is a contributing editor to International Thriller Writer’s online magazine, The Big Thrill.
“X” by prolific novelist Sue Grafton has three stories rolled into one book. One storyline has codes based on both numbers and letters that have a commonality with “X,” since it is both a Roman numeral and a letter. The encryption proves that Millhone was wrong about her late partner’s morals and ethics and alerts her that he was on the track of a serial killer. Another storyline has Teddy Xanakis, wanting revenge on her divorced husband, attempting to steal a priceless painting from him. The third plotline has landlord, Henry Pitts, taking drastic action to lower his water usage during the 1989 California drought.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): You broke with tradition in titling this book. Why?

Sue Grafton (S.G.): Somewhat, since I used the alphabet but did not put what it stood for. Because I made the rules I figured I could be the one to break them. I thought I would write about xenophobia, a hatred of foreigners. After I started writing the story there was not a foreigner to be had. I did not want to just stick one in there so I could get a title out of it since it seemed like cheating. I never figured out how I could get out of this dilemma so I just called it “X” and weaved X traits into the story.

E.C.: How did you come up with the idea of having alphabet titles?

S.G.: There was an author who titled his books by days of the week and another one that used colors. Then there was Edward Gorey who wrote the book “The Gashlycrumb Tinies,” about the untimely death of 26 Victorian children, each representing a letter of the alphabet. I thought, what a great way to link the titles.

E.C.: What will happen when you get finished with the alphabet?

S.G.: After I get done with “Z” I will see what shape I am in to continue writing. I do promise readers that I will never use linking titles because it has put such a burden on me. I will see if I have any juice left. I have watched writers go beyond the point when they should have stopped. I am leaving my options open.

E.C.: You also limit the years of your novels to the 1980s decade. Why?

S.G.: “A is for Alibi,” my first book, was published in 1982. As it happened, the next couple of books took place in June and August of that year. Without meaning to I painted myself into a corner. The other issue was the aging process. I did not want my main character to age one year for every book, so I slowed the whole process down. This way I could get through all 26 letters of the
“SHE IS MY ALTER EGO. I ALWAYS THINK WE ARE ONE SOUL IN TWO BODIES AND SHE GOT THE BETTER ONE.”

alphabet without making her 109 years old in 2015. I might end the series in either 1990 or on New Year's Eve 1989.

E.C.: How much is you in your main character, Kinsey?

S.G.: She is my alter ego. I always think we are one soul in two bodies and she got the better one. I think of her as the person I might have been had I not married young and had children. She is my unlived life, all the adventures I never embarked on. I am not as shy or a loner like Kinsey, and much more domesticated. When I started the series I was 42 and she was 32. Now, almost 35 years later, she is 38 years old and I am 75. Often I feel she's peering over my shoulder, whispering, nudging me and making bawdy remarks. It amuses me that I invented someone who has gone on to support me. It amuses her, I’m sure, that she will live in this world long after I'm gone.

E.C.: Why did you make Kinsey a private investigator?

S.G.: My father taught me to love detective fiction writers, such as Raymond Chandler. When I decided to have a hard-boiled detective series I did a lot of studying before I wrote the first book. I learned police procedure, the California criminal law, and many areas outside my expertise.

E.C.: How do you get the ideas for the plots?

S.G.: I read the paper every day. There are certain subjects that will catch my attention. I have an entire file of articles. Of course I make up the story, especially since most criminals are not very smart and fictional crime must be clever. I have to make sure the story I am telling is interesting and realistic. In this book I went online and found out the manners of codes. I thought it interesting to use them as a jumping off point.

E.C.: You have a quote about surveillance work. Please explain.

S.G.: I have talked to a lot of private investigators. They talked about having to sit around for several hours and that half the job is trying to figure out excuses as to why you are somewhere for long periods of time.

E.C.: You changed your writing style in this book compared to the last few. Why?

S.G.: For books “S” – “W” I used multiple points of view. A reader casually said to me I should write a book from Kinsey's point of view. I did that, but it was one of the hardest works I ever have done. A lot of the action takes place off camera, which makes it more inhibiting. I am not sure what I will do with the next book considering writing with multiple points of view is like writing in three dimensions. Looking from various points of view allows the reader to move around through the book's reality, creating a complex narrative.

We’d like to thank Sue for taking the time to sit down with us. To learn more about this prolific author, check out her website at: www.suegrafton.com.

