

\* **Published by Winona Kent**—Crime Writers of Canada 2023 Vice Chair and BC/Yukon Representative—in her CWC Regional Newsletter.

Bob Harris is a Vancouver writer, book promoter and publicist. His interview with author and screenwriter **A.J. Devlin**.

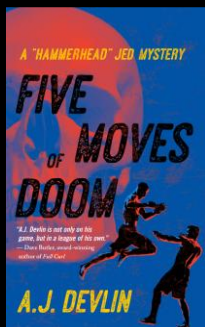


**Bob Harris, A.J. Devlin and Gerry Gionco**

“A book promoter needs hits and a good network. Authors need technical experts for accuracy and authenticity and praise testimonials from supportive authors.

I’ve been able to supply both to A.J. Devlin.

UK award-winning Film/TV producer and author Mark Grenside and my friend, Gerry Gionco (Canadian MMA and Boxing promoter), gave *Five Moves of Doom* the nod. Gerry for technical. Mark for writing.”



The third book in the award-winning “Hammerhead” Jed pro-wrestler PI mystery-comedy series.

*“With pointed and deep dive questions that lead to thorough and fun answers, jack-of-all-trades PR man and veteran promoter Bob Harris knows how to get to the good stuff in his exciting and excellent interviews!” A.J. Devlin*

A.J. Devlin has written screenplays and award-winning mystery fiction.

- He grew up in Greater Vancouver before moving to Southern California where he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Screenwriting from Chapman University and a Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting from The American Film Institute.
- After working as a screenwriter in Hollywood, he now resides in the Vancouver suburb of Port Moody with his wife and two children.

**Five Moves of Doom** – selected for the Top 100 Books of 2022 by The Globe and Mail, winner of the 2022 Crime Fiction Lover Editor’s Choice Award for Best Indie Novel, and finalist for the 2023 Left Coast Crime “Lefty” Award for Best Humorous Mystery.

**\*Bob Harris, CWC Associate, and his conversation with A.J. Devlin in September 2022:**

**Your book *Five Moves of Doom*—the third in your private investigator “Hammerhead” Jed mystery-comedy series—released on September 15th.**

**But before you became a novelist, you spent time in Los Angeles studying screenwriting and working in the film industry. It culminated in a professional friendship with Academy Award nominee screenwriter Leonard Schrader.**

**I would like to begin with your recollection of those years in Hollywood and with Leonard.**

My time as a student in Southern California was definitely exciting and “formative years” for me. Learning about the craft of screenwriting taught me to tell stories from a very cinematic perspective, which is something I try to do in my novels.

Those days were geared around movie making – classes by day, writing at night, and long shoots for student films on the weekends. But it was a thrill to get a taste of what the entertainment industry was about all while studying under the talented instructors at my alma maters of Chapman University and the American Film Institute Conservatory.

While I first met Leonard in the advanced screenwriting class I took in undergrad, it wasn’t until I was able to do a one-on-one individual study course under him that we became fast friends and bonded over our shared love of cinema and crime fiction, which eventually evolved into us collaborating and even co-writing screenplays together.

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**Now, take me back to few years ago and when you decided to shift from screenwriting to writing fiction books. What influenced that decision?**

I had always wanted to try to write a mystery novel, but the timing never seemed right while I was living in Los Angeles, especially since I was so focused on the film business. After moving home, getting married, and starting a family, domestic life certainly provided a little more day-to-day structure and with my wife’s encouragement I gave it a go.

**How did the idea for your protagonist “Hammerhead” Jed, your setting and the lens of your narrative development emerge?**

I knew from the get-go that if I were to write a mystery novel I would only be confident enough to set it in a city in which I had lived for a long time, which left me with Los Angeles and Vancouver. Having just returned from L.A., and as I began to familiarize myself with the burgeoning crime writing scene in my hometown, it felt right to use Hollywood North as a backdrop while drawing upon both my childhood and filmmaking experience.

With regards to “Hammerhead” Jed, I was a big fan of crime fiction that featured athletes-turned-sleuths. I had read novels about boxer-detectives, surfer-detectives, basketball player detectives, etc. – but to the best of my knowledge there wasn’t really a pro-wrestler gumshoe kicking around. Combined with my long-time love for sports entertainment and the inherent panache that accompanies storytelling in the squared circle, it seemed like a fun environment in which to create a narrative.

