

FORENSIC MYSTERY THRILLER

THE SKIES ROARED

THE BELL TRILOGY #2

STEVE BRADSHAW

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The Bell Trilogy

Is an utterly plausible genetic solution for life extension woven into a heart-pounding epic battle between good and evil . . .

The Bell Trilogy chronicles a family of great privilege harboring an unimaginable secret and dream that turns into a global nightmare. Elliott Sumner, a world renowned forensic pathologist, struggles to rectify his abandoned beginnings and innate gifts when unexpected paths cross. The serial killer hunter meets the genius psychopath of Memphis urban legend and discovers a secret to life people will kill for. He must protect the greatest evolutionary leap for mankind.

BLUFF CITY BUTCHER – Book one begins with Elliott’s chilling, forensic pursuit of a genius, psychopathic serial killer. The heart-pounding hunt for a real monster uncovers a century old mystery and sinister plan with profound, world implications.

THE SKIES ROARED – Book two enters the unfathomable realms of wealth and power where a secret society seizes control of a genetic breakthrough. Stealth armies on an evil mission and an unstoppable killer lure forensic sleuth Elliott Sumner onto a horrific blood trail that crosses three continents. While hunting the deadly force and navigating the startling twists, Elliott must find answers to an utterly plausible threat to mankind.

BLOOD LIONS – Book three is the masterful conclusion to the Bell family nightmare. Shocking pieces of the ill-fated puzzle fall in place. Elliott Sumner and his unlikely allies must secure, formulate, and disseminate the Medino biogenic compound or the greatest evolutionary leap of mankind is lost. Sinister forces seek control waging a secret battle. In the end Elliott must embrace a real monster and call upon his innate gifts to prevail.

For more information on The Bell Trilogy books, visit author website at
www.SteveBradshawAuthor.com

PART ONE

SCIONS AND DEMONS

ONE

“Evil is just a point of view.”

Anne Rice

“Oh God, Elliott. Is there anything you can do for him?” Carol whispered.

Thirty squad cars in a tight circle surrounded the Bell mansion. High beams poured over fresh snow and climbed Georgia marble to the growing, crimson red stain. Statues with badges stood next to smoking metal and spinning blues, arms hung and guns pointed down. Every Memphis cop and Shelby County deputy within five miles had come.

Sheriff Taft found the security guards in the gatehouse, guns in snapped holsters and bloody tracks to the gates. Before Taft pursued, he sent out an APB—Bluff City Butcher is alive at the Bell mansion. Come help if can.”

They had pulled the serial killer’s carcass from the Mississippi River two months ago. There were not ready for what they would witness on this cold, winter night in east Memphis.

Standing on the balcony, Carol slid her hand under Elliott’s coat and around his waist. He pulled her close. Thirty feet away, through floating ice crystals in white light above the packed courtyard of eyewitnesses, Elliott stared at the serial killer he had

hunted for a decade—now with a seven-foot spire piercing his abdomen and protruding from his back. Steaming blood ran from the massive, gut wound down the snow-covered roof.

Elliott thought he knew why the Bluff City Butcher jumped from the balcony onto the razor sharp spire—and it was not a failed escape. He whispered back into Carol’s ear, “Adam made a decision tonight. He saw no other way . . .” Elliott’s thoughts drifted into the places he must learn to understand, thoughts about the monster he hunted and brother he had found.

So this is your moment of clarity . . . suicide your end. I knew one day we would meet, but I thought I would be the one dying, the one crazy enough to hunt a freak of nature, a genius, psychopathic serial killer. An unstoppable, man-eating lion with the brain of an Einstein. Even now I don’t know what you can do, all your capabilities. You killed so many and escaped for so long. Elliott’s eyes moved to the growing crowd in the courtyard. These people gather not to watch you die, but to witness your next escape. They expect you to pull your bloody hulk from the spire. They want to see you bound across the rooftop and disappear into the night. They wait for you to again return to the curious fog of Memphis legend. But this is your end, Adam Duncan . . .

Elliott turned to Albert Bell now bent over the balcony rail a few feet away. The drawn face of the billionaire patriarch told the story of the tragic evening. Albert’s eyes were empty, and his complexion as white as the clinging snow. Albert’s blood left his head and moved to his core to protect the breaking heart.