Elise Cooper has interviewed a wide variety of bestselling authors for many years. Her book reviews and Q/As focus on women, thrillers, crime mysteries, and national security issues. She considers books an important part of our lives and hopes these reviews/interviews will provide some insight. In addition, she has set up book tours for authors and was the Director of Author Relations for the 2014 Veteran’s Benefit Book Fair held in San Diego.
“Devil’s Bridge” is based on a real case in the NY City DA’s office. As with all of her books, the issue involves female victims. In this novel there were two events; one of which has Alex prosecuting a deviant person, and the second involved Alex herself. The story begins with Alex in court trying to indict a defendant for sex trafficking crimes. But she must also contend with an escaped convicted rapist who is stalking her, and a hacker who has accessed her most secure information. But, these become the least of her worries when she is suddenly kidnapped. For the rest of the book she becomes MIA, allowing the reader to have the NYPD detective, and Alex’s recent lover, as their eyes and ears. As it becomes obvious she is a victim of foul play, detectives Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace pull out all the stops to get her back alive.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): Why did you decide to leave your prosecutorial job?

Linda Fairstein (L.F.): My decision to leave the DA’s Office in 2002 was a combination of a number of personal things. The events of September 11, 2001, impacted me greatly. I had been a prosecutor for thirty years when I made the decision to leave. The Alexandra Cooper series was doing well, and the chance to devote myself to writing and to my husband seemed smart.

E.C.: You always seem to write about sexual assault. True?

L.F.: My first book, “Sexual Violence,” was about my pioneering duty, being chosen to run the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit in New York City in the 1970s. Then I decided to write a series of crime novels based upon my real work. The main character is a special victim’s prosecutor of sex crimes. All these books explore what I wrote about in my non-fiction book, and my career, but in a fictionalized way. I decided to write fiction because many more people are willing to buy crime novels.

E.C.: How did you get the idea for this story?
L.F.: I keep up with the field since I am still a lawyer. I read a year ago about this when one of my colleague’s computers was hacked into. I wanted to write about this since it is a constant concern, the prevention of hacking from the outside world. I remember when I was working in the DA’s office being dependent on the IT people to keep my information safe and secure. Reading about these real hacking incidents is pretty overwhelming.

E.C.: How would you describe Alex?

L.F.: She is tough in the courtroom and in this book we see her vulnerability. She is undermined by the hacking and then becomes the victim of a crime. I enjoyed the scenes where we see through her lover, Mike, how she has a soft side behind that tough exterior. Alex has a lot of my professional traits, although we have a different personal and social life. We both want to get justice for those victimized, and love to do the hand holding as they recover.

E.C.: What does it mean to get justice?

L.F.: Alex and I understand that a prosecutor’s job is not necessarily to get convictions but rather to do justice to the system. A good prosecutor makes sure you get the right guy. I saw my job as convicting the guilty, with emphasis on the guilty as charged. Take for example the Rolling Stone article where the accuser outright lied. One of the things that saddened me the most was that smart young women said it did not matter that she lied, because important issues were brought to light. Of course, it should matter that she lied; truth seeking is a key role.

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

L.F.: An entertaining story where they will be educated about the issues of domestic violence, sexual predators, and date rape. I hope after reading my books they become a little smarter about the issues involved.

E.C.: Do you still do any law work?

L.F.: I still consult and take on occasional cases. My passion is working with victims of violence. I keep my legal credentials current so that I can work on cases or help survivors get access to the system. Two of my nonprofit boards are “Safe Horizon,” the country’s largest victim-advocacy organization, and the “Joyful Heart Foundation,” founded by Law and Order: SVU star Mariska Hargitay, where our current emphasis is ending the backlog of rape evidence kits across the nation. It’s work that makes you feel great.

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

L.F.: The next book, “Killer Look,” is set in the world of fashion where a successful businessman is killed. I will also explore Alex’s trauma of being a kidnapped victim, where she will clearly have PTSD issues.

E.C.: Is Mike one of your favorite characters?

L.F.: Yes. I really enjoy being with Mike and writing his actions as well as his dialogue. He is a pretty special guy since he is a composite of the great men I worked with over the years. As a prosecutor, I had the pleasure and honor of working shoulder-to-shoulder with the best detectives in the NYPD, and I just channeled them whenever I had Mike speak.

E.C.: In this book it appears luck plays an important part in solving the case. Please explain.