**Tell me about the journey of shopping your first manuscript and landing a publishing deal with NeWest Press.**

Rejection, rejection, rejection! Like so many aspiring authors I had my fair share of those who passed on my writing, but I believed in the work and I guess I just loved the character too much to give up on him.

After exhausting many options, I finally heard back from NeWest Press, which was incredibly exciting given their forty-year history of publishing radically rewarding fiction and long-time focus on shining the spotlight on Western Canadian stories. The amazing team over there headed by the at-the-time new General Manager Matt Bowes saw potential in “Hammerhead” Jed and his debut in *Cobra Clutch*, so it was one of the greatest thrills of my life to sign with them and commence collectively making the novel better through rewrites with my editor and their creative team in the hopes the book would offer readers some thrills and chuckles.

**Coming off “Hammerhead” Jed’s debut—marked with an impressive book sales record in the Canadian market, a national award and international award nomination—your sequel was released in May 2020. How did you navigate through that release? Explain the highs and lows of the rollercoaster ride.**

Releasing *Rolling Thunder* at the beginning of the pandemic was a unique experience, and it certainly came with adjustments as my publisher and I had to pivot quickly to an all-virtual promotional plan.

I really missed the boots-on-the-ground aspect of getting out to bookstores, local wrestling shows, and conventions, but there was so much happening online and people were so generous in taking an interest in my sequel novel that there were plenty of new opportunities to explore.

Ultimately getting to revisit "Hammerhead" Jed and further his exploits in a sophomore adventure provided a welcome distraction, and by doing so gave me my own bit of escapism from the Covid chaos while trying to provide the same thing for crime fiction aficionados.

**When was *Five Moves of Doom* written?**

I wrote *Five Moves of Doom* while trying to get the word out about *Rolling Thunder* and after that promotion had tapered down. But it was when I was able to take a break from the extended marketing that I was able to really focus on telling what I hope is a stirring and satisfying culmination of "Hammerhead" Jed's first full year as a private investigator.

**Your work has been referred to as mystery-comedy. Give me a log line that describes what that is.**

For me a true mystery-comedy is inspired by the likes of literary greats like Carl Hiaasen and Joe R. Lansdale, and I would define the subgenre as crime fiction that blends a traditional whodunit with a healthy dose of humour.

And with "Hammerhead" Jed being a pro-wrestler PI who is very much defined by his physicality, I wanted to add splashes of pulpy hardboiled action and fisticuffs into the mix.

**You have two captivating female characters and a hilarious Irish bartender who have sustained throughout your series. What inspired you to create them? How have you managed to grow and keep their presence lit in all three books?**

Having grown up heavily into athletics, there's a bit of wish-fulfillment for me writing "Hammerhead" Jed as he's kind of the emboldened hoss hero I always wanted to follow on adventures. But if Jed represents the "ego" and "superego" in Freud's Personality Theory, then Declan would be pure id. He has a good heart and a brotherly bond with his sleuthing cousin, but as a lethal ex-Irish commando and hot-tempered hard-drinking hedonist, all bets are off when he tags along on cases as Jed's sidekick.

Detective Constable Rya Shepard was intended to be a combo of a reluctant crime-solving ally, foil, and romantic interest for Jed, and it's been very

rewarding mining the complexity of their deep connection over the course of the series.

The character of Stormy Daze, however, was created as a one-off for *Cobra Clutch*. But she evolved organically into a strong, confident, Amazon woman lady wrestler turned roller derby star, and quickly became an object of “Hammerhead” Jed’s affection in her own right. Stormy has definitely been the most surprising and unexpected of the characters I created, so much so that I find myself coming up with plans for her down the line.

\* \* \*

**Reflecting on your journey as a screenwriter-turned-fiction novelist, who and what are your influences and why? Past and present.**

In addition to Len Schrader, Lansdale, and Hiaasen, I would have to say authors like Charles Willeford, Robert Crais, and Michael Connelly definitely influenced my work. And action-comedies and adventure movies like *Back To The Future*, *Die Hard*, and *The Last Boy Scout*, with flicks written and / or directed by Shane Black in particular, are near and dear to my heart.

