

RANDALL SILVIS

Author of *Two Days Gone*

WALKING
THE
BONES



A Ryan
DeMarco
Mystery

"A TOUR DE FORCE."

—Karen Dionne, international bestselling author
of *The Marsh King's Daughter*

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. What do you think would have happened if DeMarco had been allowed to retire as he had planned? Do you think Jayme's sick leave was the best option for him?
2. If you were to take two months of sick leave, what would you do with the time? Where would you go?
3. Describe Jayme and DeMarco's relationship. Do you think they are well suited to each other? What are the biggest challenges they face? How does their relationship change over the course of the book?
4. Imagine you were in Jayme's position. How would you help DeMarco face his past demons? How would his jealousy and anger issues make you feel?
5. Describe DeMarco's childhood. How do you think his upbringing changed him?
6. Compare and contrast Jayme and DeMarco. How are they similar? How are they different?
7. Describe the Da Vinci Cave Irregulars. Why do you think they are set on cracking this cold case? Why do you think DeMarco and Jayme agree to help?
8. Upon reading the initial list of suspects, who did you originally

- think killed the seven girls? If you were DeMarco, who would you look into first?
9. Compare DeMarco's and Jayme's detective styles. What role do they take when they interview suspects? If you were a detective, who would you be more like?
 10. What was the relationship between Royce and the Da Vinci Cave Irregulars? Why did they suspect him? Did they have reason to?
 11. Do you think McGintey, Royce, and Burl get the justice they deserve? Why or why not?
 12. What is the relationship between Burl, Friedl, and the murdered girls? Who do you think is ultimately at fault?
 13. How do you think solving this case affected DeMarco? How have these characters changed over the course of the book?
 14. If you were DeMarco, what would you do after the case closed? Would you continue on leave or return to the force?
 15. What do you make of the poem DeMarco writes for Jayme? Do you think they will get a happy ending together?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

Ryan DeMarco is a very layered character. What do you think is his best quality? What do you think is his biggest challenge to overcome?

His best quality is empathy. He's a very compassionate man, especially toward those he considers innocents—children, women, and men abused or maligned by others. His role in life, as he sees it, is to protect the innocents and bring the guilty to justice.

In regard to his biggest challenge, he holds himself responsible for every abuse he failed to prevent. Consequently, he has become emotionally guarded and reluctant to allow himself any of life's pleasures. Jayme is helping him to overcome those problems.

You currently live in Pennsylvania. What research did you do to bring the South to life in *Walking the Bones*? Do you have a special connection with that region of the country?

I have a special connection with any part of the country that reminds me of the Appalachian foothills, woods, and river valleys where I spent most of my youth. For the past couple of years, each time I visited one of my sons, I would research potential sites for my relocation to a place that reminds me of western Pennsylvania but receives more than sixty sunny days each year and whose winters are less dismal than here. Other criteria for my next home is that it will be in a rural area and that I will be able to see mountains (or at least big hills) from my future front or back deck. So far, the Ozarks and eastern Kentucky seem to fit the bill.

How would you describe DeMarco and Jayme's relationship?

They are still feeling their way through it, still trying to understand each other. They have a deep love and respect for each other, but each has secrets that impact the relationship. Their physical chemistry is still an important part of their relationship, especially for DeMarco—it's one of the few times he can truly be open and unguarded and allow himself to experience the fullness of human connection.

Which character did you most enjoy writing?

DeMarco is easiest for me. I need only look a few years in the past to remember what it is like to be so guarded. But I also enjoy the challenge of seeing life from a female point of view. Fortunately, I've had some guidance over the years in understanding that point of view.

For that same reason, I also enjoyed writing Cat. She's a woman with a huge heart but with the brittle shell of a lot of the country-women I knew as a boy.

As for the other characters, I had a lot of fun with Hoyle. Everything he does filters through his intellect. His physicality is an encumbrance, so his physical pleasures are limited to the gastro-nomic. I, on the other hand, have always exulted in the physical; as a high school and college athlete, my attitude toward the physical life was akin to that of the ancient Greeks. Even though my running and jumping days are behind me now, I still retain an appreciation for the physical life, but am gradually according more and more importance to the nonphysical.

Which character did you find the most challenging to write?

Several of the secondary characters are based more on observation than on an inner understanding of what drives those characters. I find it impossible to appreciate the motives of anyone who deliberately harms another person.

Do you see any similarities between DeMarco and yourself?

Maybe. Maybe not. 😊

There are some really great twists in *Walking the Bones*. Can you describe some of your plotting process? How do you map out the events in your novels?

Typically, I don't start writing until I know the opening scene and have an idea of the conclusion. Somewhere along the way, I begin to discern future plot points that will tie the beginning to the ending, though the ending is quite likely to change before I get to it. Overall, I let the characters determine the course of the story. I set them in motion, then follow along behind and record their decisions.

If you had one piece of advice for aspiring mystery writers, what would it be?

Do I have to choose only one piece of advice? How about two?

Here's number 1: Don't assume that an MFA or any other degree will turn you into a writer. It won't. At best, a degree will expose you to a lot of good, published writers and will shorten your apprenticeship by a few years. At worst, a degree will take a lot of money and time and will homogenize your writing so that it is acceptable to the lowest common denominator of literary taste. I think an aspiring writer will learn a lot less about herself, human nature, and life by sitting in a classroom for two years than by traveling the world, or just the country, and by reading and studying every good book she can get her hands on.

Number 2: Know story structure. Know what is meant by a beginning, a middle, and an end. And understand that even that formula is only a suggestion, not a rule.

What do you want readers to take away from *Walking the Bones*?

If my readers close the book and feel they have been on an emotional journey with my characters, and if the reader says goodbye to

those characters as they would say goodbye to dear friends they hope to see again, I will be satisfied that I have fulfilled my obligation.

DeMarco has suffered through a lot of tragedy, both in his childhood and adult life. Do you think people ever truly escape the ghosts of their past?

I will let Thomas Huston and Jayme Matson answer that question.

Thomas: “There’s story and there’s backstory. In fact, there’s no story without backstory. There’s no you.... There’s no present without the past.”

Jayme: “The past is never past. Every second of their pasts lay gathered inside them. Every incident of their pasts had constructed their present, every cell interlocking, layer upon layer. The past is omnipresent.”

What do you think makes DeMarco a great detective?

He listens to his heart.