L.F.: There is a lot of skill involved and a reliance on science. I worry that sometimes young cops go straight to the science without using their investigative skills. The third element unquestionably is luck. One of my first cases after DNA became prominent included a bit of luck. The criminal used Clorox to scrub down the apartment. Then he stole jewelry, so we got him when finding those fingerprints.

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To learn more about Linda and keep informed about her upcoming releases, go to www.lindafairstein.com.

Elise Cooper has interviewed a wide variety of bestselling authors for many years. Her book reviews and Q&A’s focus on women, thrillers, crime mysteries, and national security issues. She considers books an important part of our lives and hopes these reviews/interviews will provide some insight. In addition, she has set up book tours for authors and was the Director of Author Relations for the 2014 Veteran’s Benefit Book Fair held in San Diego.
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“Depraved Heart” is a psychological thriller full of suspense. There are two plot lines; one a possible murder Dr. Kay Scarpetta is investigating, and the other has video links of her niece that threaten to destroy her entire world and everyone she loves.

Elise Cooper (E.C.): Is it hard to write a series for twenty-five years?

Patricia Cornwell (P.C.): I would say it is very interesting to have a series out this long. You start to create a biography of the character. With each new book you want to tell readers something about Scarpetta that defines her better. You start creating scenes that happened long before you even started the series, such as what happened to her when she was a little girl. Slowly but surely I am flushing her personal side out. With each book we get to know her better.

E.C.: Did you base Scarpetta on anyone in particular?

P.C.: No. She is created out of whole cloth. Those I know have inspired me professionally, but in terms of her character she is a blank slate. If I am to keep readers interested I have to show different dimensions of this person or it gets boring.

E.C.: Have you changed how you write these stories over the 25 years?

P.C.: When I started out I wanted to describe more of the forensic medicine because nobody knew much about it. The first book, in 1990, was before the CSI shows. My guess is that the TV shows were inspired by the literature. Now that everything has been done in the shows I don't spend a lot of space describing that stuff. What I do have that no one else does are my characters. I spend the time now trying to make them more compelling and interesting.

E.C.: Have there been a lot of changes in forensics over the 25 years?

P.C.: Just look at the computers. 25 years ago you needed a dialed up modem and continuous print paper. Today it is all electronic. There have also been behavior changes among those working in the ME's office. Now there are alarm systems, rules, and protective clothes that did not exist in years past. When I was working there I never had to worry someone was...
P.C.: She has matured and is now more comfortable with herself. She was a woman in a man's world and had to prove herself a lot in the earlier books. Currently, she has more humor and has become more philosophical.

E.C.: Do you agree with those who say there is the "CSI Effect?"

P.C.: It is real. I feel a little guilty about that. By making that world as accessible as I did with the advent of the Scarpetta series, it opened the door for the CSI shows that caused the "CSI effect." Many times it is harmful to law enforcement. For example, five or six years ago while riding with a Florida crime scene investigator, when we got there the victim had already collected and bagged the evidence. This one woman told me, 'I watched the shows on TV and know fingerprints don't matter anymore.' I thought to myself, 'I hope I am not a little bit to blame.'

P.C.: You might not see Carrie for a while. However, the threat caused by her looms large, but in terms of how she was getting up front and personal, as in "Depraved Heart," that will be different. It takes place a year later. Scarpetta's world is almost in ruins and smoldering. The big question, what will she do about this absolute pandemonium?

P.C.: Because Scarpetta deals with death, what would she say about it?

P.C.: We are made up of some kind of intelligent energy. Where did someone's soul go when they died? How is it possible we all have that same universal experience? She and I do not think it is wishful thinking that we are not really gone. There is more to us than we have ever imagined.

P.C.: Maybe we really don't know what her real job is. She is supposedly the forensic computer person at Scarpetta's office. We know she is a cyber-crimes expert. I will be exploring in the next book what she is really doing and whom she is really working for. There is something going on that we have not been told. That includes what Lucy and Jenna are really up to and is Desi really her dead sister's son. We will find more about what goes on in Lucy's compound.

P.C.: Do you agree with those who say there is the "CSI Effect?"

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P.C.: What is up with Lucy, it seems her life is a mystery?

P.C.: For them to experience some of the adventures I have done, such as flying a helicopter, scuba diving, or shooting a high-powered weapon. I want them to understand there is government overreach that is all about independent ambition, which is at an all time high. I want them to lose themselves for a while in a world I created for them, with the characters who have become their good friends.

