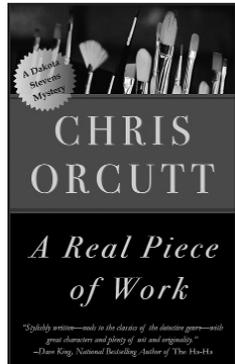


# Local author introduces homegrown detective via Kindle

by Kate Goldsmith

Thanks to local writer Chris Orcutt, Dutchess County has its own fictional private detective: Dakota Stevens.

"He grew up here, and he lives up here when he isn't on a case," Orcutt says. "His office is in Manhattan, so I guess you could say that, like everyone else, he has a long commute."



And thanks to digital technology, Orcutt's gumshoe could be coming to a Kindle near you.

His mystery, "A Real Piece of Work," was released last week on Kindle, Amazon's e-book reader.

The first novel in a new series, "A Real Piece of Work" delves into a world of forged and stolen art, secret identities and murder.

"In a case that leads from Manhattan to Millbrook to the Catskills to Washington, D.C., what begins as the simple recovery of a painting soon reveals an international art scam and a chilling secret that has remained hidden since World War II," states the release for the book.

Much of the book's action takes place in our region.

"To my knowledge, Dakota Stevens is the first private eye from Dutchess County. And in the novel he interacts with some real-life businesses and locations around the county," Orcutt says. "I foresee more of this as the series continues. In 'A Real Piece of Work,' there's a lot of material about the Dutchess countryside that I love so much."

Orcutt describes Dakota Stevens as "a modern PI [private investigator], medium-boiled, who never drinks while on a case. As a former FBI agent with experience in the field and the lab, Dakota combines the wit and grit of PIs Marlowe and Spenser with the ratiocination of Sherlock Holmes."

Stevens' "Watson" is not a low-key older gentleman but a gorgeous and brilliant Ukrainian-American chess champion named Svetlana Krüsh, who's fluent in seven languages.

Orcutt began writing the Dakota Stevens series six years ago. He says "A Real Piece of Work" was inspired by two events: an international art scam by New York dealer Ely Sakhai uncovered in 2000; and the looting of Europe's art treasures during World War II.

Getting his start as a newspaper reporter for the Millbrook Round Table in the 1990s, Orcutt has written professionally for 20 years as a journalist, scriptwriter, playwright and speechwriter. His short fiction has been published in a variety of literary journals and garnered "a few modest awards." As a reporter for the Round Table, Orcutt also received a New York Press Association award.

"Even though I'm pretty tech-savvy, I never imagined I'd be publishing this [novel] on Kindle," Orcutt says. "But the benefits of e-publishing—better royalties for the writer and more content sooner for readers—far outweigh the drawbacks."

Orcutt calls e-publishing "the greatest revolution of the written word since the Gutenberg Press—in some respects more than the Internet itself."

Does he think virtual books will replace the real thing?

"No, but paper books are going to become a lot more expensive," he says.

"They'll have to, in order for publishers to make a profit."

Although Orcutt still hopes to eventually land a traditional book deal, digital publishing is the best way to get his work seen, right now.

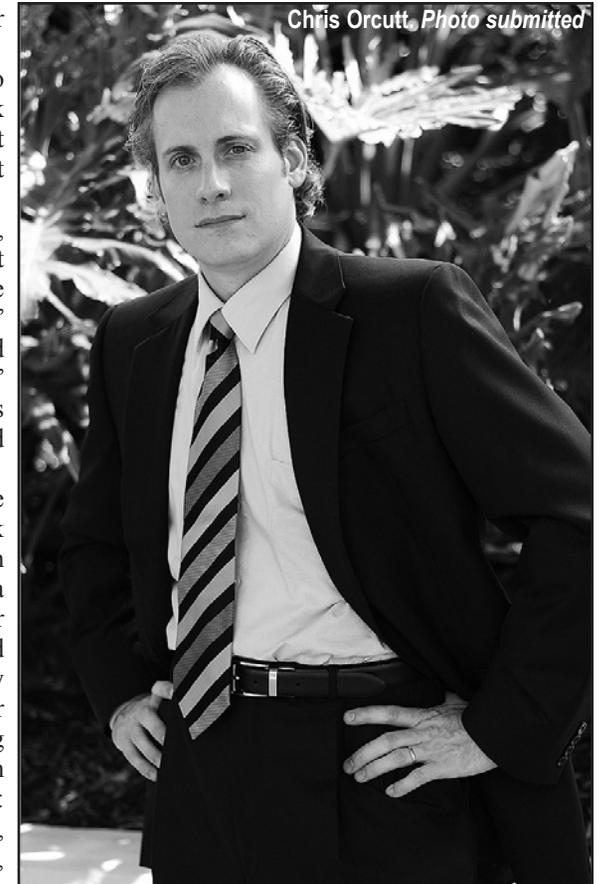
"A writer writes to be read, and the two PI novels I wrote that were sitting on my hard drive weren't being read by anyone," he says. "I wanted people to read them, to be entertained by them."

Interestingly, Orcutt writes his first drafts in pencil on a legal pad or on one of his five typewriters.

