

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Lawrence Light and Meredith Anthony, authors of *Ladykiller*

How did you get the idea for *Ladykiller*?

Meredith: Several years ago I was asked by a struggling film director to adapt a short story for film. It was the story of a woman who was menaced by a guy she'd shared a cab with and then the cab driver appeared and rescued her. I hated the story. I was tired of women needing to be rescued.

Larry: From Meredith. She did a lot of research in the field. She sat in at GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis) in the Village and later raised money for a women's violence center at Mount Sinai.

In reading the book, it is clear that you've researched the profiles of serial killers. How did you conduct the research and what did you learn?

Meredith: I read lots of true crime and lots of psycho-social studies of repeat killers. They frequently have interesting profiles and a kind of twisted logic. Sociopaths, as opposed to psychopaths, are fun because they are what's called very organized. That is, they maintain an appearance of normalcy and keep a lid on their craziness, which seems quite real to them. The most interesting thing is how many traits almost all serial killers share – a history of childhood violence, bedwetting, cruelty to animals. Now when I hear someone saying how cute little junior was pulling rover's ears, I think, uh oh.

Larry: As a newspaper reporter early in my career, I covered cops. So I saw all sorts of bad people up close. Whatever they did, they thought they were justified. In my experience, expressions of remorse were something you faked for the sentencing judge.

***Ladykiller* takes place in New York in 1991 and paints a pretty grim view of the city. Was it really that bad? How has it changed?**

Meredith: No. New York has always been fabulous!

Larry: Times Square pre-Disney was a very skanky place. Great grist for our thriller.

Are any of the characters in *Ladykiller* based on people you know?

Meredith: No. I know a lot of cranky social workers, though.

Larry: I know cops who are like some of our police characters.

What is the process of writing as a husband-and-wife team? Any epic struggles?

Meredith: It was quite easy for us to write together once we set the rules. It's simple: I'm always right about everything!

Larry: She is the supreme boss. Her word is law.

Start to finish, how long did it take you to write *Ladykiller*?

Meredith: It's hard to say. I wrote and produced a short film that covers one killing. Then I wrote a feature-length screenplay filling out the story. Then Larry and I wrote the novel from that.

Larry: It generally takes a year to write a book.

As writers, what are your individual strengths and weaknesses? How does writing as a team work for you?

Meredith: I love to collaborate. I've written humor with a woman friend many times. I wrote a play with a guy I know. And Larry and I have written humor together. Larry has a thriller series of his own, the Karen Glick novels, which are wonderful. But I was excited when he suggested working on a thriller together. I loved the process. We had fun.

Larry: We both brought something to the table. Meredith knew something about social workers. I knew about the cops.

Was the storyline completely thought out before you wrote the book or did it evolve as you were writing?

Meredith: In this case, the story was fairly well developed, but as we wrote some of the characters evolved, took larger roles than we had intended. And some of the background seemed to come alive.

Larry: The relationships among the characters deepened -- the dedicated cop, the vulnerable social worker, and her mentor.

Do either of you have a favorite character from the book? Least favorite? Who and why?

Meredith: Well, I love strong, twisted women. Don't ask me about my family!

Larry: I think Ace is my favorite, a typical street punk and drifter. Everyone else disguises their motivations, but Ace is very transparent -- and laughable. I hate the nasty top cop, Mancuso. I know people like him.

Ladykiller may remind some readers of the Summer of Sam. Was this intentional?

Meredith: Not really. I researched the Sam murders as well as all the other big cases. I found Berkowitz the least interesting of them. I moved to New York some time after the Summer of Sam but people were still talking about it.

Larry: Ladykiller takes place in the early spring of 1991 when New York's Times Square was much like it had been in the Son of Sam 1970's -- dangerous and seedy.

Ladykiller features several tough female characters. Why?

Meredith: I am just so sick of women victims. I'd rather see a woman kill someone than whine about her plight, I guess. I know it's not politically correct but I prefer Lorena Bobbit to Hedda Nussbaum. Or Susan Smith, for that matter. In a short film I made, the woman seems to be the potential victim but isn't. It was a good short film and played many festivals here and in Europe. It played on HBO and on The Learning Channel. But I submitted it to a prestigious women's festival in L.A. and they turned it down. They said it didn't show women in a nurturing light!

Larry: Meredith is very tough. She is taking boxing lessons. So she's writing what she knows.

How does your work in humor writing influence the book? Business writing?

Meredith: Humor always helps.

Larry: I think it's better for the reader if a suspense novel is not unrelentingly dark.

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Which writers influence or inspire you?

Meredith: Larry will probably say Hemingway! My list would begin with Plato, Proust and Jane Austen and end with Ken Bruen, Jim Fusilli, Janet Evanovich and Lee Child.

Larry: Fitzgerald, Kinky Friedman, Richard Wagner.

How do you hope readers will react to Ladykiller?

Meredith: I hope they will run out and buy hundreds of copies for their friends and then besiege Paramount with letters demanding a movie version.

Larry: They will have nightmares.

Do you have other books in the works?

Meredith: Yes. I'm working on a very atmospheric psychological thriller about a woman who thinks her husband is a killer. And Larry and I are polishing a thriller about a murder in corporate America.

Larry: I have a series set on Wall Street (Too Rich To Live and Fear & Greed) and I'm working on the third in that series. Also a stand-alone. And Meredith and I have a project. I also have a short story coming out in an anthology: Wall Street Noir.

Will any of the characters in Ladykiller return?

Meredith: I think we kill off almost everybody interesting.

Larry: They may be back in other bodies.

Do you have something against fish? Social workers?

Meredith: Larry has always hated fish. Something about a boys' school in England. Don't ask. And social workers... I have a theory that there are two kinds of people – process people and results people. I'm a results person. Social workers are process people.

Larry: You can't pet a fish. Ditto for a social worker.