

VIGILANTE JUSTICE TRIVIA

About 20 years ago, a friend told me he doesn't believe the police want to solve the drug problem. Go by the parking lot and you see all new cars. How do they afford them on such low salaries? Bribes. If they wanted to solve the drug problem, they'd poison the drugs and kill the users.

My first reaction was that my friend is a nut. My second reaction was that this is a novel.

The hero is "if Barry were alive today..." My little brother was Barry and the hero is Gary. Both cops. Our last name at birth was Drake, and Gary still is one. So there you go.

The poison in the drugs. I spent much time in the Tampa (Florida) public libraries researching that. Finally, I read about Doctor Halpern's cases, concocted the succinylcholine-in-crack method, and checked with my anesthesiologist to ensure it'd work. As I've documented elsewhere, he probably questioned my sanity.

In hindsight, I don't advise asking your anesthesiologist how to kill until after he's ensured you don't die on the operating table.

Years later, after Al Gore invented the Internet, I discovered just how easy it is to get succinylcholine.

Why did it take me over 10 years to write the book? Well, I actually wrote 3.5 novels about Gary Drake. This project consumed several years, beginning on a manual typewriter and ending on an Epson PC clone. I started by digesting patrolmen's autobiographies, then copied the style, then let my character take me where he would.

The only problem was, they weren't good novels. Moving Gary Drake into Internal Affairs was the final piece of the puzzle. I added the criminals from the first book, the dark tone of the second book, and the craftsmanship of the third book. I pretended the fourth book never happened. Voila! A novel never consists of only one idea, as you know. Many ideas, many ingredients.

The dead body in Chapter One is some author who died while writing *The Chronicles of a Madman*. How obvious is that? Bring back one Drake boy and you have to kill the other, I guess.

Pastor Santiana's sermon. Did you recognize the beginning of "Let's Go Crazy" by Prince? Allow me to quote what I wrote. Turn in your Bibles -- um, novels -- to Chapter Twenty.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to talk about life. In this life, sometimes it seems like you're on your own." After that, I contemplate eternity.

Now let's listen to Prince:

"Dearly beloved

"We are gathered here today to talk about life

"Electric word, life
"It means forever and that's a mighty long time
"But I'm here to tell you there's something else
"The afterworld
"A world of never ending happiness
"Where you can always see the sun
"Day
"Or night
"Things are much harder here than in the afterworld
"In this life, you're on your own."

Damn, that's better with Prince on the organ!

You may not know that I almost became a Baptist minister. I think I could've written some rousing sermons. Or you may not realize that Santiana's exhortations to "read your Bible, don't wait for the movie or the Reader's Digest version" are words I originally wrote for American Atheists. But I digress.

Weaver, the "bad guy," and his defense of the death penalty. In fact, those are my thoughts. I disagree with my protagonist. So sue me. Really, every defender of capital punishment that I'm familiar with talks about "deterrent value" and strikes me as a strutting moron. I thought I'd throw some different reasons into the debate and see if anybody noticed. I don't think they did.

My defense of capital punishment uses a medical model, which becomes a bit ironic in light of (1) Weaver's murder method, and (2) the disease swimming through Drake's bloodstream.

Meanwhile, Weaver's apelike appearance and his left-handedness come from my former next-door neighbor, who attacked me during the time I was writing this book. First I beat him in real life, then Gary Drake beat him in my novel. Drake is far more vicious.

How did Brooks get curly red hair? When I wrote during my teen years, I never visualized my characters, and my world was extremely male dominated. Females were never more than window dressing, so I took turns. This girl gets brown hair, this one blonde, this one red, next one black and start over again, etc. This one short, this one medium, this one long, back to short, etc. And, just once for variety, I threw in curly hair. 15 or 20 years ago, Gary Drake's partner was Marjorie Brooks of the curly red hair. It was that random. She's not based on anyone I know, and exists only within the pages of Vigilante Justice.

Doctor Garrett Allison. If you've read The Chronicles of a Madman and Vigilante Justice, you know he's in both. I wrote that character for Michael Jordan. Before Space Jam, and before his first retirement from the NBA. I just thought he had a "screen presence" I wanted, and I was thinking movie deals 20 years ago. Let Michael Jordan explain that he became a doctor because he lacked the talent to play in the NBA. I call that irony. I wrote this before I remembered that he was my classmate. The manuscript even had Drake telling him, "You look like Michael Jordan," but an editor told me that would distract a reader from the story, so I cut it.

Ten years later, I thought about who should play Gary Drake in this movie. I wanted a guy who looks too young for the job, as that is part of the Gary Drake self-image problem. A kid's

face, really. I'd seen Matthew Broderick's fine performance in *Glory*, wandering accent be damned. Nah, not quite. Strain the brain some more. What about that little brat from *Silver Spoons*? I've seen him on a few ads for miniseries I studiously avoided. Yeah, Rick Schroeder. Probably has the look, might even know how to act by now. Guess what? Two months later, *NYPD Blue* had him. Really. I thought of it first. Dagnabbit! I console myself by pretending he can't drawl.

I think I've mentioned the reason for giving my hero HIV, long before that medical series by Michael Crichton you're thinking of, but let me do it again.

Originally, Brooks was Drake's partner but NOT a love interest. I think it's unrealistic for every book ever written to have the protagonist just happening to meet that special someone, just in time to face "the great conflict" together. Life isn't like that. I have many stories from my own life with no girl in them at all, never mind "the special girl." Across a crowded room, she's the one for me, Claudio and Hero, la la la, bite my ass.

But many editors insisted that we're not in this business to be so realistic. Readers expect the love interest. By not putting it in, I was disappointing my readers. Editors told me that, as blunt as that. Hmm. Back to my computer. You want a love interest, fine. But I will NOT write sex scenes or even love scenes, and "fade to black and go to commercial" whenever folks kiss gets stupid. So I gave my boy AIDS. No sex here! Hah! It also made his self-destructiveness more credible.

How credible? Two good friends, Bill and Todd, who happen to be a couple, asked me if my little brother had AIDS. Not that I'm aware of, but if my writing made it that credible to them, that may be the greatest compliment I've ever been paid.

How did Gary Drake get AIDS? Don't you love how open-ended I left that? Real life, folks. Plus, well, in real life, my little brother's wife was probably unfaithful and he wouldn't admit it to himself. Meanwhile, there are many ways for cops to get AIDS which don't involve anything sexual. I wanted that uncertainty. What started as an afterthought became an integral part of this manuscript. More than anything I've ever written or ever will write, this was a collaboration, and I thank every helper whose name I can't remember.

I put the finishing touches on "the love story" when I was falling in love myself, for the first and only time, so I hope some of that energy found its way to the printed page. *Vigilante Justice* is my only book with a love interest, after all. I don't think that married guy in *Descent Into Madness* qualifies.

Do the above words make you think that Gary Drake is, perhaps, just a wee bit too serious? Well, when I had that problem in my life, my cousin never failed to mess with my head and kick me in the ass. So he's in the novel, being himself. Clint "Two Dawgs" Hill, who I trust not to sue me. I don't think he can, actually. I'm in China, he's probably in an American jail, and we're both poor. Haha!