

Maddie M. White

AUTHOR

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ASK THE AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

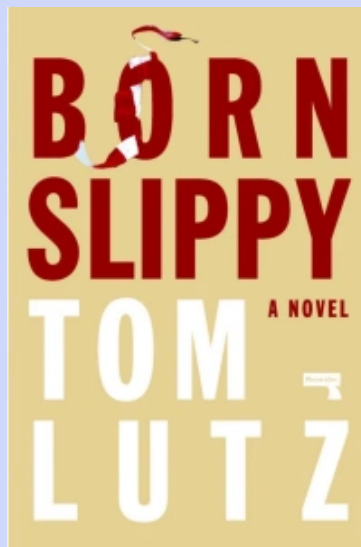
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Ask the Author: Tom Lutz

 3 DAYS AGO  1 COMMENT



What would you like readers to know about you?

Honestly, I'd like readers to know my books. Anyone who has read a few of them knows more about me than a standard biography could represent.

There is a biographical story that can be told through those books. I started writing as an academic (American Nervousness; Cosmopolitan Vistas), then wrote cultural history for a general audience (Crying; Doing Nothing), then travel (Drinking Mare's Milk; And the Monkey Learned Nothing), before finally doing what I always wanted to do, which was write a novel (Born Slippy) and screenplays for film and television (Custom of the Country; Jonestown; The Key).

I could tell a story about starting adult life as a cook and a carpenter and a musician, having children at a very young age, and then realizing, kind of by accident—I was cooking breakfast and lunch at a small college in the Midwest—that there were people called professors and that they read books and wrote books for a living, which put me on this path, landing me in Los Angeles, where all three of my children also ended up, working in creative fields themselves.

There's a story about wandering around the world and the country as a young man, settling into college in Massachusetts, grad school in the Bay Area, first academic job in Iowa, next jobs in Southern California, including my current position at UC Riverside, which has allowed me to wander around the world and the country again.

There's a story about playing in bands in high school in Connecticut, bar bands in New York, country rock in the Midwest, rock and Latin music in California, back to the Midwest playing blues and country, then blues in Los Angeles.

There's a love story, but that's private.

What is your book about for those who haven't read it?

The story opens in 2013 with a building exploding. When Frank Baltimore sees it in the news, he recognizes that it is the building in Taipei where his friend, Dmitry Heald, worked in investment banking. We then alternate between the story of their odd friendship, born on a building site years earlier, when they were both young, and their interactions over the years. Frank goes to Asia after the blast to help Dmitry's widow, only to find himself over his head in more ways than one. Dmitry was a very bad man, and Frank is a fish out of water in foreign countries, out of his league when it comes to Dmitry's international crimes, and out of his mind in love with Dmitry's wife...

What has been your inspiration for writing it?

I've always loved thrillers and noir, always loved the novels, like *Candide*, or *The Great Gatsby*, or *Motherless Brooklyn* or Carl Hiaasen and Elmore Leonard novels, when the protagonist is a step behind the other characters, and a step behind the reader. Not exactly an untrustworthy narrator, but a bit slow on the uptake. And I wanted to have something to say about the banality of evil in our world.

What was your favorite scene or part of your book to write?

I loved writing Dmitry's monologues. He's a charming sociopath, and he had a very clear English accent in my ear as he told these stories of his own derring-do, and which are often also about his own comeuppance. I think he's a hilarious character and found myself laughing out loud at what was coming out of his mouth as I was writing. Also, he's a killer.

What books or authors inspired you to become a writer?

I've written recently (in LitHub) about reading *The Black Stallion* as a kid, but I've always read widely. It may have been reading the complete Sherlock Holmes that I first started wondering how an author came up with his books. From then on, everything I read fueled the desire. The stuff that wasn't great made me think I could do it, the stuff that was great made me aspire.

What advice would you give to aspiring authors who want to write a book?

1) Ass in chair. 2) Repeat. 3) If that doesn't work, stop.

I spent many years as a young man roaming around the country under the mistaken impression that I was Jack Kerouac, and assumed that somehow these intense, fabulous experiences I was having would magically become novels. Jack Kerouac does a lot of things in those novels, but most of the time it doesn't involve any writing.

One has to make a living, of course, and so once I ended up with a career in academia, I wrote academic books, and that taught me a lot about process, and taught me the love of writing. I see a lot of people who are trying to write that don't find it pleasurable, that don't look forward to it, and I think that that would be miserable. I'm like a golf addict who just can't wait to get back on the links or a gamer who only wants to get back to the console—because it is a deep, deep pleasure to be immersed in the creative process. If it isn't pleasurable for you, if it feels like work, like a chore, then why do it? There are plenty of books in the world without you.

But if it is pleasure, if you feel better when you are writing than you do when you are not writing then go for it, full speed ahead. And use my friend Juan Felipe Herrera's rule: when someone asked him how he managed to write over two dozen books, he said his mantra was, "it's all good." Don't let doubt read over your shoulder. You'll have plenty of time to edit and fix and gussy up and prettify and polish later. While you're writing, dive in and swim and float and splash around. Have fun.



1 Comment »

I am an author with RhetAskew. My premiere novel will be appearing in 2020.

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