P.C.: How has Scarpetta changed in the 25 years?

E.C.: Because Scarpetta deals with death, what would she say about it?

P.C.: Because we all worry about being spied on and watched we are getting more cautious about communication. Eventually we will be back in the 'dark ages,' when there were no cell phones or emails. We have created technology that outruns safety; for example, drones. When I fly my helicopter and am about to land, someone's drone can hit my Tailroter and kill me since they have no transponders. With opportunity comes risk.

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

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We would like to thank Patricia for taking the time to speak with us. Don't forget to check out Patricia's website to keep up to date on her future releases at: www.patriciacornwell.com. 

Elise Cooper has interviewed a wide variety of bestselling authors for many years. Her book reviews and Q/A's focus on women, thrillers, crime mysteries, and national security issues. She considers books an important part of our lives and hopes these reviews/interviews will provide some insight. In addition, she has set up book tours for authors and was the Director of Author Relations for the 2014 Veteran's Benefit Book Fair held in San Diego.
I HAVE PUBLISHED MY *Everyday Heroes* stories for over three years and continue to be amazed at the self-sacrifice and nobility displayed by the subjects of this monthly blog. Florent Groberg is no exception.

Florent, an Army captain who survived attacks by two suicide bombers moments apart, but was badly wounded as he saved his fellow soldiers in Afghanistan, received the Medal of Honor on November 12, 2015.

The Medal of Honor is the nation’s highest military honor and is given for “meritorious conduct involving great personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his or her comrades and must have involved risk of life.”

President Barack Obama awarded Army Captain (Ret.) Florent Groberg the Congressional Medal of Honor for “his selfless service” during a deadly attack in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, in August 8, 2012.

The president said, “He deployed to Afghanistan twice. First as a platoon leader, and a couple of years later when he was hand-picked to head up a security detail.”

“Training. Guts. Teamwork. What made Flo a great runner also made him a great soldier,” Obama said during the White House ceremony.

Groberg and five other soldiers provided a security detail for senior U.S. military leaders as they moved down a street toward the provincial governor’s compound when an ambush occurred.

“August 8, 2012 was the worst day of my life,” Groberg told CNN. “Things just felt different that day. I switched everything in regards to the way we position ourselves. I had a weird feeling inside. Spidey senses are ticking and you’re kind of like, ‘Alright, I don’t like this.’”

Groberg, 32, said he saw an Afghan male in dark clothing exit a building and move backward toward his group.

“As soon as he was moving towards our patrol, I left my position to go meet him because he’s a threat...” he said.

“So I hit him with my rifle and that’s when I felt I hit a vest under his clothing. So at this point all I could do was just get him away as far as we could,” Groberg said. “So I grabbed him by his vest and tried to push him down and throw him.”

Groberg said his platoon sergeant pushed the man to the ground.

“And then he detonated at my feet,” he said. “And then after that I was thrown 15 to 20 feet, unconscious...you come back, and I wasn’t hearing anything. I had a blown ear drum that took me a couple seconds to come back to reality.”

And then a second suicide bomber appeared and blew himself up, killing four of Groberg’s fellow soldiers.

“I couldn’t remember what happened. I thought I had stepped on an IED (improvised explosive device). My fibia was sticking out of my left leg, my skin was melting, and there was blood everywhere,” Groberg, who was on his second tour in Afghanistan, told the Army News Service. “I checked myself for internal injuries and started to drag myself out of what was probably a kill zone for small-arms fire.”

Despite his horrific wounds, Groberg tried to continue to lead his troops but needed medical attention and was put into an armored truck.

“That’s when all the pain came in. It felt like a blow torch was burning through my leg,” he told the Army News Service.

Obama said Groberg received the Medal of Honor because his efforts “prevented an even greater catastrophe.”

“You see by pushing the bomber away from the formation, the explosion occurred farther from our forces and on the ground instead of the open air,” Obama said.

“Had both bombs gone off as planned, who knows how many could have been killed.”

Groberg spent nearly three years recovering at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center before he retired in July. He required 33 surgeries.

Groberg is the 10th living recipient of the Medal of Honor for actions in Afghanistan.

*Everyday Hero* Florent Groberg is yet another example of a soldier who put his teammates and his mission ahead of self-preservation. Men like Groberg stand as models for all of us. Their bravery and sacrifice are difficult to understand by most, but must be acknowledged and admired by all.

