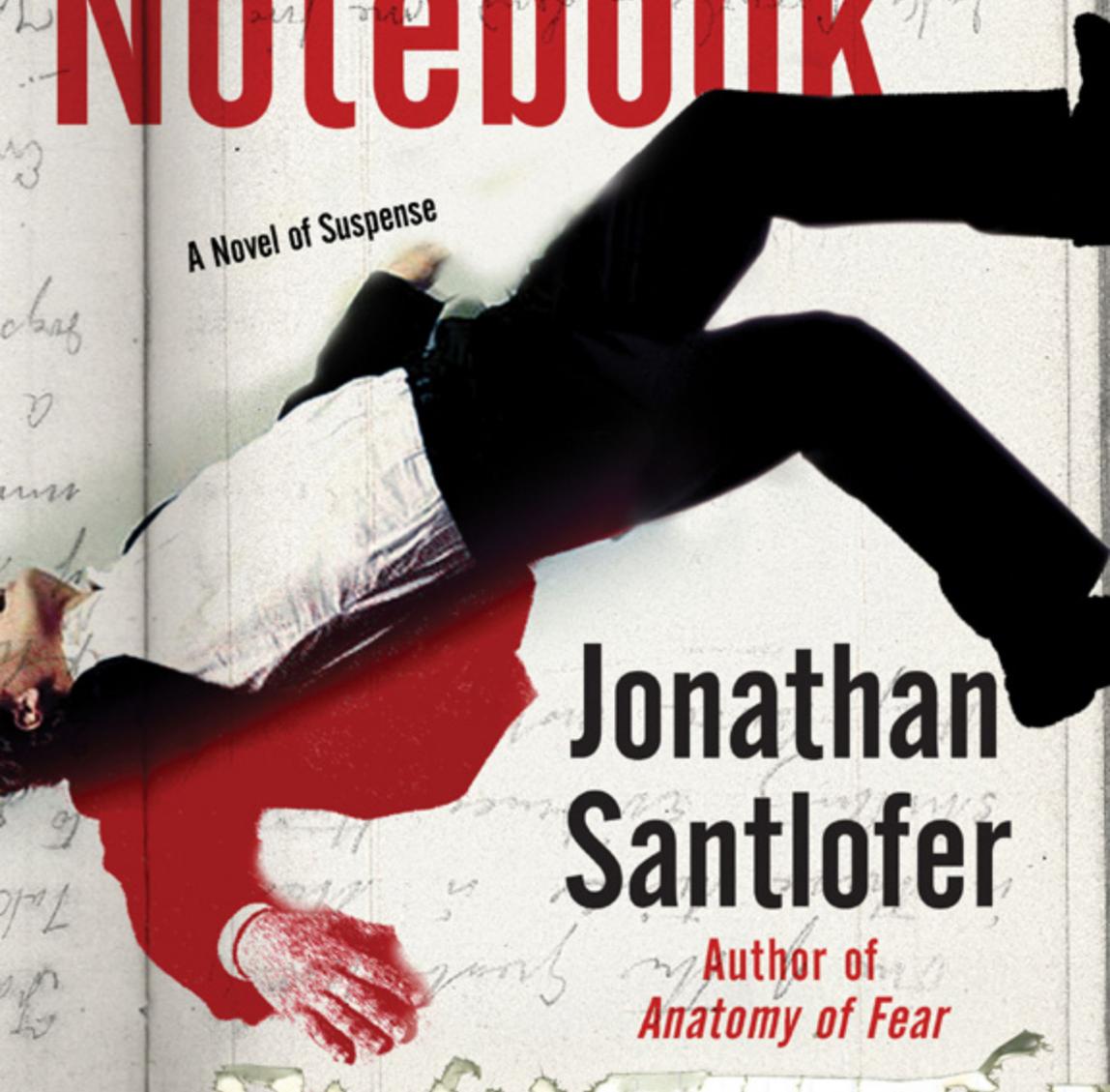


"One of the most intriguing and innovative crime-fiction writers to come along in years."

—Chicago Tribune on *Anatomy of Fear*

The Murder Notebook

A Novel of Suspense

A man in a red jacket and white shirt is lying on his back on a notebook page. The page is filled with faint, illegible handwriting. The man's right hand is visible, showing a bloody fingerprint. The notebook page has a scalloped edge at the top and bottom.

