



Gregg Hurwitz

The Kill Clause
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adventures in research

Try finding research on the U.S. Marshals Service. There isn't much. I managed to find only four books that even dealt with the Service, three of them out of print. The first thing I did was to go back and review the entire history of the Service, starting with Stuart Lake's biography of Wyatt Earp (1931) recounted to him in Earp's own words. I got my hands on a few documentaries, and delved heavily into the Service's role in the civil rights movement, most significantly during James Meredith's enrollment at Ole Miss — a second Civil War for this country about which very few people are knowledgeable. While this didn't directly impact my story, it gave me a great background and understanding of the Service. I called a buddy of mine (the former agent whose brain I picked for Ed Pinkerton's character in *Do No Harm*) and asked him if he ever overlapped with any deputy US marshals he could put me in touch with. I talked to his good friend, a deputy out of East St. Louis, and we got along great. He was coming to LA on some business, and promised to set a few meetings for me in the California Central District office (there are 94 districts, and 94 appointed U.S. Marshals, one corresponding to each

judicial district). So he flew in, we grabbed breakfast and headed over.

I figured I'd meet a deputy or two and get shown a couple of cubicles. Awaiting us was (the legend himself) U.S. Marshal Tony Perez, his Deputy U.S. Marshal Supervisor, the Supervisory Deputy for the Arrest Response Team and the Explosive Detection Canine Team, as well as a few other key lieutenants. The Marshal had them all waiting to answer any questions I might have, and promised me a tour later of the facilities. He even offered to suit up his men and run through tactical scenarios for me. When I asked Marshal Perez whether it was fact or legend that he'd once allowed his beloved dog, Gus, to execute an arrest (long story), I knew I'd won him over. He called off his lunch and took me for Cuban food.

I was completely blown away by the reception I received. It turned out that Marshal Perez was trying to expand the public awareness of the Service, and so I was benefiting from precisely the shortcoming of information that had proven such a research obstacle to begin with. I was in on the ground floor, able to ask questions and get answers at the highest level, a privilege I benefit from as I work on my Tim Rackley sequel. From there, I needed a few more guys on my contact list, so I kindled a friendship with a brilliant Los Angeles Public Defender, and struck up a relationship with a dynamo of a DA. I'd have one guy holding while I was on the line with the other, playing their legal arguments off each other as I clicked back and forth. A lot of lunches and dinners and bar tabs helped me fill in the blanks about their views of the law and its frustrations.

The locksmiths, believe it or not, were the toughest contacts to make open up. They were incredibly tight-lipped. I went and followed a few guys around, asking questions, but they refused to answer most of them. I watched them burn keys. I read pamphlets and called lock companies. I tore through the Yellow Pages, calling up random locksmiths and asking questions about lock picking. When they got too suspicious, I hung up. They wouldn't give me information on lock picking as a novelist, because they were worried it would get out in the public and crooks could read my book and pick up new techniques. So I posed as a reporter, a customer, a victim of a home robbery. I usually altered one piece of info, or left out a key fact, so robbers couldn't pick up technique from the book. It took a while, but I finally managed to piece together a convincing worldview of a forensic locksmith.

I needed to get the feel of a .357 down, as it would be Tim Rackley's prize weapon. Fortunately, one of my Navy SEAL buddies was in town, teaching an explosives course to California SWAT teams. He's one of the leading demolitions experts in the world, having come up on the SEALs counterterrorist group, and he's had more trigger time than whole platoons put together. He's also built like a brick shithouse — huge comic book lats, barrel chest, and a Fu-Man-Chu mustache. I've been out with him places where he's shot his patented don't-fuck-with-me look and gotten whole groups of guys to leave a bar. He had a bevy of handguns in tow, so we headed up to a range he used on occasion. He told me not to ask any questions or say anything at the guard booth. He bullshitted us through (I had no clearance, which I didn't realize was required until I was being eyeballed by the deputy on duty) and got us to the range. I practiced with a Beretta, a Colt .45, and the .357 (a wheel gun from Smith & Wesson), so I could compare their operational differences. At one point, I was grouping high and right on the paper targets. My friend asked to borrow my gun to make sure the sites were appropriately lined. He turned and fired, not in a Weaver firing stance, not bothering to site correctly or even hold the weapon with both hands. He hit the dead center of the critical mass — and I mean dead center. Five bullets, one hole. I couldn't believe it. It was like something from an old-school Western. He returned the .357 to me, wisely surmising that there was no problem with the gun and that I was merely anticipating recoil. He then hunkered down with the .45. Each time he fired, the muscles in his back contracted, bulging out through his T-shirt. Watching him, I thought, this is probably the last guy in the whole world I'd ever want to piss off. Which got me to thinking about *The Kill Clause*. The only thing I could imagine more intimidating than my buddy was two of him. And so I created the Mastersons — twin brothers, built to crush skulls.

I wanted to put Rackley and the Commission up against some of the worst offenders in order to drive home the imperative for vigilante action. For these horrific crimes and for the assassinations of the criminals, I had to proceed with a shadier group of contacts. I asked some of my darker off-the-record boys about the worst things they've ever seen, and I was told a few stories and shown a few video clips that kept me up nights. These trickled down from my memory onto the pages, finding expression in the refrigerator scene and Lane's dispatchment.

The most dangerous research move I pulled for this book (or any) I didn't even end up using. I was debating having a small plane figure in the ending of *The Kill Clause* so I talked to a friend of a friend who flew a lot. I met him at the Santa Monica airport to ask some questions, but he threw me a parachute and told me to put it on. I was belted in before he informed me he was a stunt pilot. Now, I'm not the best flier as is (and here, I'm referring to subdued Friendly Skies kind of flying), so being up in the great blue open doing barrel rolls and flips was not my idea of a relaxing Sunday. But I landed in one piece, went home, and wrote down many of the sensations I'd

experienced. But the damn plane scene never found its way into the book. I kept trying to hammer it in one place or the other. I didn't want to believe I'd gone through all that for nothing. Killing your babies, as writers call editing out material, is hard enough normally. When you've paid for the scene by losing all the blood to your head for an hour, it makes it next to impossible. But, if it doesn't serve the plot, it doesn't serve the plot. Tim gets up to a lot of trouble in *The Kill Clause* but he doesn't get stuck on a stunt plane. That we left to his idiotic creator.