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Because everybody
needs an editor . . .

and a newsletter



Let's get Sirius

The dog days of summer are upon us, and this newsletter has no news other than the scintillating blog item I have cut and pasted below for your consideration, a selfless act undertaken so that you need not click and expend more energy than necessary.

In the meantime, you have noticed that dog days is a cliché and wondered why I employed such a despicable device. Ah, but even clichés can teach us, grasshopper. As a child and until about fifteen minutes ago, I thought dog days referred to a time so hot that even dogs wanted to do nothing more than lie in a comfortable place that was just the right temperature. In adulthood, when dogs became part of our household, I realized that is what dogs do every day. Dog days, I can now report, is a term that refers to the hot part of mid-summer coinciding with the rising of Sirius, the Dog Star. Ancient Greeks made that connection.

My use of dog days has paid off for you. You not only learned an exhilarating bit of etymology, but now you know that a cliché you thought must be thousands of years old really is thousands of years old. Not every day is this good.



Emi gets comfortable at home in San Jose. For a ten-second video that shows how she likes to spend her summer days, click the photo.

Aging in place

[\(Click here to read this blog post on, you know, the blog.\)](#)

The trouble with humans is that they die.

So how is it fair that some fictional humans, usually main characters in mystery series, are not only immortal but do not age? They have not shared that secret process with their living, book-buying fans. Neither do they share it with the authors who created them. Ingrates.

Robert B. Parker wrote nearly forty Spenser books over forty years, and a few more were published posthumously after his agent brushed up some manuscripts that had been in the works at the time of Parker's fatal heart attack in 2010. And if that weren't enough, writers Ace Atkins and Mike Lupica took up the standard and continue to produce Spenser books in a style like Parker's, in cooperation with Parker's estate. The Spenser brand, like the Dude, abides. It also spews money. Would Parker have cared that someone else is putting words in the mouth of Spenser and Hawk these days? I assume (never a good idea, but I did it anyway) that part of the proceeds from Spenser books that Atkins and Lupica write go to the Parker estate and thus take care of Parker family members. Parker's other series characters, Jesse Stone and Sunny Randall, also have enjoyed extended lives through the efforts of other authors. A story in the *Boston Globe* pointed out that Parker was unconcerned about his legacy. He created novels to provide for his family and scratch the writing itch.

When asked how he thought his books would be viewed in fifty years, the *Globe* reported that Parker said, “Don’t know. Don’t care.”

Parker is hardly the only example of passing off a franchise after passing away. Tom Clancy sold a book or two in his time, and after he died in 2013, a handful of authors plugged the gap to allow Jack Ryan to live on, even if Clancy didn’t. Sometimes a successful author doesn’t even have to endure the inconvenience of dying before inviting other authors to keep the brand alive. James Patterson long ago figured out that he could contract with co-authors and create a gusher of popular fiction. You know you have grasped the system when a former U.S. president is just one of your co-authors.

But what about protagonists who never get old? Jack Reacher maims thugs in a 2020 book as enthusiastically as he did in his 1997 debut. Twenty-three years of face smashes and elbow slams. Doesn’t that start to hurt after a while? But author Lee Child is riding a winner, and he doesn’t seem inclined to let Reacher become frail. Child’s younger brother is now co-authoring the series, which allows Reacher to continue drinking coffee, go three or four days without changing clothes, and head-butt those who deserve it.

Today’s older authors might have contracted Mystery Writing Syndrome long ago while reading the ageless Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew and inferring that main characters were eternal. And some authors understandably want to write a main character who attracts readers, even if the character is thirty years old and uses a rotary dial telephone in the series debut and thirty years old when texting someone a zillion books later. Thirty is the new thirty.

Not every thriller series writer seems to worry about that, and those who do sometimes split the difference. Popular mystery creators Michael Connelly and John Sandford (who are both former newspaper reporters, a point I raise to make you consider the collateral damage that will occur when every last newspaper goes under) have allowed their main characters to age, but not in a way that you could call normal human years. Or even normal dog years. Harry Bosch and Lucas Davenport grow older in mystery years, the exact working of which is a mystery. Harry Bosch is physically not the guy he was in *The Black Echo* and *Concrete Blonde* days, but Connelly has drawn a couple of characters to pull the dramatic load, Renée Ballard and Harry’s half-brother, Mickey Haller, the Lincoln Lawyer. And those of you who are fans of the Bosch series on Amazon Prime noticed long ago that the streaming Bosch is a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, whereas the written Bosch was a Vietnam tunnel rat, so who knows how old this guy really is? Meanwhile, Sandford is giving Davenport more age-appropriate adventures and strengthened Davenport’s colleague, Virgil Flowers, moves that have not diminished the snap of the dialogue or the speed

of the plots.

Should mystery series protagonists remain genetic wonders, or should they get creaky and cranky like me? Main characters with disabilities arise here and there in the mystery game—Jeffery Deaver’s Lincoln Rhyme, for example—but the disabilities are usually not age related. Maybe mystery/thriller characters should act their age. But what is their age? I’m for whatever suits an author’s vision, as long as he or she can suspend my disbelief. Tell me your thoughts, and I’ll collect them for a future post.

The trouble with dying is that it’s human.

**Kind regards,
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