Jonathan
Santlofer

Author of
Anatomy of Fear

THE
MURDER
NOTEBOOK

Jonathan Santlofer



 HarperCollins e-books

For my sister, Roberta

*“Whenever science makes a discovery
the devil grabs it while the angels are debating
the best way to use it.”*

—ALAN VALENTINE

*“How does one kill fear, I wonder?
How do you shoot a spectre through the heart,
slash off its spectral head,
take it by the spectral throat?”*

—JOSEPH CONRAD

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About the Author

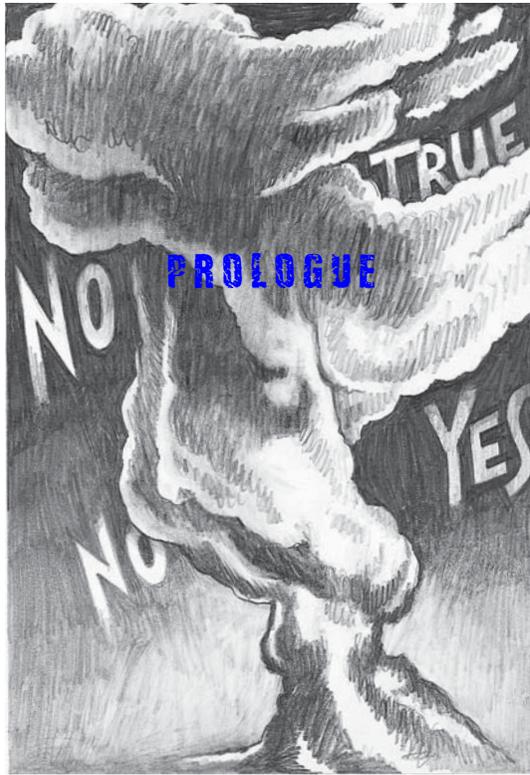
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About the Publisher



Dust flecked with blood, shards of debris and bone, smoke so thick he can't breathe or see or maybe he's gone blind; the noise, horrific a moment ago, leveling out to a dull thump, thump, thump in his eardrums, until it dissolves into an absence of sound as if the world had exploded and he is the lone survivor.

The smoke clears.

He looks around at cars and buses and taxicabs; at passersby walking talking laughing frowning, some smoking cigarettes, others sipping coffee, no one alarmed, no one dodging for cover, no one crying or screaming.

He leans back against a wall to catch his breath.

"Hey, buddy, you all right?"

The man's face zooms into focus, soft blurry features suddenly sharp and all too real only inches away, touching something at the back of his mind: other faces in close-up, studying him like a bug under glass.

"Me? All right? Oh, sure. Sure."

The man stares at him a minute before turning away and he thinks that perhaps it was a trick, the enemy in disguise. But he has outsmarted him, given the right answer to the test. He knew it was a test; it's always a test.

He sets his shoulders and taps his backpack to make sure it is still there. He has a job to do, a mission.

The city street stretches out in front of him like something in a mirrored fun house, but this is no fun, and the heat, the heat is unreal.

And then he is cold. Body shuddering, shaking, everything cool and white and the smell of something chemical in his nose.

". . . bandwidth . . . propranolol . . . peptide . . ."

The words make no sense and fade so fast he isn't even sure he heard them.

A pinprick, a bug bite? Then a shot of buzzing electricity—in the air or in his brain?—warmth spreading under the skin, leaching into arterial paths, bringing a flood of surreal Technicolor imagery; one gritty reality exchanged for another, bodies scrambling and sand gone muddy with blood.

He has to get there, has to save his best buddy, Ron.

But Ron is dead. Didn't I see that happen?

He turns one way, then the other; the scene shifting, sand exchanged for city streets, dunes that morph into funnels of smoke.

Come on. You can do this. Complete the mission. Because everything—Ron, the other guys—everything depends on you, and this is it: your last chance to make it right.

Hang on, buddy, I'm coming.

The music starts up, electric guitar strummed loud and hard, that

Zevon song that Ron liked and would play over and over, "Lawyers, Guns and Money."

The landscape flip-flops, a video game of shifting worlds: First a concrete jungle, then a cold white room, now it's all thick gray clouds and red-hot flames, explosions, and more blood and bone and ash, and from somewhere deep within this chaos there are piercing screams and muffled plaintive cries, but he is outside it, watching, watching himself walk right into it, and though he feels the fire on his skin and the smoke in his lungs, he is absolutely unafraid—the very notion of fear a mystery.

He has got to get there. He has got to tell his story. That is the mission; what he has to do to make it right again.

Lieutenant Bill Guthrie spread the crime scene photos across his desk. “Maybe these will help.”

I didn’t see how. The vic looked like a piece of charcoal.

I glanced up at the Bronx lieutenant’s round face, thin hair over a high forehead dotted with sunspots that begged for a dermatologist’s opinion.

“And there’s this.” Guthrie held the skull out in front of him, contemplated it like he was about to recite Hamlet’s soliloquy, which I didn’t think a Bronx homicide lieutenant could do, but I’d known cops who read Proust, and ones who knew the words to every Broadway musical, so it was possible.