Are you thinking about the people your illegitimate son killed, Albert? Elliott thought. *How can you reconcile the abominable acts of a monster with the unconditional love of a father? You see Adam dying, and a heinous killer dying. Does the love of a father bridge all . . . ?*

“Tonight I learned Adam is my brother,” Elliott said only to Carol. Their bodies fused. She spoke with her eyes. He felt her inside—the only one he let in. Her long blond hair fell from her sculpted cheekbones, and her wet lips almost touched his. Then they did touch, but not a kiss. His hand pressed on the small of her back, holding her, pulling her closer and wanting to protect her.

“Max called from Dallas. He told us everything on Albert’s speakerphone. That’s when Adam rested his knife on my shoulder . . . my neck. He pressed the blade to my carotid artery. Adam owned the room, Carol. He came to kill Albert and me.”

“You were the last names on the kill list,” Carol said.

“Max did not know he was speaking to three,” Elliott said.

“And why did Max call?” Carol asked.

“To correct information he had given earlier to Albert.”

“Information regarding an investigation . . . ?”

“The missing persons investigation—Betty Duncan—Albert’s mistress forty years ago.”

“And Adam’s mother. Now Max claims she is your mother, too—twins?”

“Triplets: Adam, me, and Jack Bellow.”

“God, Elliott—triplets! Albert Bell is your father? It is all very hard to believe.”

“Max possess irrefutable evidence, so he says.”

“Hard to swallow the serial killer you hunted the last ten years is your brother,” Carol said. “And Jack Bellow was your brother, too . . .”

“Max was the first to figure it out—that Jack Bellow’s body is in the morgue and the Butcher is still out there. Max had a hunch Adam would come for Albert and me tonight.”

“A county-wide Christmas party crawling with cops, I could not agree more.”

“Fits the BCB’s *modus operandi*—use the *impossible* to outmaneuver us mere mortals. ”

“And Jack Bellow is certainly the Butcher’s double. I saw him,” Carol said.

“On the bluff . . .”

“But you don’t look like them, Elliott.”

“They are identical twins. I’m fraternal.”

“What’s the difference?”

“In simple terms, Jack and Adam shared an embryo. I had my own.”

“Does that stuff really happen?”

“Yes it does. Happens more when fertility drugs are involved. They could have been.”

“Fertility drugs were available in the ’60s?”

“Hormone *hMG* was in clinical studies in the ‘60s.”

“Forty years later paths cross. I wonder why.” She rested her head on Elliott’s chest.

He stared at Adam, dying on the steep roof atop the now red snow. “I think someone is pulling our strings.”

She stayed on his chest. “It looks to me like Adam Duncan was pulling the strings.”

“Two months ago I would have agreed, because I thought we stopped the Butcher. But now a world-acclaimed biotechnology entrepreneur—who happens to also be my biologic brother—is dead and my *serial killer* brother is taking his own life.”

“When you say it that way . . .”

“I must find out why Adam let Albert and me live, and why he choose to kill himself?”

Carol studied Elliott’s face. “I see your wheels turning.”

Their eyes met. “If Jack and Adam messed-up someone’s plans, maybe it’s my turn. If they were a threat, maybe now I am the threat to eliminate.”

“How will you find out?” she asked.

“The answer’s in the timeline of events. I need to dig deeper. I need to know more about how Jack died and what led to Adam’s change of heart and snap decision.”

“You have little to go on, Elliott.”

“Something’s not right about any of this. It’s always been much bigger than a serial killer.”

Adam released a primal scream, a cry like a helpless animal being eaten alive. The delirious, rhythmic flow of excruciating pain slowed as the end neared. The iron spire reflected white light from the squad cars. It shot a beam into the black sky creating a surreal portal.

“The night the Butcher took you from Beale Street, were you alone in the back of that van? Do you know if he took anyone else into the catacombs?”

“I was alone that night.” She felt Elliott’s phone vibrate.

“Excuse me.” He pushed through the balcony crowd and disappeared into the study.

Carol moved to Albert. When she held his arm, he managed a slight smile. His eyes stayed with Adam writhing in pain,

flopping and spewing bright red blood onto the snow. She prayed Adam's death would come soon—the pain and the nightmare needed to be over.

The crowd in the courtyard parted. The ambulance rolled to a stop and paramedics got out slowly—they could not change the inevitable. The monster, who had tormented the community for decades, lay in his blood three stories up. The BCB would die before anyone could get near him.

