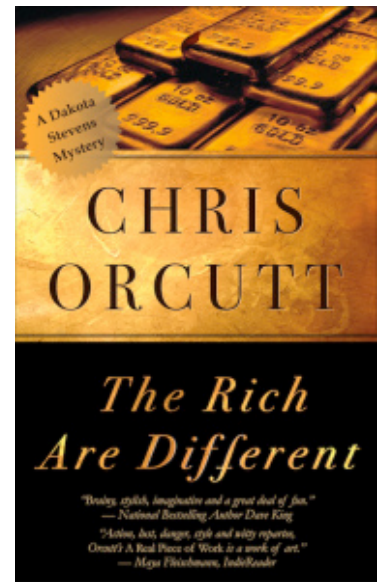


Rachel Abbott

CONVERSATIONS

An interview with Chris Orcutt

JUNE 29, 2012 | RACHEL ABBOTT | 5 COMMENTS



(http://rachelabbottwriter.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/trad_cover_72dpi_750pxh_.jpg)Chris Orcutt is the author of the critically acclaimed Dakota Stevens Mystery Series, including *A REAL PIECE OF WORK* (#1) and the just-released *THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT* (#2). A writer's writer, Orcutt has earned a living as a writer for 20 years through journalism, scriptwriting, technical writing, speechwriting, and his fiction. In this Q&A, we ask him about his indie-published Dakota Stevens Mystery Series, his influences, and about ebooks and publishing in general.

Are you an avid reader of books in these genres (mysteries and thrillers), and is that why you were inspired to write one of your own, or did you write *A REAL PIECE OF WORK* and *THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT* for other reasons?

Compared to friends of mine who devour books in these genres, I have read very few mysteries and thrillers. In fact, the only detective series I have read entirely are Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Raymond Chandler's Marlowe, and Robert Parker's Spenser. I've also read Ian Fleming's James Bond series all the way through.

But on the whole, when I'm looking for something new to read, I don't choose a mystery or a thriller. I enjoy creating them but not reading them as a reader. I'm a puzzle-maker, not a puzzle-solver. In fact anytime my wife and I are watching a mystery on television, I *always* guess the wrong murderer. Probably because I'm predicating it on how I would have written the story.

I wrote the two novels in the Dakota Stevens series because I wanted to create a detective hero of my own. I

asked myself, “What would the 21st century equivalent of Holmes and Watson look like?” and the answer I got back was Dakota and Svetlana. I started creating them about 8 years ago, filling notebooks with thoughts about the qualities I wanted my detective duo to have. You could say that was my pre-production for the series, and it seems to have paid off because readers almost universally express admiration for Dakota & Svetlana.

You’ve had over 90 5-star reviews of A REAL PIECE OF WORK from Amazon readers, but surely a few must stand out as favorites. What are some of your favorite customer comments about the book?

(<http://rachelabbottwriter.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/rpow-469x7501.png>) Two of them are from 5-star reviews, and a third is from my lone 1-star review. First the 5-stars: “Orcutt has combined a classic hard-boiled with the page-turning frenzy of a Dan Brown novel” and “I am now stalking this author on Amazon, anxiously awaiting the release of his next book in the series.” I like the first one for how apt it is, because after the fact I realized that that’s what I had done with A REAL PIECE OF WORK. The second one is a favorite because I like the image of someone stalking me on Amazon. Exactly how does one do that? By hitting refresh every 2 minutes? 😊

As for the 1-star review, I like it because the reader was complaining about something that everyone else praised. S/he wrote, “Lots of things happen in the book, and there are lots of twists and turns....” Yes? And your point is?

Like a lot of ebook authors, you only published your works on Amazon’s KDP platform after enduring years of rejection from agents and publishers. Does the success you’ve had with the Dakota Stevens series make up for any of the pain and negativity you experienced while trying to bring your work to fruition in traditional publishing?

