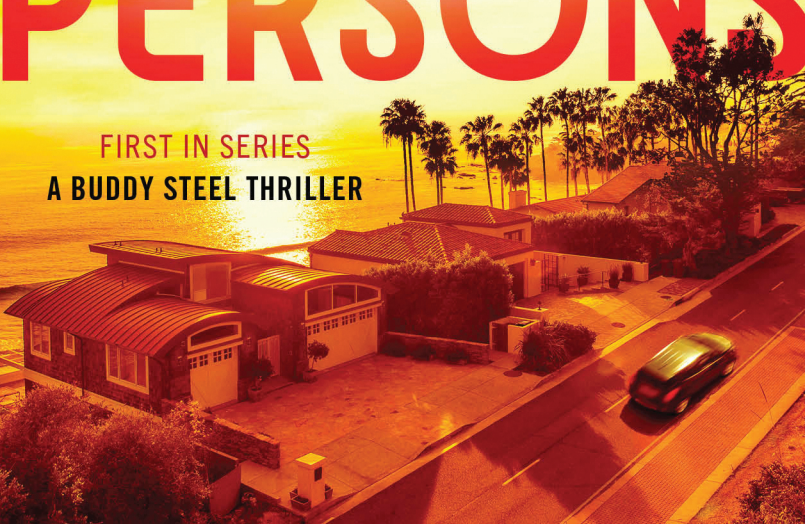


NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF
ROBERT B. PARKER'S
KILLING THE BLUES

MICHAEL BRANDMAN MISSING PERSONS

FIRST IN SERIES
A BUDDY STEEL THRILLER



Reading Group Guide

1. Readers and critics have in large part defined *Missing Persons* as a straight-ahead procedural. What thoughts do you have about that?
2. The *Library Journal* termed Buddy Steel: "An irreverent and complex lawman." Is that how you see him?
3. In assessing the style of the book, readers and critics made reference to the large amount of dialogue. How would you assess that finding?
4. Given the preponderance of violent crime in America, do you think the mystery/thriller genre has replaced the great American novel as the nation's bestselling literary entertainment? If so, how do you view this phenomenon?
5. As readers of mystery/thrillers, what reactions do you have to the gun violence depicted in them? Do these books serve as deterrents in any way?
6. Buddy Steel is a member of the X Generation,

a cohort following the post-World War II baby boomers and proceeding the millennials, often described as “*unfocused twenty-somethings, self-involved and aimless.*” Do you find that to be true of Buddy? Of Gen Xers? Does the generational shift make a difference in a reader’s perception and/or appreciation of the mystery/thriller genre?

7. The Gen Xers are the first societal group to experience the sexual revolution. Whereas the baby boomers were quick to marry and start families, Buddy’s generation is far more cautious regarding the advisability of and the prospects for long-term relationships—in large part due to the high divorce rate of their parents. Does this generational gap figure in your literary choices? Do stories about Gen Xers attract or repulse you?
8. The generational gap has produced a disparate group of readers...those who cling to hard copies of books...and a growing number who embrace the digital revolution. Which are you? And how has your choice impacted your reading habits? And your appreciation of the forms?
9. The digital revolution has also impacted the use

of libraries, many of which now offer ebooks. And like the brick-and-mortar retail stores that are vanishing in the face of shifting consumer buying habits, some brick-and-mortar libraries are closing. What future do you envision for libraries and the way in which we read?

10. The cultural divide seems to have grown wider as it relates to the Z Generation. This generation, raised with cell phones, the internet, and social media, seems to be eschewing books. What do you suppose this means for the future of culture as we've known it?

A Conversation with the Author

You're a noted film, theatre, and television producer. What inspired you to start writing?

I'm blessed to have produced the works of some of the finest writers of our generation. My reputation was that of being a "writer's producer."

Over the years, I produced and worked closely with Arthur Miller, Tom Stoppard, Stephen Sondheim, David Mamet, Horton Foote, Neil Simon, Wendy Wasserstein, David Hare, Elmore Leonard, Jules Feiffer, and Athol Fugard.

Bringing their work to the screen was thrilling. But it was during my collaboration with Robert B. Parker that the writing bug bit me.

When my longtime partner, Tom Selleck, and I asked Bob to contribute dialogue to our forthcoming filmed adaptation of Louis L'Amour's classic Western novel, *Crossfire Trail*, Bob, in turn, asked me to write it with him. Our success led to us later co-adapting Jack Schaefer's novel, *Monte Walsh*.

When Tom and I set about producing Bob's Jesse Stone novel, *Stone Cold*, Bob suggested I sign on to write

the screenplay. Its enormous success has been followed by eight additional Jesse movies, which ultimately resulted in Tom and me writing the screenplays.

And, ironically, with Bob's untimely passing early in 2010, G.P. Putnam's Sons asked me to carry on writing the Jesse Stone novels. "Get the guy who's been writing the movies."