Elliott returned to the balcony. Carol found her nest in his coat. Although a strong woman, she needed a strong man this night. They watched in silence. Elliott seemed pensive when the ladder did not reach the steep roof three stories up. The snowfall thickened. He knew the long-ladder truck on its way would arrive too late. Adam was now still.

“Why did you ask about the night the Butcher took me from Beale?” Carol asked.

Elliott's cell buzzed again. This time she saw the name—Mike Primeaux—one of Elliott's handpicked paramedics he used on special assignments. There were two, highly trained and tight-lipped.

Elliott did not hide his conversation. “Is Dr. Bates with you now . . . ? Good. I'm coming.”

Elliott met her stare. “First, why the question about Beale?” she pushed.

“At that time we thought Adam and Jack were one. Now we know they are two. Adam could not have taken you and Jack on the same night at the same time.”

“My God. I did not get that far. That means . . .”

“It means Adam had help he did or did not know about.” Elliott turned to leave. “There are others in this, Carol.”

“You're right. Adam could not do all of it alone.” She turned to the crowd in the courtyard. “They're here now, watching him die. They must be shocked at the abrupt change in plans. With the Butcher, kills were never in doubt. This outcome has gotta be disturbing to them.”

“Adam's suicide is catastrophic or a blessing. The others came tonight expecting him to do what he always does, kill and escape. This time, his task was to terminate the Bell patriarch

and me, the first male born and sole heir to the Bell family fortune.”

They watched a powder-blue Bentley leave the edge of the crowd and crawl up the drive with lights off. When it reached the crest, the lights popped on and dropped out of sight.

“Who would leave now, and like that?” Carol said.

“I don’t know. But I need to take care of something. I’ll be back.”

Elliott left the balcony as the fire truck barreled down the drive with lights spinning and sirens blaring. The turntable ladder would be adequate, but would never be deployed. Carol returned to Albert’s side and surrounded his arm as they both watched the spectacle.

Adam Duncan stopped moving before the small door on the roof opened and a square hole appeared in the snow. William crawled out first and then two paramedics. They unbolted the spire with a sparkling socket wrench and removed the spire from Adam’s stomach—it slid to the edge of the roof as the crowd watched in breathless awe. The three pulled the blood-covered, lifeless body of the legendary serial killer inside, and the small door closed.

Soon the fire trucks departed and the guests followed. A long line of lights moved from the Bell estate, and were swallowed on Walnut Grove. Sheriff Taft and Deputy Pilsner walked the snowy fields, releasing each squad car with a handshake and “thanks.” The grounds would return to normal except for the bloodstain on the north wall of the mansion, and the tire tracks in the surrounding snow.

They brought out the body in a black crash bag strapped onto a gurney. Two paramedics crossed the courtyard with heads down and loaded Adam Duncan into the back of the ambulance. The ME had examined the body in the attic. He officially ruled manner of death “suicide”, and cause of death severe, abdominal trauma with terminal exsanguination.

In the crawl space beneath the little door to the roof, Dr. Bates collected the required body fluids for the obligatory toxicology tests. He obtained a full set of fingerprints, dental impressions, and DNA samples. There was no need to bring the twin to the morgue. An autopsy would not tell them anything

new. Dr. Bates had witnessed the suicide and pronounced the Bluff City Butcher dead at the scene.

Bates said he had done it out of professional courtesy. He released the body to the family to avoid a long, drawn out, meaningless inquest. Bates explained to the press he had more than enough to rule and sign a death certificate. The only one hurt this night was the man committing suicide. His life of offenses had no bearing on his death. Bates declared the circus officially over. The serial killer of Memphis urban legend would no longer threaten the community or use up the ink at *The Memphis Tribune*. Albert Bell would go forward with private funeral arrangements.

No lights. No sirens. The ambulance pulled out of the courtyard leaving Elliott standing alone in the snow. No one would question the ambulance's destination until later.

He looked up to the balcony where Albert and Carol stood alone. Only Carol noticed the fingers poking out of his blazer. Only Carol saw the bloody, white latex gloves worn by the man she adored.

Carol squeezed Albert's arm. He smiled for the first time all night . . .



STEVE BRADSHAW is a forensic field agent and biotech entrepreneur writing his unique brand of mystery/thrillers. Steve's training and experience investigating thousands of unexplained deaths for the medical examiner's office, and as the founder-President/CEO of an innovative biomedical device company enables him to put his readers on the front row in the fascinating worlds of fringe science, modern forensics, and the chilling pursuit of real monsters.

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