Absolutely. Both A REAL PIECE OF WORK and THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT made the rounds of agents and publishers for about two years, coming close to acceptance several times. A Hollywood studio actually read A REAL PIECE OF WORK with an aim toward optioning the book for a film, but in the end the novel didn’t have—wait for it—enough *explosions* in it. I’m not kidding.

The most vindicating thing has been reader response to A REAL PIECE OF WORK. I *knew* that if I could just get the book in front of *readers*—not publishing professionals, but actual readers including commuters, travelers, and leisure readers, I knew that they’d love it. I knew it because I wrote it with them in mind.

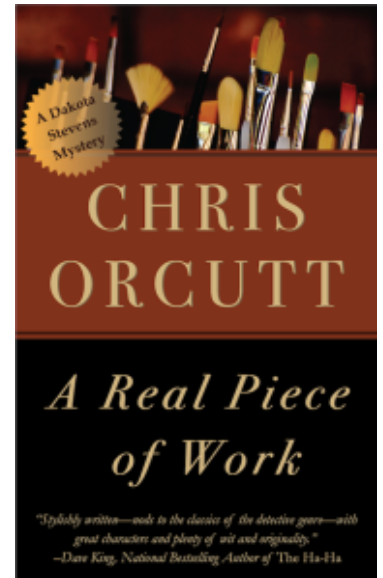
A REAL PIECE OF WORK has been consistently praised by readers and critics for the quality of its writing. Where do you think it ranks in terms of writing quality among other popular mysteries?

Honestly, I don’t read enough mysteries to answer that question. All I can say is, in both of the Dakota novels, not to mention everything I write, I try to make the writing as good as I can make it. I want it to be the very best of which I’m capable. When I finish a project, I want to know that I left it all on the field.

Ultimately, the reason I do this—write—is because I love writing. You’d be amazed to learn how many people are out there writing, not because they love the process itself, but because they want to be known as authors. They want “to have written.” That’s not me.

I’ve worked as a professional writer in one capacity or another since I was 21, so that’s 20 years of journalism, scriptwriting, technical writing, and speechwriting, not to mention fiction writing. I’ve been plying my trade for quite a while now, and I make it a point to continuously study. Hemingway said of writing, “We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.” And that’s how I think of it.

A common criticism of self-published or indie-published ebooks is that they are of inferior quality compared



to those released by mainstream publishers, that they are riddled with grammatical and formatting errors. Aren't you concerned that this common criticism might affect whether or not a reader decides to buy one of your books?

No, I'm not. While it might be true that there are self-published ebooks out there of inferior quality, that's the case with traditionally published books as well. We've all had the experience of buying or browsing a traditional book and saying to ourselves, "How did this get published?" My point is, self-published ebooks are just like anything else: some are going to be outstanding, some very good, some fair, and some abysmally poor. All I can do as a writer is try to give the reader the very best experience and the very best value for his money. I believe that ultimately the most important thing to buyers and readers is the book's quality, and if it's excellent quality, they don't care who published it.

Who are your writing idols—those writers whose work inspires you to be the best writer you can be?

That's easy. They're all important to me for different reasons, so I'll just list them as they occur to me. Anton Chekhov, for writing some of the best short stories ever written. His "The Lady with the Dog" is a masterpiece that only gets better with each rereading. Vladimir Nabokov, for his sentences of staggering genius. John Cheever, for his ability to blend reality and fantasy in his stories. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for *The Great Gatsby*—an utter masterpiece that I've read at least three dozen times in my life. Raymond Carver, for his ability to create moving stories out of seemingly insignificant or "throwaway" moments. Hemingway, for his simplicity and clarity. And several pulp fiction authors, including Jim Thompson, Gil Brewer and Charles Williams, for their constant lessons in how to create and maintain narrative drive through a story—narrative drive being "the promise or threat that something is going to happen."

Among British authors, Doyle, Jane Austen, Graham Greene and Ian Fleming stand out for me as simply remarkable. They each created stories and characters that were *way* ahead of their time. And to me, Fleming's writing stands out as some of the best ever to appear in a thriller.

Do you have any advice for would-be writers considering publishing an ebook?

