

News That's Fit to Fake

by Philip Jason

"In news, you don't have to know something; you just have to know how to find out about it."

THIS IS A NOVEL in which most of the characters have few, if any, redeeming qualities. It has on display the cut-throat competition in the news business; the shallowness of the hangers-on who have no real reason to expect honest success, the extremes to which dishonesty can go, and the vulnerability of women whose low self-esteem makes them easy prey. Well, there are some women waiting to take revenge.

What's to like? The sense of insider authenticity; the ever-tightening, hypnotic suspense; and the dark humor that keeps readers laughing at screwball situations and characters.

Set in major metropolis Atlanta and boutique, upscale Naples, Florida, the plot keeps the major characters running back and forth while also touching bases through endless communication. Some are trying to pull off a big scam, and others are trying to expose it. Do you think that 'tree-hugger,' the disparaging term for naive environmentalists, has had its day? Maybe so, but what about fake tree-huggers — people who raise money ostensibly to protect a threatened species or otherwise cleanse and improve the environment? What if the money just lines the pockets of corrupt, smiling event-planners for whom taking bows at a televised campaign is a way of life?

Nikki Zachos is an attention-grabbing television anchorwoman whose ambition is to be number one in her market. She seems to have a weakness for clothing made from the skins and furs of slain animals.

An enterprising but suspect do-gooder decides to exploit Nikki's celebrity by kidnapping her and making her the arch-enemy of animal rights activists. The ransom for Nikki might help the cause, or it might just get certain reporters and station managers great airtime to boost their ratings and salaries. Also, the money that comes in might help Rudy Decker cover his addiction to booze and gambling.

Or will his money come from feeding the black marketplace for black bear body parts, a lucrative commodity?

Reporting the Nikki Z case on her signature Global News Service television segments is the impressive and fame-hungry Cassandra Page. She has something of an advantage, being the significant other of Jimmy Hagan, the Atlanta Police Department's Chief of

Detectives. Their somewhat conflicting responsibilities create difficulties in the relationship.

Soon enough, Nikki's predicament has gone viral on social media, with online competitive games about the outcome bringing winners huge prizes.

Throw in the murder of Hunter Freeman, another female television personality yearning for stardom, and a bunch of other off-screen characters in the media wars, and you've got a ton of tension and insider atmosphere.

Are the twists and turns in the plot line based on the authors' experiences, or are they pure fantasy?

Authors Don Farmer and Chris Curle have been in the news business — television, radio and print — for a combined total of 99 years. They met in a TV newsroom in Houston, Texas. She was a reporter/anchor at KTRK-TV, the ABC station there. Don was there on assignment in his role as Southern Bureau Chief for ABC News, based in Atlanta. They married two years later.

They are veteran journalists who have interviewed thousands of people, some of the best in the world and some of the worst. In 81 countries on six continents, they've covered wars, peace talks, and historic figures from presidents to The Beatles. Their experience in major media includes ABC News, CNN, and network TV stations in Washington DC, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Houston. *Deadly News*, their first novel, also uses the broadcast news business for background. *Fatal Ambition* was just named a finalist in the category of Fiction: Thriller/Adventure in the 2019 americanbookfest.com competition. They live in Naples, Florida.

I recently spoke with Don and Chris about their writing and the state of broadcast news.

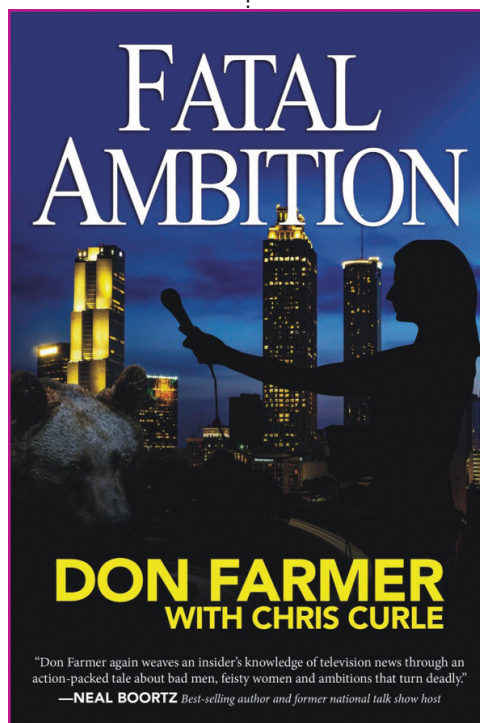
PHILIP: *What were your primary motivations in writing this novel?*

DON: After a career of factual reporting, I wanted to tell a fictional story, to make up stuff! So, I wrote my first novel, *Deadly News*, in 2013. The new novel is the same motivation.

Which scenes draw upon events in your own lives?

CHRIS: We have done documentaries on the despicable illegal wildlife trade, from the horns and tusks of rhinos and elephants to black bear parts, even orchids in the Florida Everglades.

The ransom might help the cause, or it might just get certain reporters and station managers great airtime to boost their ratings and salaries.



D: The female African-American doctor in the book is based on the thoracic surgeon who operated on Chris for her esophageal cancer.

What changes in broadcast news have strengthened or weakened your profession?

D: Constant advancements in technology and miniaturization make covering and reporting the news easy and immediate from just about anywhere.

Are any of those changes reflected in Fatal Ambition?

C: Satellite technology makes live reporting in broadcast news the norm. You can even do a 'live shot' with FaceTime using your smart phone.

What do you enjoy most about writing a novel?

D: I enjoy poking fun at some of the foibles of TV news.

What demands of prose fiction do you find most difficult?

D: Dialogue is challenging, but key to enliven the characters and to advance the story.

Did creating this novel call upon your research skill? Explain

C: In news, you don't have to know some-

thing; you just have to know how to find out about it.

D: We always joked the news people are a mile wide and an inch deep.

Do you outline in advance? Improvise a plot?

D: I just approached the computer as if it was an Ouija Board. I did have characters and situations in mind, though.

What are your steps or techniques in moving from early drafts to the finished product?

D: It was an impromptu system. Chris was recovering from cancer surgery. I would give her a chapter or some pages and she would edit, comment or question.

There is an undertow of humor running through this often-frightening novel. Which of you is responsible for that dimension?

C: That's all Don; the good, the bad and the ugly.

Any thoughts about a third novel?



Fatal Ambition

by Don Farmer
with Chris Curle

PUBLISHER PAGE/HEADLINE BOOKS

D: I like to write women characters. In many action novels, women are secondary or supporting. In my stories, women are primary and push the plot. •