Writer’s Note

FLASHBANG grew out of a strange idea that had been sitting in my head since the 1990s. I imagined a handgun that looked completely real but didn't fire a bullet. Someone would point it at a person and pull the trigger, and instead of killing them, it would photograph their face at the exact instant they believed they were about to die. Those photographs would eventually hang in an art gallery.

It was dark, disturbing, and obviously not something anyone could actually do, so the idea stayed in my head for decades. Once I started writing screenplays, I realized fiction finally gave me a place to explore it.

From there, I built an underground art collective around the idea. Their targets are powerful people who have become very good at performing for cameras and controlling the way the public sees them. Casey believes that if someone genuinely thinks they have reached the final second of their life, there isn't enough time to put the mask back on. For him, that fraction of a second contains a kind of truth that can't be rehearsed.

What interested me more as the story developed was whether Casey's idea of truth was any more trustworthy than the people he was trying to expose. His Banksy-style guerrilla art group, Negative Space, calls what it does art and journalism, but its members are also choosing targets, controlling context, editing what the public sees, and building an audience around the results. A movement that begins by attacking manufactured images can very easily start manufacturing images of its own.

That part of the story grew out of things that already make me uneasy: facial recognition, corporate surveillance, predictive technology, viral outrage, deepfakes, algorithms deciding what gets seen, and the increasingly shaky assumption that a photograph or video automatically proves what happened. We have more images of the world than ever before, but we also have more ways to manipulate what those images mean.

Detective Leonard gave me another way to have fun with that. He works in a world where sophisticated technology is supposed to make traditional detective work almost unnecessary. Then he encounters a group specifically designed to stay invisible to those systems. Suddenly he has to start looking at physical evidence, listening carefully, following mundane paper trails, and relying on his own judgment. The futuristic investigation gradually turns him into an old-fashioned detective.

I also never wanted Casey to be an uncomplicated hero. The people he targets may deserve to be exposed, but believing you are on the right side doesn't automatically make every method righteous. Once an audience forms around the work, attention, ego, branding, and power begin changing what the group originally thought it was doing.

The idea that started *FLASHBANG* was simply a photograph of someone's face in the instant when they believed everything was over. Years later, what interested me most was everything surrounding that photograph: who pointed the camera, who chose the subject, who decided what the image meant, and whether any picture can present the truth without being shaped by the person showing it to us.