

Author Bruce Borgos Interview (“The Riddle Maker”)

Raised on Reading: “The Riddle Maker” is the fourth installment in the Porter Beck series. How did you come to, and go about, developing the Porter Beck character? Is he based on any person, or people, you’ve known?

Borgos: Porter Beck was actually a product of the storyline for book #1, The Bitter Past. In other words, I imagined the plot – a Cold War espionage story set in Nevada before I imagined Sheriff Beck. Once I had the main architecture of the story, I knew I needed a guy with an interesting background to make it work. He’s not really based on any one person, but I did spend time with the actual sheriff of Lincoln County while doing my research.

RoR: Despite being the fourth book in the Porter Beck series, “The Riddle Maker” also works as a standalone novel. Are you conscious of that as you write, making sure to seamlessly incorporate explanations to references or people from prior books in the series?

Borgos: I’m conscious of it but not always good at it. My editor, however, is very good at making sure I don’t over-explain events or people from previous books. As the author, my goal is to give the reader a good sense of my characters and the setting without having to refer back to any of the previous stories.

RoR: What is your approach to writing? Do you outline and know where the story is going from the start? Or do the characters take on a life of their own and sort of guide where the narrative should go?

Borgos: I’ve tried writing things without an outline, but I fail miserably each time. I use a writing software that allows me to do an extensive outline and map out the book from start to finish before I start typing the first word of the first draft. I have to know where I’m going the whole time. My characters will sometimes surprise me, and that’s a good thing. I can always tweak my outline!

RoR: Since “The Riddle Maker” is the fourth book focusing on Sheriff Porter Beck, how comfortable are you now with this character? Do you feel at times (perhaps while writing) that he becomes sort of your alter ego?

Borgos: Very much so. We’re not alike in some important ways, but I’m so comfortable with his character at this point that I know instinctively how he would react to any situation.

RoR: Clearly, riddles play a huge role in this story. Are you partial to riddles? Was it difficult to write these riddles (the rhyming aspect, calling out specific landmarks, etc.)? Was there a lot of ‘geographic’ research you had to do to call out the locations?

Borgos: Oh yes, and because of that, the riddles were very difficult to write. For one thing, I had never written a riddle in my life. I had also never written about a serial killer. So when I started to compose the first riddle, I was at a loss. Incorporating the geographic clues made everything

more difficult, and then there was the challenge of finding the words that rhymed to complete each line. Oh boy – I don't think I'll be doing that again!

Ror: I've seen readers comment negatively on the overuse of a certain offensive expletive, mostly by Jett's character. Does that concern you when you see reviews like that? Or do you feel the usage is necessary to capture that character's personality?

Borgos: In this case, it's totally necessary. Jett is very small in stature and looks much younger than she is. She swears like a sailor to compensate to a degree – to make herself appear more serious and to be taken more seriously. Beck makes fun of her foul mouth at times, but he gets her. And Jett is a really great character. It doesn't bother me at all when readers have negative feelings about that. They are certainly entitled to those feelings. But I write real people, and real people sometimes use language I wouldn't. That's what writing is.

RoR: Ocular gene therapy, which Porter Beck's character undergoes, is a real procedure. Did you have to do much research on this to accurately incorporate it into the story? Do you feel this aspect of Beck's character makes him more 'human' to readers? More relatable?

Borgos: Absolutely. This procedure is the result of Beck's journey through a very real eye disease, one that gets progressively worse. When I learned about the clinical trials going on to treat retinitis pigmentosa, I thought I owed it to my readers to give Beck some "light at the end of the tunnel." I'm not sure how it will end up, but RP has provided Beck a serious challenge to both his personal and professional life. It definitely makes him more human and relatable. My readers are always pulling for him to get better!

RoR: Approximately how long does it take, start to finish (research included), for you to complete a book? Has writer's block ever been an issue? Or simply found yourself stuck on a specific scene or aspect of the story where you must pause and step back? If any of that applies, how do you remedy the issue?

Borgos: On average, it takes me about 9 months to complete a book. Soup to nuts, 9 months. Occasionally I get stuck on something I didn't foresee in my outline, but I take long walks to sort through them. Sometimes the answer comes to me in the middle of the night when my brain is otherwise resting.

RoR: What do you hope readers take away from this story, or any of the books in the Porter Beck series?

Borgos: My entire goal as a writer is to make my readers laugh and/or cry – to move them emotionally with my words and my stories. I don't hope they come away from any of my novels with anything but a sense of satisfaction.