

An interview with Archer Mayor

Most of your books focus on a particular type of crime: arson, Internet predators, illegal drugs, etc. What kind of crime is at the center of *The Catch*?

Drugs play a large role in *The Catch*, to be sure, but perhaps the biggest crime this time out is unbridled ambition. In some ways, this is a book about unscrupulous people on the make, as well as about the tricky nature of alliances, and what we truly know or don't about family relationships.

***The Catch* ends with a sort of romantic cliffhanger, a first for you. What made you write it that way?**

I write these books in part from the seat of my pants, certainly when it comes to their emotional contents. I knew that I wanted to deepen the relationship between Lyn and Joe in *The Catch*, and allow the reader more insight into Lyn's background and character, but a whole new possibility opened up as the novel was nearing its conclusion—good enough to merit more scrutiny than I had time. Also, some of the themes stimulated by this late arriving development seemed deserving of their own book. Both a cliffhanger and a sort of sequel, therefore, seemed appropriate for the first time.

So Joe will return to Maine in the next book?

Since the ending of *The Catch* was a bit of an emotional cliffhanger, vis-à-vis Joe and Lyn, I thought it important to address this issue immediately by having Book 20 return at least in part to Maine where I'm hoping things will become a little more clarified. (Sorry to be so mysterious, but that *is* the name the game, right?)

Willy Kunkle seemed like he was getting into some trouble at the end of *Chat*. Will he be a major focus of *The Catch*?

As is often the case, I am baffled by this question. Willy is perpetually getting into trouble, after all. But concerning *The Catch*, he will not feature overlarge in the plot, since most of it occurs in Maine. He and Sam do play a crucial role, however, which really comes home to roost when Joe returns to Vermont at the end of the book. In short, Willy's job is intact, and Willy (and Sammie) fans will get some nutrition this time out.

Do you think you will ever write another book from Willy's perspective?

I never say "Never," to such questions. I don't have a purely Willy book in my head right now, though.

Will the VBI ever get bigger to include more characters for Joe to work with besides Sammie and Willy?

I have had various other VBI members surface briefly, now and then, and the thought has crossed my mind that it might be fun to introduce a new, at least semi-permanent, regular character, but I haven't conjured him or her up yet. I would imagine that were I to do so, many readers would start getting nervous that I was also about to knock off one of the old timers.

Do any of the cases you work on as a Deputy Sheriff or Assistant State Medical Examiner make their way into your books?

Absolutely, but not in detail. I use the feelings I encounter on my other jobs, some of the techniques, occasionally a phrase or one-liner. I would never want to cross the line between the integrity and/or privacy of an actual case and any of my novels. What I write about is make-believe, but it is flavored and influenced by reality.

How do actual police officers like your work?

They like me. The really like me. Actually, some of them may hate me, for all I know, but I've never met them. So far, the professional reaction has been gratitude and amusement.

Why did you switch publishers?

A couple of things stimulated a move to St. Martin's Press. First, the previous publisher, though very supportive early on, became distracted by a complex series of corporate changes, essentially losing its focus on mysteries. Indeed, my initial imprint, Mysterious Press, was eventually put on the scrapheap and replaced by a much less specialized entity calling itself Grand Central Publishing. Second, I am a regional writer detailing regional activities and a way of life. I never felt that my previous publisher ever fully recognized that—they certainly never fully exploited it, and thus my sales began to disappoint their New York-based accountants.

What's it like publishing your own books?

It's a real pleasure. The very books that were put out of print by my previous publisher (13 of them so far,) have found the northern New England market that I'd always thought was there. Now, admittedly, my overhead is a lot smaller than some New York bigwig's, and thus I need to sell fewer books to make ends meet, but nevertheless, this has made me a happy camper, and resulted in readers' being able to locate virtually the entire series in stores again, albeit from three different publishers.

What made you decide to publish *Open Season* as an audiobook?

That was simple. Even with the outrageous climb in fuel prices, people are increasingly trapped in their cars, driving, instead of being able to curl up with a good book. The audiobooks are a natural—and much requested—way of addressing that dilemma

Are you the reader on the new audiobook?

No. I'm sorry to say that the time necessary to do a recording was more than I could spare, given all my other commitments. The guy we did select to read *Open Season*, however—Thomas Stevens of Waterbury, VT—is a wonderful reader and a talented actor, and did, we believe, a truly wonderful job.

Why don't you ever describe what Joe looks like?

I'd like the reader's imagination to do that job. One of the joys I experience when I read a book is being able to conjure up scenes and appearances in my head—to help the writer along as a storyteller, in a way. It invests me in the telling of the tale, and enhances my pleasure. I hope that by leaving Joe's "face" blank, I give that same constructive opportunity to my readers.

Where will Joe go next?

Darned if I know. He probably won't age much, since he's more an embodiment of us all than a real person—an Everyman at an Everyage—and he obviously won't become a nuclear scientist. He is what he is. What I hope is that he'll keep exploring the vagaries of human nature, and continue to be an intelligent, compassionate, insightful guide—for both me and my readers.

How do you decide what the next book is going to be about?

It can be extraordinarily quirky, but it often hinges on a question—what's it like to undergo this type of tribulation? What's it like to live under these types of conditions? Why is it that someone would do such an action? I have often been heard to say that ignorance and curiosity are my primary drivers—I like to write about what interests me,

but about which I know little to nothing.

Are you going to put Joe's mother and brother Leo in the hospital again?

Not anytime soon, but then Joe seems to go there on a regular basis, as do—sadly—many of us, if for less dramatic reasons. I do think, however, that much as like to visit Mom and Leo (as far as I know, Mom's never been given a name, by the way,) I'll try to keep them hale and hearty for a while, at least.

Are there areas of Vermont that Joe hasn't explored yet that you'd like him to visit?

There are probably dozens, some of them utterly mundane, and other exotic enough that I don't even know of them yet. Right off the bat, though, nothing specific comes to mind. Ben & Jerry's assembly line, perhaps?