Yes. The word "publish" comes from the Latin *publicare*, which means "to make public," and that's exactly what you're doing when you publish something: you're making it and yourself public. For this reason, you want your work to be your very best before you publish. And if you or your work aren't ready, I strongly advise you to wait. You only get one chance to make a first impression, and if your writing isn't ready for public consumption, you're better off waiting until it is. The annals of literature are full of stories of writers who published something, only to regret it years later.

You've described THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT, novel #2 in the Dakota Stevens series, as "a true sequel." What do you mean by this?

What I mean is that the story opens a few months after the first novel, and the hero, Dakota Stevens, is still affected by the events of that novel. In short, he's depressed and has lost his detecting mojo. The case that he and Svetlana take in THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT is the first one he's taken since the very difficult and emotional case in A REAL PIECE OF WORK.

When I first started writing this series, I decided that I wanted there to be continuity between books. I wanted the events of one book to affect the characters and their relationships in the next book, because that's how life works.

As a result, readers will find Dakota of book #2 to be a little darker, a little less happy-go-lucky, and they'll get some real insights into his character. The character development in THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT is richer, and you'll see that Dakota and Svetlana truly are becoming like real people.

What is the plot of THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT?

It's pretty complex, but then again, if it weren't, it wouldn't be much of a mystery. Here goes: Dakota and Svetlana are hired by a Long Island heiress to investigate the death of her brother, a rich eccentric who owned an Old West resort in Montana. Their job is to go undercover as actors at the resort, which is basically a make-believe mining town straight out of 1885. But before they can get out west, a number of events in the East crop up and they have to investigate those first. Certain clues in the East link to the West, and that's where the core of the case takes place. Sorry I can't be more specific, but I don't want to give any spoilers.

Put another way, "It's an American story of East meets West as Dakota and Svetlana follow a trail of clues that takes the reader from the sophisticated setting of *The Great Gatsby* to the forbidding land of *Pale Rider*."

How can readers buy A REAL PIECE OF WORK and THE RICH ARE DIFFERENT?

By going to Amazon right now and downloading them for their Kindles or Kindle-enabled devices. The point being, you don't have to have a Kindle to read Kindle ebooks.

US Links : A Real Piece of Work (<http://amzn.to/rvBB4t>) The Rich are Different (<http://amzn.to/PH4k0Y>)

UK Links : A Real Piece of Work (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Real-Piece-Work-Mysteries-ebook/dp/B006FYKUMS/>) The Rich are Different (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Different-Dakota-Stevens-Mysteries-ebook/dp/B008DQKMTC/>)

Any final thoughts?

Yes, I want to thank Rachel for her generosity in having me as a guest on her blog. Despite her #1 success with ONLY THE INNOCENT, she still finds the time to support writers she believes in. She's remarkable. And I want to thank this audience. Hopefully some of you are intrigued enough about Dakota & Svetlana that you'll want to read the series. Thank you for your time and attention.

That's very kind of you Chris. You may remember that A Real Piece of Work was the very first book that I gave five stars to! And they were well deserved.

For more about Orcutt or the Dakota Stevens Mystery Series, visit his blog:

<http://www.orcutt.net> (<http://www.orcutt.net>)

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5 thoughts on "An interview with Chris Orcutt"

1. **Nina** says:

[JUNE 29, 2012 AT 4:27 PM](#)

Thank you for posting this fantastic interview, and great insights!

2. **acflory** says:

[JUNE 30, 2012 AT 11:30 AM](#)

I really enjoyed this interview! Thank you.

3. ★ **Rachel Abbott** says:

JUNE 30, 2012 AT 11:36 AM

Thanks Nina and Acflory for your comments. If you haven't read Chris's books, I can really recommend them. I have read the first one, and just started the second. I'm hooked already!

Thanks for your feedback.

4. Pingback: [Interview with UK Author Sensation Rachel Abbott | Chris Orcutt, Writer](#)
5. Pingback: [Thanks for the Incredible Year | Chris Orcutt, Writer](#)