

## **The Ultimate Thriller/Courtroom Drama Book Series**

This is not your normal book review. Regular readers know that I occasionally recommend books, usually having some relation to Arizona history, like Stephen Fried's biography of Fred Harvey, of railroad hospitality fame, and Jeff Guinn's history of the shootout at the OK Corral.

This time I want to recommend 25 books – all at once. ... First, my favorite fiction genres are thrillers and courtroom dramas. I'm the kind of reader, who when he discovers a great running series in one of these genres, must search out, find, and read them all - in publication order as far as possible.

I've found a literary "gold mine" that I want to tell you about, a combined thriller/courtroom drama series by Robert K. Tanenbaum, still going strong since starting in 1987, counting 25 books to date.

Tanenbaum is a well-respected lawyer, onetime Chief of the Homicide Bureau for the New York District Attorney's Office, never losing a felony case. In 2012 it was revealed that the first fifteen of the novels, through 2003, were ghostwritten by Tanenbaum's cousin Michael Gruber. With the true authorship of the subsequent books somewhat in doubt, I will nonetheless refer to author Tanenbaum in this article.

Tanenbaum's hero, Butch Karp, is also a lawyer, a man of unshakeable principles, who works in the NYC District Attorney's Office, starting as a young Assistant DA, who over the years rises through a political cesspool to the office of District Attorney. The nitty-gritty details of a huge city's overcrowded criminal justice system are sobering indeed.

Early on in the series, Karp marries fellow lawyer Marlene Ciampi, whose fiery passions are raised by abused women cases, causing her sometimes to dispense vigilante justice against repeat abusers and even get into the client protection business. And woe to those who attack her family.

The Karp's children have prominent roles in the stories: daughter Lucy, a savant who speaks over 60 languages and has a continuing mystical relationship with a protective saint, and twin sons, whose opposing personalities make for some crazy adventures. Other family live-ins include a series of huge guard dogs that Marlene trains and who find ample opportunity to "render" their judgments. One of the attractions of the series to me was "watching" the children develop and mature and the changing family dynamics.

There are now 25 books, but there are many more stories told. Tanenbaum does a superb job weaving together divergent tales, ranging from foiling terror attacks to solving and successfully prosecuting brutal murders. Some stories are contained in one book; others continue for a while from book to book. Tanenbaum is the best I've come across at interrupting a storyline and then catching the reader up later in the book.

Notable villains include an insane industrialist, Islamic terrorists, sociopaths, an extreme right wing conspiracy, numerous foul murderers, mobsters, and hit men, and corrupt church leaders, politicians, policemen, FBI agents, attorneys, and union leaders.

Colorful friends of the Karp family help them resolve their difficulties: a Vietnamese gangster, the Taos reservation police chief, a New Mexico cowboy, various mole people who inhabit New York City's underground tunnels, a priest with a shadowy past, a lascivious news woman, and a sidewalk newspaper seller with Tourette's syndrome who keeps trying to stump Karp with movie trivia questions.

Along the way there are plenty of exciting, stimulating courtroom tussles. Also, Tanenbaum's characters engage in intelligent conversations on such diverse subjects as the law, religion, European history, the holocaust, faith healing, abuse of woman, terrorism, criminal forensics, and the insanity defense.

I first became aware of the series when Pat brought home a paperback book from the old book rack of the cancer center where she volunteers. I read it, was hooked, and Pat helped me get copies of all the books through a combination of Bookmans, Mostly Books bookstore, the internet, and the library.

Towards the end of the search, I decided that I wanted my own copy of each book, so we searched harder on the internet to secure books that I had borrowed from the library. Today I have all 25 books!

The 26<sup>th</sup> book in the series is due out this summer on August 12<sup>th</sup>. Pat's already reserved a copy from the library.

Meanwhile, I'm finishing up author Craig Johnson's mystery series starring Wyoming Sheriff Walt Longmire.

Pat says that it's harder to keep me in books than it is to feed me.