There were two holes in the frontal eminence, the forehead. Guthrie poked a finger into one, then the other.

“The bullets are what killed him. Being burned up was just a cover.” Guthrie rotated the skull for inspection.

“Looks pretty clean. Acid bath?” I asked.

“I guess,” he said. “That’s part two, right? I hear that in part one they give it over to bugs who gnaw away whatever flesh is left on the bone. I didn’t know about that, did you?”

I did, but didn’t like to think about it.

“So, you think you can do it, Rodriguez?”

I hadn’t made a sculptural reconstruction in a long time, but had studied forensic anthropology along with forensic art as part of my course work at Quantico almost eight years ago. Recently, I had taken a brush-up course in osteological profiling—identifying victims from their bones, teeth, and whatever else is left of them—at Fordham University, here in the city. Plus, I’d been making my own study of forensic anthropology over the past five years, particularly the skull, and how it shapes the face. I got interested after a visit to the body farm, in Knoxville, Tennessee. I can’t say I enjoyed seeing—or smelling—the decomposing corpses spread around “Death’s Acre,” as the founder, Bill Bass, referred to it, but it taught me a hell of a lot about the body, from the inside out.

I took the skull from Guthrie and looked it over, half the teeth knocked out or broken, which would add to the challenge. I think a part of me had been waiting for this opportunity.

I started making a mental list of the supplies I’d need: oil-based modeling clay, sculpture tools, Duco cement, cotton balls, swabs, sandpaper, mesh, eyeballs—prosthetic ones if the PD was going to reimburse me because they were expensive—doll’s eyes, if they were not.

I looked at the eye sockets and for a moment saw a flash of blue. Maybe my mind was playing tricks on me, but I decided to go with the color.

Guthrie flipped through some pages in the case file. “Like I said, there was no way to ID our John Doe. Apartment where he was turned into a crispy critter was strictly month-to-month rental, cash sent to a real estate PO box, and his fingerprints were charred right off.”

“Poor guy. I wonder what he did?”

“You mean for a living—or to get himself killed?” Guthrie shrugged. “Who knows, but Rauder wants full reports.”

Mickey Rauder was chief of operations, a lifer who had worked with my dad in Narcotics, way back when. He'd asked me to help Guthrie with this case and I'd agreed because whenever I was with Rauder he would bring up my father and I'd get so damn flustered I'd agree to anything.

"If Rauder wants some John Doe to be priority, he's priority," said Guthrie. "And I appreciate your help, Rodriguez."

"What about the other people in the building, anyone who might have known who the guy was?"

"Only one other resident, old lady on the second floor, but she didn't make it through the fire."

"So your arsonist has two murders on his hands."

Guthrie nodded. "The building was slated for demo, some real estate developer had bought the land, planned to build a new high-rise on it."

"Fire's a good way to get tenants out of a building," I said.

"Yeah, but the realtor checked out. Seems to be a reputable guy," said Guthrie. "So, Rauder tells me he worked with your old man."

"Uh, yeah. That's right."

A picture of my father, dead in the street, unfolded in my brain.



“The coroner is waiting for me,” I said. “He’s got more stats on the John Doe that might help.” I used the excuse to get going. I didn’t want to hang around and talk about my father.

Guthrie slid the skull into a brown paper bag and handed it to me like he was giving me my lunch.

The medical examiner was in his forties, with sad eyes and skin the color of newsprint. His name tag, BAUMGARTEN, ADAM, was smeared with blood. He was eating a tuna on rye and offered me half, but the stench of formaldehyde and dead bodies only a few feet away made it easy to decline.

He exchanged the tuna for a report. “You know the basics, right? White male, mid-to-early-fifties, just under six feet tall.”

“You measured the femur, the thighbone, to get his height?”

The M.E. looked up, assessing me. “I see you’ve been studying your forensic anthropology. Not every sketch artist knows that.” He flipped a page in the autopsy file. “Weight has to be adjusted, too. Autopsy reports it as approximately a hundred and eighty, but you have to remember that’s with a lot of flesh and muscle burned off. I’d add another twenty to thirty pounds, at least, which puts him on the heavy side.”

I made a note: His face would show the weight in the masseter muscles of the jaw into the platysma of the neck.

“I didn’t do the autopsy,” said Baumgarten, “or I would’ve noted that. It was Dr. Abbott’s case, but she retired, moved to Vegas with her husband. I’m not saying anything negative about Dr. Abbott. Megan is an excellent physician, but the case was a John Doe, not much police attention at the time, so . . .” He flipped a page. “Basically, I’d say you’ve got an overweight fiftysomething man, with some serious arterial buildup. Not exactly a picture of health.”