I wrote three Jesse novels, each of which became a *New York Times* bestseller. Then I reasoned that if I didn't soon start creating my own work, I never would.

Hence, Buddy Steel.

Why Buddy Steel?

The mystery genre always fascinated me. I grew up on Chandler, Christie, Hammett, and Spillane. Now I'm a big fan of James Lee Burke, Elmore Leonard, Betty Webb, Lee Child, Michael Connelly, Delia Owens, Robert Crais, Walter Mosley, and of course, Robert B. Parker.

Like the creations of the previously mentioned heavyweights, Buddy Steel is a flawed character. He's freighted with the weight of his issues...mainly those associated with his father.

In my film career, father/son relationships were a frequent theme. And as such, I produced Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*; Robert Anderson's *I Never Sang for My Father*; Jules Feiffer's *Grown Ups*; Neil Simon's *Broadway Bound*; Horton Foote's *Alone*; and Jonathan Miller's brilliant

adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, starring Jack Lemmon.

In my novels, as a direct result of his father's incipient illness, Buddy Steel has sacrificed a burgeoning big city law enforcement career in the interest of coming to grips with his paternal issues before it's too late.

While noble in theory, Buddy's mission is filled with frustrating and unsettling events. Compromise is de rigueur.

Or in Buddy's lingo, "Nothing comes easy."

What advice would you offer to someone who wants to give novel-writing a whirl?

In a word, discipline.

Or as Steve Sondheim once explained to me, "It's not about inspiration. It's about perspiration."

My great friend, the late Robert B. Parker, attributed his success to his self-imposed discipline. Five pages a day; six days a week.

Which has become my mantra, as well.

I can think of no greater challenge than to confront the empty page each day. But more so even than the content, it's about the steadfast determination to write five pages each day, not going back, but plowing forward until you reach the end.

I don't mean to diminish the creative process. Good ideas well executed are, of course, the goal of every writer.

But without trivializing the process, I can assure fledgling authors that it's only through the pain and torture of daily discipline that the creative dream becomes a reality.

Assuming the discipline, what's the creative process you undergo with each of your novels? Where do you get your ideas? How do you organize them?

Process is what keeps you awake at night. Fulfilling your dream...writing what you need to write, what you set out to write, and doing so successfully, is every writer's goal.

With the Jesse Stone novels, I was dealing with a cast of characters created by Robert B. Parker. My job was to fashion narratives that remained faithful to Bob's vision of those characters.

No small feat.

I wrote three of them.

When I moved on to fulfill my own creative aspirations, I was extremely gratified to be hailed by *Publisher's Weekly* as...*"having perfectly reproduced Parker's style in an impressive continuation of his series featuring Jesse Stone."*

Publisher's Weekly labeled me *"the gold standard for mystery writers attempting to preserve the Parker brand."*

Grateful for that recognition, I also knew it was time for me to face the challenges of creating a universe of my own making, captained by a character who represented a younger demographic.

I envisioned Buddy Steel as more of a Gen Xer than a boomer, imbued with generational psychological issues...a professed loner, haunted by his fear of commitment, more adept at hooking up than settling down.

Street-smart and ironically attuned to the rhythms of his generation, Buddy's singular challenge comes when he's unexpectedly faced with his father's mortality, which forces him to come to grips with his own destiny.

That destiny is at the heart of each of the Buddy Steel novels.

Buddy's ability to meet and successfully resolve his professional predicaments is always tempered by his personal anxieties.

He hides his insecurities and fears behind his native cynicism. He's an existential wiseass who'd sooner crack the joke than delve into its meaning.

My kind of guy.

What advice would you give writers regarding the business of selling their screenplays and/or novels?

First off, let's not ascribe too much nobility to the process of selling one's work.

As Woody Allen cautioned, "It's worse than dog eat dog. It's dog doesn't return other dog's phone call."

Sooner or later, a writer must offer up his or her creation unto the judgment of others, which invariably results in overwhelming anxiety and inexorable discomfort.

With movies, a rash of cynical executives, along with a plethora of questionably competent creative personnel, will determine the fate of the work.

With novels, one's destiny is in the hands of a gaggle of publishing potentates.

Having sat on both sides of the table, I was always amazed by how taxing the process is for everyone involved.

The head of NBC-TV once confided that during pilot season, when he made his program selections, he knew the ones he didn't choose were just as likely to succeed as the ones he did. What mattered was that he made a decision.

Which applies to the motion picture development process as well.

The great American novelist and screenwriter William Goldman, in assessing those in charge of the various sales procedures, sharply noted: "Nobody knows anything."

So, writers beware.

The pathway to success will forever be rife with roadblocks and heartache.

Fortitude is the sole remedy.

Or as Bob Parker instructed incipient writers: "Screw their opinions. Go for it."