

David Baldacci on THE INNOCENT - 'In my mind's eye, everything seemed to click'

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Tuesday, 17 April 2012 09:53

When I reached David Baldacci at his office in Reston, Va., last week, I told him my husband and my little dog were not happy campers.



"Have you been reading the book?" he asked with his characteristically good humor.

I was, indeed, reading. For two nights in a row, I neglected the dog and my spouse while I had my nose buried in Baldacci's new blockbuster, "The Innocent," set for release today (Grand Central Publishing - \$27.99 - 416 pages).

"I should send them both an apology," he offered.

While he might need to apologize to my family, Baldacci won't have to write any reparation notes to his fans. With "The Innocent," the attorney-turned-author has hit the ball completely out

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of the park.

"This book was a lot of fun to write," he explained. "I just felt good all the way through. I don't know if it was because it was a brand new character and I was doing something different, but in my mind's eye, everything seem to really click."

This story introduces a new character, Will Robie, a high-level, super undercover hit man for the government.

I asked if he named his new hero in honor of John Robie, the cat burglar from the 1955 film "To Catch a Thief."

"That's certainly where it came from," he said. "I'm a huge Cary Grant fan. I've always liked that character. Obviously Will Robie is different, but at the same time, they're both professionals."

While Baldacci named Robie after a movie character, make no mistake – there are people in the real world who do what Robie does.

"There are people out there who do that sort of work," he said, turning serious for a moment. "There's a high burn rate because it is incredibly stressful. Your set of field skills diminish over time."

When a new assignment goes terribly wrong, Robie has to activate "Plan C," an alternative route of escape. While he's on the run, he encounters a youngster named Julie Getty, who has her own set of problems. They join forces against a set of nebulous bad guys. From then on out, the book is a heart-pounding, pulse-racing trip – one you cannot finish until both characters are safe and sound.

"People who have read it so far, obviously not a huge number, felt it was really a ride all the way through," he said. "I wrote it pretty fast and I wanted to streamline it to keep the pace really

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strong, but to also feel claustrophobic.”

To create Julie Getty, Baldacci had only to look as far as his daughter's room.

“I know teenage girls very well,” he said with a chuckle. “I've been there, done that. It's a fine line, because Julie's smart, but she's not a trade operative, so I had to put her in situations where she would clearly acknowledge that she was totally out of her depth and scared to death.”

One thing Baldacci does better than most working writers is making the readers feel like they're in the middle of the action. This is particularly true in “The Innocent.”

“It's a really atmospheric book, so it's important to place the reader in that type of atmosphere,” he noted. “I wanted the readers to feel the dread, and I wanted it to feel claustrophobic.”

The many subplots swirling around Robie and Julie are there for a reason.

“For me, it's a book of misdirection, obviously,” he said. “Turning the tables on my protagonist and him trying to figure out who was being targeted. Was it him or someone else I wanted to give the sense of two trains rattling down the track. You know they're going to smash into each other, you just don't know when.

“It came down to Robie and what he needed to do at the end of the day,” he concluded. “He spent his whole career doing a task and worrying only about himself. Then, all of a sudden, he had to worry about someone else. It's a lot harder to do good than it is to do bad. For him, he was a predator who had to become a guardian angel.”

Once Robie decided the assignment he was given is not right, he makes that judgment call that nearly costs him his life. He does not know who he can trust, especially after he survives a deadly attack in a very public place.

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"That scene came out of nowhere," Baldacci offered. "He and Special Agent Nicole Vance are having a meeting in a restaurant. Things get heated. They leave, and all of a sudden, you have him throwing her to the ground. You're going, 'My God. Is he beating her up?' when he's actually saving her life."

According to Baldacci, there was a big buzz when they sent this book to Los Angeles, where Robie's character has found a lot of fans. Baldacci's team is working with a producer who loved the book and getting a writer on board to see if they can package it for a studio.

No matter what happens in La-La Land, Baldacci is happy with the way Robie turned out.

"There are a lot of writers in this genre that do assassins at all costs," he said. "Their targets are usually easy ones. They look like bad guys. That makes it easy for you to like the character that eliminates the bad guys. But, it happens sometimes that the target is wrong. Are you, as the shooter, just going to carry out the assignment, which is the easy way, or are you going to make a judgment?"

Although there are many twists and turns in "The Innocent," Baldacci is able to hold readers' interest from the first hint of action to the final denouement.

"It was a fine line," he explained. "Sometimes you can throw in the kitchen sink and sometimes it's just too much. I tried to make the big moments as big as possible and then move on to something else."

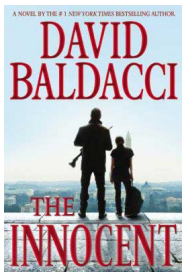
"The Innocent" - Five out of five stars

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Grand Central Publishing and the *News-Telegram* offer a copy of David Baldacci's 'The Innocent'

New York Times best-selling author David Baldacci, who has over 100 million books in print, and his publisher, Grand Central, are offering a copy of Baldacci's new book, "The Innocent," to a lucky News-Telegram reader.



"This is going to be a runaway best seller," said Terry Mathews, arts editor. "David has really outdone himself, creating two new characters who will stay with you long after you've turned the last page. He's also cranked up the action, leaving his readers breathless as they try to keep up with the plot."

Log on to the newspaper's website, www.myssnews.com, to enter. There is no limit to the number of times you may enter, but you must be a *News-Telegram* subscriber. Contest deadline is Friday, May 11.

The winner will be announced in the May 12-13 edition of your *News-Telegram*. The book will be sent directly from the publisher to the winner.