Gibson Vaughn sat alone at the bustling counter of the Nighthawk Diner. The breakfast rush was in full swing as customers milled about, waiting for a seat. Gibson barely registered the crescendo of knives and forks on the plates or the waitress who set his food down. His eyes were fixed on the television behind the counter. The news was playing the video again. It was ubiquitous, part of the American zeitgeist—dissected and analyzed over the years, referenced in film, television shows, and songs. Like most Americans he couldn't look away no matter how often it aired. How could he? It was all he had left of Suzanne.

The beginning of the video was grainy and washed out. The picture stuttered and frames dropped; distorted lines rolled up the screen like waves pounding an undiscovered shore. By-products of the store manager having recorded over the same video tape again and again and again.

Shot down at an angle from behind the cash register, the footage showed the interior of the infamous service station in Breezewood, Pennsylvania. The power of the video was that it could have been anywhere. Your hometown. Your daughter. Viewed in its entirety, the silent security camera footage was a melancholic homage to America's most prominent missing girl—Suzanne Lombard. The time stamp read 10:47 p.m.

Beatrice Arnold, a college student working the nightshift was the last known person to speak to the missing girl. At 10:47 p.m., Beatrice was perched on a stool behind the counter, reading a tattered copy of “The Second Sex.” She would be the first to recall seeing Suzanne Lombard and the first to contact the FBI once the disappearance hit the news.

At 10:48 p.m., a balding man with long, stringy blond hair entered the store. On the Internet he'd come to
be known as Rif-Raf, but the FBI identified him as Davy Oskenberg, a long-haul trucker out of Jacksonville with a history of
domestic violence. Oskenberg bought beef jerky and Gatorade. He paid cash and asked for his receipt but idled at the counter,
flirting with Beatrice Arnold, in no apparent hurry to get back on the road.

The first and best suspect in the case, Oskenberg had been questioned repeatedly by the FBI in the weeks and months
after the disappearance. His rig was searched and searched again, but no trace of the missing girl was found. Grudgingly, the
FBI cleared him, but not before Oskenberg lost his job and received dozens of death threats.

After his departure the store fell still. An eternity ticked by...and then you saw her for the first time—the fourteen-year-
old girl in an oversized hoodie and Phillies baseball cap, a Hello Kitty backpack slung over one shoulder. She'd been in the
store the whole time, standing in the camera's blind spot. To add a layer of intrigue, no one could say for certain how Suzanne
came to be in the store in the first place. Beatrice Arnold didn't remember seeing her enter, and the security tape offered no
answers.

The hoodie hung off her in great, draping folds. She was a pale, fragile stalk of a girl. The media liked to contrast the
black-and-white footage with colorful family photographs—the smiling blonde girl in the blue bridesmaid's dress, the smiling
girl at the beach with her mother, the smiling girl reading a book and gazing out the window. They stood in bold relief to
the grim-faced kid in the baseball cap, hands thrust deep in pockets, hunched low like an animal, watching warily from its
burrow.

Suzanne wandered up and down the aisles, but her head was cocked toward the front window. One hundred and seventy-
nine seconds passed. Something out the window caught her eye, and her posture changed. A vehicle perhaps. She snatched
three items off the shelves: Ring Dings, a Dr. Pepper, and a box of red vines licorice. A combination now known eerily as the
Lost Girl's Picnic. Suzanne also paid in cash, dumping crumpled dollar bills, quarters, and pennies on the counter before
shoving her purchases into her backpack.

The security camera caught her eye, and for a long moment Suzanne
gazed up at it—an expression frozen in time and, like Mona Lisa's smile,
interpreted a thousand different ways.

Gibson stared back, as he always did, locking eyes
with Suzanne, waiting for her to smile shyly at him the
way she had when she wanted to tell him a secret. Waiting
for her to tell him what had happened. Why she'd run away.
In all the intervening years, he'd never stopped hoping for an
answer. But the little girl on the security video wasn't talking.

To him or anyone else.

In a final gesture, Suzanne drew her baseball cap low over
her eyes and looked away for good. At 10:56 p.m., she stepped
out the door and into the night. Beatrice Arnold would tell the
FBI that the girl seemed anxious and that her eyes were red as
if she'd been crying. Neither Beatrice nor the couple pumping
gas noticed whether she got into a vehicle. One more frustrating
dead end in a case of dead ends.