**What light bulb moments have you experienced along the way? How about the milestones you’ve accomplished as an athlete, a screenwriter and award-winning novelist?**

I played on some provincial championship lacrosse teams in my youth and had some success in basketball as I initially tried to follow in the footsteps of my father, who is a former Olympian and was a point guard for the 1976 Canadian Men’s Basketball team.

So being around athletics at that level definitely left an impression and was something I drew upon when developing an athlete detective.

Moving to Southern California with dreams of making it in the movie business was an adventure of a lifetime, but over time I realized that I wanted to be a storyteller first and foremost, which is what ultimately led me to writing books.

The biggest light bulb moment I would say was the realization that finding success in sports and entertainment is essentially the same – it takes resilience, determination, and also a bit of luck to get your shot. But I believe if one commits themselves to a journey of developing their skills, gathering experience, and staying hungry then anything is possible.

**What is ahead of you for the remainder of this year—considering that *Five Moves of Doom* has launched mid-September, primetime for the Fall/Winter 'book biz' season—and how is promotion and publicity going to date.**

It's terrific to be able to resume in person events again for sure. And since I've been on the crime writing scene for a little while I've been able to make a lot of friends in the book biz and cultivate amazing relationships.

With *Five Moves of Doom* I'm really thrilled to be partnering up with fellow authors for events and signings, supporting indie bookstores and businesses, and continuing to work with the fantastic marketing team at NeWest Press who are always coming up with new and exciting ideas.

Finally, collaborating with promoters like yourself, terrific organizations like Crime Writers of Canada, and connecting with great people in the wrestling, roller derby and now MMA worlds keeps things fresh and fun.

**Are you planning to attend writer's conferences and book fairs next year?**

Yes! I will be working the Crime Writers of Canada table at this year's Word Vancouver Festival later this month, and I hope to resume attending some crime writing conventions and Fan Expos again as an exhibitor.

**Do you have a sequel or spin-off in mind? Does writing outside of mystery/crime fiction appeal to you? What keeps you writing?**

I do indeed. I like to think "Hammerhead" Jed has a strong circle of supporting characters around him deserving of starring in a story themselves. And I've been flirting with ideas for a standalone novel of late.

What keeps me writing is definitely a passion for getting swept away in my imagination, creating characters and stories that are shaped by both my personal experiences and the thrills and whimsy of the books and movies I've read and watched all my life.

**What is the best lesson and the most valuable piece of advice you've experienced—in terms of the screen and the commercial fiction marketplace? What would you like share with writers?**

Just keep at it. And be a sponge. Seek out and soak up the stories that resonate with you the most and then use them as inspiration to tell a tale that only you are able to.

## **What have you read recently?**

A couple of outstanding crime novels from my NeWest Press bros Niall Howell (*There Are Wolves Here Too*) and JT Siemens (*To Those Who Killed Me*), both of which I had the privilege of reading advanced copies of and blurbing. *FALL OUT* – a globe-trotting thriller set within the world of the film industry by Hollywood producer turned scribe M.N. Grenside – was especially enjoyable for me given my screenwriting experience. And I recently finished *Ticket to Ride*, the latest Jason Davey musician-sleuth mystery by Winona Kent.

## **Who are you reading now?**

*Last One Alive* by Amber Cowie, then *Other People's Secrets* by Meredith Hambrock, before diving into the highly anticipated upcoming psychological thriller *Blood Atonement* by S.M. Freedman.

## **What and who are you watching on television and in film?**

I think I might be mourning the end of BETTER CALL SAUL as it in my opinion is as good as or perhaps even more brilliant than my all-time favourite TV show BREAKING BAD.

And I'm still trying to wrap my head around the astounding feat that was Nathan Fielder's HBO series THE REHEARSAL.

## **Thanks for today's chat, A.J. How about some flash answers to:**

### **Favourite food and beverage.**

It's not a banana milkshake, I can tell you that! I do like them, but I totally lifted "Hammerhead" Jed's dietary quirk from my mom's long-time love of the DQ treat.

### **Your first celebrity encounter in Hollywood.**

Dustin Hoffman was a surprise guest for a Q&A after an advanced screening of MOONLIGHT MILE on my very first day at the American Film Institute Conservatory.

### **Most memorable childhood experience.**

Getting to hi-five "Macho Man" Randy Savage while he was on the way to the wrestling ring to take on the ONE-MAN GANG at the Pacific Coliseum.



