

THE JURY MASTER crosses a number of genres. In some ways it's a detective novel, in others it's an espionage thriller. Did you begin writing THE JURY MASTER with the intent of blurring genres, or did you simply find that your story was such that it went in directions of its own?

Yes and no. My intent was to distinguish the book from other "legal thrillers," to bring a new voice to the genre, but I've also learned to trust my characters' instincts. Often they will be more creative than my original plot. This book, like my subsequent books, started with an idea, "What if an attorney had the ability to get a jury to do whatever he wanted?" That idea, along with the premise that a friend of the President of the United States found dead in a federal park may not have committed suicide, were the two driving forces behind the plot.

One of the more interesting plot threads of THE JURY MASTER relates to Mexico as a source of oil. So much attention is focused on the Middle East that it is often forgotten that other areas, including Mexico and South America (not to mention the United States) have great potential as sources for oil. Was there anything in particular which inspired you to use Mexico --- and its political relations with the United States--- as the impetus for much of what happens in THE JURY MASTER?

I found Mexico partly by accident. I was doing research on the Middle East and came to learn that during the oil embargo of the 1970s the United States did turn to Mexico as a potential source of oil, or at least as a bargaining chip against OPEC. That led me to do further research and I was amazed at the history of U.S. and Mexico relations in general – and the fact that Mexico is sitting on billions of barrels of oil. For me it raised the question why we're fighting a war in the Middle East and not looking to get oil from other sources so close to home.

Do you see a lot of yourself in David Sloane, or is he a wholly fictional character? Who served as the inspirations for Detective Tom Molia and your other supporting characters?

David Sloane is a better lawyer than I ever was. He's the best of the best. But like me, he's not satisfied practicing law. There is a void in his life that being professionally successful does not fill. He is searching for that one thing in life that will make him happy. For me that thing has always been writing. For David, it is finding who he really is and what happened to him thirty years earlier and why. If he can put that behind him he might be able to find happiness.

The inspiration for Tom Molia is actually my good friend Tom Moglia. We've always called Tom, "the mole." He's not a detective, but he has the same gregarious personality and quick wit and is one of those guys everybody just really likes. Charles Jenkins is also a real person, to a degree. My law school roommate, Charles Jenkins, is a 6'5" 240 pound man of African American and Indian descent. A true gentle giant, but don't get him mad.

Much of THE JURY MASTER ties into politics. Did you face any special challenges when researching to build your fictional White House and political cast?

The Jury Master, like all my books, is about justice and abuse of power. Those are two themes you can find in every administration, Republican or Democrat. My President, Robert Peak, and his White House Chief of Staff, Parker Madsen, are really an amalgamation of historical figures. There's a little Bill Clinton, a little George Bush, even John F. Kennedy in Peak. With the explosion of the Internet there are so many ways to get information. You can learn so much now about Presidents and places. I toured the White House but did you know that there is a miniature doll house of the White House that includes every detail including the inscriptions on certain mantles? It's amazing. It's just a matter of finding the right information.

THE JURY MASTER is quite different from your first book, THE CYANIDE CANARY, which was a non-fiction work. Was there any particular event which inspired you to make the jump to fiction?

Though I'm a trained journalist, creative writing has always been my passion. So, actually I wrote *The Jury Master First*, and my second novel, *Damage Control*, which will be out in January 2007. *The Cyanide Canary* was a unique opportunity to use my journalism and legal skills to write a book that also happened to be about justice and an abuse of power. In that case, however, the injustice was real and the ramifications were horrific. I'm very proud of that book because it tells a story that needed to be told and two years after publication I'm still receiving invitations to speak about the book and the subject matter.

You co-wrote THE CYANIDE CANARY. What are the benefits, and drawbacks, to writing a book with another author? Would you do it again?

I'd do it with Joe again. I'm not sure I could do it with anyone else. Joe lived the story. He was the EPA Agent whose job it was to take down the bad guys. Since I wrote the book after the events I needed Joe to be my eyes and ears to what transpired. I had thousands of documents, but I needed the emotions and internal dialogue to bring the book to life. Joe and others who were willing to talk to me provided me with those emotions. Joe was also willing to let me write the story the way I wanted to write it using the words I chose. I'm possessive when it comes to my words and stringing them into sentences. I'm not sure I'd be very good at letting someone else do that on a book with my name as the author.

We read that you practiced law for nineteen years and left legal work to write full-time. Can you share your professional background with us? What kind of law did you practice? Will your courtroom experiences form the basis for any of your future novels?

I always intended to be a writer. I graduated from Stanford University with a degree in Journalism and worked for the LA Times before going to law school. I tell people now it was a moment of insanity, but really it was a great education and a terrific career. Like David Sloane I was a defense attorney. I represented a lot of professionals - contractors and engineers, architects, even other lawyers. I wanted to try cases, but trials are expensive for clients and time-consuming for courts so there is a lot of pressure for adversaries to reach settlements. Those times I was in court were the most stressful moments of the practice, but also the most exhilarating. But it wasn't enough. One day I woke up and just came to a decision. Being a lawyer was not what I'd intended to do with my life. If my wife was willing to take the chance, I was going to give writing a real shot. I drew on my experiences as a lawyer to write both *The Cyanide Canary* and *The Jury Master*, as well as *Damage Control*, and I continue to draw on them in the novels I'm currently writing.

What authors in particular have influenced you?

I'm a big Stephen King fan, but he's so good the best I can say is I try to emulate his craft. I also really like the Steven Hunter books with the protagonist Earl Swagger, particularly the way he draws out the suspense and creates flawed heroes. His books are some of the best thrillers out there. Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* stuck with me because of the way he weaves multiple stories together and John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. I've also read every book written by Nelson DeMille.

What authors do you read for pleasure?

Stephen King, Steven Hunter, Nelson DeMille, David Baldacci, Scott Turow, Stephen White, John Lescroart, Tess Gerritsen, Dean Koonz, Pat Conroy, and yes, J.K. Rowling. I'll read anything that keeps my attention.

What can your readers look forward to from you in the future? Will we be seeing more of David Sloane in the future, or is THE JURY MASTER intended as a stand-alone work? Do you have other characters in mind for a potential series? And will you intend to continue to blur genres in your work?

I always thought David Sloane would ride off with *The Jury Master*, but I recently came up with a great idea to bring him back in a novel set in Seattle, another book about justice and power that will, like *The Jury Master*, blur genres. Charles Jenkins comes back in that novel as well, working as a private investigator for Sloane. I've always felt Detective Tom ("Mole") Molia has more books in him and I'm contemplating a plot where he comes back to his roots in Oakland, California. More immediately, my second novel, *Damage Control*, will be published by Time Warner Books next January. It also crosses genres and I can now see the female protagonist in that book, a Seattle lawyer named Dana Hill, also coming back in a series.