The FBI failed to turn up a single substantial lead. No one
ever came forward to claim the ten-million-dollar reward
offered by the family and their supporters. Despite the frenzied
media coverage, despite her famous father, Suzanne Lombard
walked out of the gas station and vanished. Her disappearance
remained an enduring American mystery alongside Jimmy
Hoffa, D.B. Cooper, and Virginia Dare.

The news went to commercials, and Gibson exhaled,
unaware that he'd been holding his breath. The tape
always left him spent. How much longer were
they going to keep showing it? There hadn't been
a development in Suzanne's case for years. Today's
big breaking story was that Rif-Raf had cut his hair
short and earned a college degree while in prison for a felony drug bust. The Internet, in its infinite snark, rechristened him Professor Rif-Raf 2.0. Other than that it was all a maudlin rehash of what everyone already knew, which was nothing.

But the tenth anniversary of her disappearance loomed, which meant the networks would keep running their retrospectives. Keep exploiting Suzanne’s memory. Keep trotting out anyone with even a passing relationship to the family or to the case. Staging their tasteless reenactments at the service station in Breezewood and using computer models to project what she might look like today.

Gibson found the mock-ups especially hard to look at. Suzanne would be twenty-four now, a college graduate. The images tempted him into imagining what her life might have been. Where she might live. Her career path—something to do with books, no doubt. He smiled at that, but caught himself. It wasn’t healthy. Wasn’t it time to give her some peace? Give them all some peace?

“Heck of a thing,” the man beside him said, staring up at the television.

“Sure is,” Gibson agreed.

“I remember where I was when I heard she was missing—hotel room in Indianapolis on a business trip. Like it was yesterday. I have three daughters.” The man rapped his knuckles on the wooden counter for luck. “I sat on the edge of the bed for a couple hours watching. Just terrible. Can you imagine not knowing for ten years whether your little girl is alive or dead? Hell of a thing for the family to endure. Lombard’s a good man.”

The last thing Gibson wanted was to get drawn into a conversation about Benjamin Lombard. He nodded to be agreeable, hoping to put a tourniquet on the subject, but the man would not be deterred that easily.

“I mean, if some sick bastard, excuse my French, can grab the daughter of the vice president—and get away with it—what hope do the rest of us have?”

“Well, he wasn’t vice president then.”

“Yeah, sure, but he was still a senator. That’s no joke either. You don’t think Lombard had juice with the feds back then?”

In fact, Gibson knew firsthand just how much influence Lombard wielded and precisely how much the man enjoyed wielding it. Vice President Benjamin Lombard was another subject he tried not to think about.

“I think he’ll make a good president,” the man continued. “To come back from something like this? Get the VP nod when most people would curl up in a ball. And now a run for president? That takes a strength you can’t imagine.”

As a two-term incumbent VP of a popular president, Lombard had been expected to nail down the nomination early—the convention in August a mere formality, a coronation more than anything else. But Anne Fleming, the governor of California, had come out of nowhere and seemed intent on playing spoiler. The two were currently polling virtually neck and neck. Lombard led in the delegate count and was still the favorite, but Fleming was making him work for it.

That the tenth anniversary of Suzanne’s disappearance fell during an election year had, in a perverse way, been a boost to Benjamin Lombard’s campaign. That was nothing new, though: championing Suzanne’s Law through the Senate had propelled him onto the national stage in the first place. Of course, Lombard gracefully refused to discuss his daughter. The cynic would argue that there was no need, since the media couldn’t help but do it for him. And, of course, there was his wife. Grace Lombard’s tireless efforts on behalf of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children had been a staple of cable news outlets throughout the primaries. She was, if possible, even more popular than her powerful husband.

“If he gets the nomination, he’s got my vote in November,” the man said. “Doesn’t even matter who the other side runs. I’m voting for him.”

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate that,” Gibson said and reached for the ketchup. He poured a generous dollop onto one end of his plate, mixed it with a little mayo, and scrambled it into his hash browns the way his father had taught him when he was a boy. In the immortal words of Duke Vaughn, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, take a big bite and chew slow.”

Words to live by.

Matthew FitzSimmons was born in Illinois and grew up in London, England. He now lives in Washington, DC, where he taught English literature and theater at a private high school for over a decade. “The Short Drop” is his first novel.

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