

# Savannah Morning News.

Savannah Morning News Thursday, December 31, 2015

## THE PERFECT SUSPECT

'The Girl in the Maze,' set in coastal Georgia, reaches No. 1 as a Kindle bestseller

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"The Girl in the Maze" has suspense, action, memorable characters and even a perfect storm.

A psychological thriller set in coastal Georgia, the book is a Kindle bestseller. It has reached No. 1 in three Amazon categories, including psychological suspense.

"It's the story of Martha Covington, an aspiring journalist who recently suffered a psychotic break," author R.K. Jackson says.

"She has taken an internship with the Historical Society of Amberleem, a fictional coastal town on the Georgia coast, and is given the task of collecting the oral history of the residents of Shell Heap Island, descendants of slaves who have lived by their own traditions for the last 300 years."

Martha, who is schizophrenic, has just been released from a psychiatric ward. Thinking the breakdown is behind her, she begins gathering stories of the residents.

"As Martha delves into her work, the voices she thought she left behind start whispering again, and she

begins to doubt her recovery," Jackson says. "When a grisly murder occurs, Martha finds herself at the center of a perfect storm — and she's the perfect suspect."

Published online by Random Alibi Books, the book is available for \$2.99 from several Internet retailers.

"Prior to this, I've only published short stories," Jackson says. "The fictional Shell Heap Island is based on some of Georgia's real barrier islands that I've visited, including Sapelo and Cumberland."

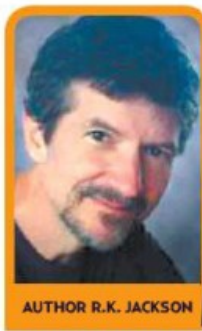
The islands form a perfect setting for the story, Jackson says.

"I was inspired by numerous visits, both as a child and as an adult, to Georgia's hauntingly beautiful Golden Isles," he said.

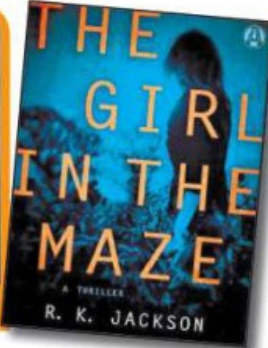
"As an adult, I discovered the unique and threatened culture of the Geechees, direct descendants of slaves who lived for centuries in near-isolation. The book also drew upon my early career experiences as a small-town newspaper journalist."

The book has received excellent reviews.

"One of my favorite reviews so far described the book as 'genre-crushing,'" Jackson says. "I like that.



AUTHOR R.K. JACKSON



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"It's a thriller, a mystery and a puzzle story, with elements of horror and the paranormal," he says. "Yet it's also a character-driven story of a young woman's struggle to develop her journalism career while fighting the demons of mental illness."

Writing is just one of Jackson's careers.

"I'm a lifelong space enthusiast who works in communications for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, somewhat of a dream job," he says.

I previously worked as

a senior editor at CNN, where I helped launch the network's Internet presence. I've attended the Advanced Novel Writing Workshop at UCLA as well as the Squaw Valley Community of Writers Workshop.

"Two of my plays were staged professionally by Atlanta's Academy Theatre, and my short story, 'All the Devils,' was featured in the Alfred Hitchcock-themed issue of Penumbra Magazine," Jackson says. "I recently consulted with Disney's Imagineers on the forthcoming Space-

ship of the Imagination attraction at EPCOT."

Known for rescuing neighbors from snakes, Jackson builds elaborate Halloween experiences in his garage.

"In fiction, I like to explore things that both frighten and fascinate me," he says. "Schizophrenia falls into that category. It's a mysterious illness, and being unable to trust your own perceptions of reality is one of the most terrifying things I can imagine."

Coastal Georgia makes a memorable setting for psychological suspense.

"It's one of the most beautiful and atmospheric places in the world, and Savannah is one of my favorite cities," Jackson says. "My ancestors on my father's side are all from the region, and we used to visit relatives in Savannah and on Wilmington Island."

"They made a deep and lasting impression on me," he says. "I always thought it would be a great setting for a book. Of course, others beat me to the punch — most notably, John Berendt with 'Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.'"

Jackson found out about the Geechees when his wife, Elizabeth St. Andre, was doing her Ph.D. dissertation work on nearby Morgan Island.

"My research into schizophrenia was more second-hand," he says. "I read every memoir I could find written by those who've lived with the condition. I also talked to psychologists and corresponded with a few people on mental health forums."

Jackson lives with his family in the Los Padres National Forest in California and works in Pasadena, but his family has deep roots in Georgia dating back to the 1700s. His parents currently live in North Georgia but he has relatives in Savannah, Beaufort and Charleston.

"We both love coastal Georgia and South Carolina," he says. "Savannah is definitely one of our favorite cities and we hope to make a trip out there within the next year."

Fans can expect more from Jackson.

"I've signed for a two-book deal with Alibi and I'm currently working on a sequel to 'The Girl in the Maze' called 'The Kiss of the Sun,'" he says. "Look for it next spring."

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R.K. Jackson, author of 'The Girl in the Maze,' on why he set his book in coastal Georgia