## Favourite mode of transportation.

With back-to-school season in full swing I'd have to say anything that gives me a break from shuttling my kids around from their play dates, activities, and sports!

## Most thrilling vacation experienced with your children.

I know it's cliché, but seeing my daughter's face light up when she met Minnie Mouse at Disneyland and my Halloween-obsessed son's smile after going on the Haunted Mansion ride were both pretty special moments.



Vancouver CWC authors S.M. Freedman and Meredith Hambrock with A.J. at the March 2023 Left Coast Crime conference in Tucson, Arizona.



A.J. and Bob at the Vancouver WORD Festival in September and the infamous banana patterned sneakers.

- Readers of A.J.'s "Hammerhead" Jed mystery-comedy series know that Jed is a former pro wrestler – turned – private investigator who has an addiction to **banana milkshakes**.
- I always get a smile out of A.J.'s flair for showbiz. No doubt picked up during his many years in Los Angeles acquiring his screenwriting BA and MA while pounding slick Hollywood streets with school pals and notable film icons.

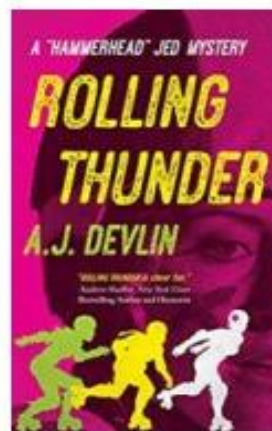
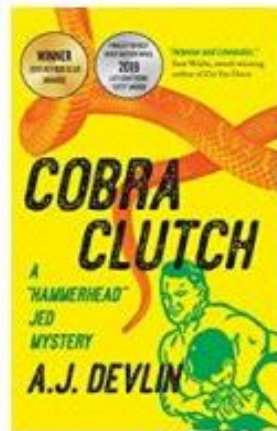


**The item:** Note A.J.'s banana tie, sneakers and jacket he wore for the Left Coast Crime banquet.

Here's the story behind the banana jacket. During Covid home isolation, A.J. was shopping around online for colourful wardrobe and saw the jacket but didn't purchase it until last summer. He intended to debut it at his *Five Moves of Doom* book launch in September but the day was too hot to wear it. When his opportunity to attend the 2023 Left Coast Crime convention in Tucson, Arizona came up, out came the jacket. Such style, eh!



A.J. on a road trip with me for visits to Chapters Coquitlam and Indigo Robson in Vancouver to sign *Rolling Thunder* for displays. His style and storytelling caught the eye of UK award-winning Film/TV producer and thriller author **M.N. "Mark" Greside** (*FALL OUT*) posed here at his home in Malta.



**Cobra Clutch** (2018) – the first book in the "Hammerhead" Jed professional wrestling mystery-comedy series, nominated for a Left Coast Crime "Lefty" Award for Best Debut Mystery, and won the 2019 Crime Writers of Canada Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Novel.

**Rolling Thunder** (2020) – the highly acclaimed sequel was featured in the Vancouver Sun, The Province, The Globe and Mail, Kirkus Reviews, Library Journal Reviews, Mystery Tribune Magazine, CrimeFictionLover.com, 49thShelf.com, and on CBC Radio's The Next Chapter.

Jeanne Basone (Nashville and Los Angeles)  
Crime Writers of Canada International Associate



*“A.J. Devlin’s latest crime novel packs a punch with nonstop action! His witty, entertaining style hooked me quicker than a figure 4 leg lock and pinned me to the pages.*

*‘Hammerhead’ Jed’s colorful stable of heels and babyfaces create a suspenseful, romantic, comedic vibe. Very entertaining! His rock star persona makes him the ultimate chick magnet.*

*His story takes me back to my four seasons at The Riviera hotel in Las Vegas with the Gorgeous Ladies Of Wrestling and the words of my trainer, the legendary pro wrestler Mondo Guerrero, come to mind — ‘no guts, no glory.’*

*Rolling Thunder is a must read for everyone who is a fan of sports, wrestling, suspense...or all three!” Jeanne “Hollywood” Basone – The first G.L.O.W. girl hired by creator David McLane.*

A.J. Devlin website: <https://ajdevlin.com/>

NeWest Press website: <https://newestpress.com/>

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