"My first job out of college was as a newspaper reporter. Ink on paper. Seeing your name in print every morning or once a week. And getting paid for your skill," he says. "Also, I had grown up with books, seen my grandfather read *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* every morning for 22 years, and I wanted to be in print. All of my idols were: Chekhov, Tolstoy, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Chandler, Nabokov, Fleming, Cheever, Carver, Keillor and Boyle. They all got their start in books, not on screens designed to resemble paper."

However, he thinks if many of those writers were alive today, they'd embrace the new technology.

"Chekhov wrote largely for newspapers in his youth—anything that paid while he was going to medical school and working as a young doctor. He would have jumped at the 70 percent royalty," Orcutt says. "Hemingway was a shameless self-promoter who had several years in Paris

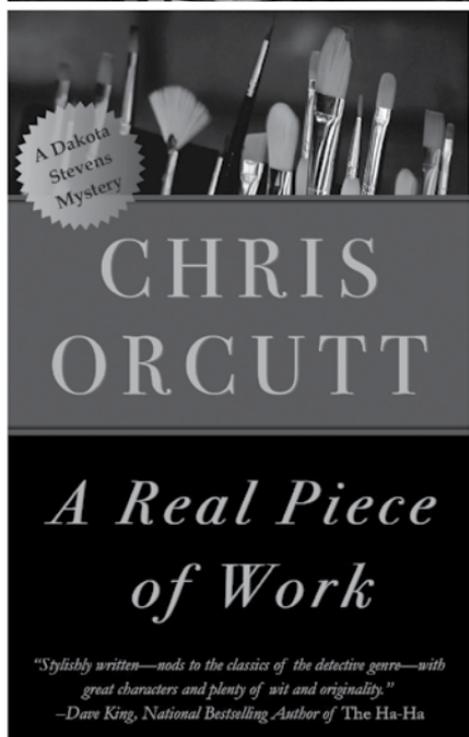


when no American periodicals would publish his stuff. He would have gone with Kindle. Chandler didn't publish his first novel, 'The Big Sleep,' until he was 49. Had Kindle been available to him, he might have taken it."

Orcutt points out that none of his idols wrote for the money; they wrote because they were compelled, and because they wanted to be read.

"Same deal here," he says. "If no one is reading your words, writing is just another word for solipsism."

# Orcutt releases mystery novel on Kindle



By Jesse Ordansky

Millbrook resident and author Chris Orcutt announced the recent release of his first published book to Amazon's Kindle and Kindle-enabled devices including iPhones and iPads.

His mystery novel titled *A Real Piece of Work* is the first in a series about a Millbrook-based private eye duo that lives amid our town's rolling hills and conduct their investigative duties in New York City.

After growing up in Millbrook, Orcutt worked as a scriptwriter, journalist, and speechwriter. He has written "at least eight novels" all of which are unpublished, "not for lack of trying," he said.

As Orcutt was unable to land a deal with publishing company, he decided self-publishing on digital platforms would be the best way to bring Dakota Stevens and Svetlana Krush - *A Real Piece of Work's* main characters - to life.

"It's not about money. It's about people reading what you write and Kindle gives me the ability to reach an audience whom I know will love these novels," said Orcutt. "Kindle lets me go straight to the readers with no intermediary."

As tablets, increasingly small laptops, and smart phones allow for an innumerable amount of information to

reach users instantaneously, the number of self-published authors continues to grow as the book publishing industry enters a new era.

In a July *New York Times* article titled "E-Book Revolution Upends a Publishing Course," Julie Bosman wrote, "In the past year, e-books have skyrocketed in popularity, especially in genre fiction like romance and thrillers. For some new releases, the first week has brought more sales of electronic copies than of print copies."

Orcutt admitted that initially, he viewed e-publishing as a "fad" and there was "no way this was going to last." But after learning more about the e-publishing industry he asked himself "what great virtue is there in ink on paper?"

He used the first line of F. Scott Fitzgerald's timeless novel, *The Great Gatsby* as an example of how meaningless the medium is in a book's presentation. In an interview, Orcutt recited from memory, "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice I've been turning over in my mind ever since."

Orcutt paused and told this reporter, "if you took those words out of the book and you painted it on a cave wall, would those words be any less elegant... any less amazing?"

E-publishing combatants might question the validity of authors who self-publish with media like Kindle and iPad because, in theory, anyone can do it.

In a May *New York Times* essay titled "The Case for Self-Publishing," author Neal Pollack wrote, "A self-published book is almost certainly going to end up on the digital slush pile, with fewer readers than the average blog post."

But he said corporate publishers shell out millions in support of works "that have a chance of landing their authors on the 'Today' show or on the discount table at Costco..." and "...most books that corporate publishers release will fail to make money, both for the writer and the company."

While poor writing and corporate fluff is prevalent within the traditional publishing model as well as in the e-publishing world, consumers, not major publishing houses will decide what books are worth their time from the countless reasonably priced publications available online.

While self-published authors incur the moderate costs of releasing their own work, they also reap the benefits of higher profit margins than they would see working with a publisher.

*A Real Piece of Work* is available on Kindle-enabled devices from Amazon.com for \$2.99. Orcutt will receive 70 percent of each sale while Amazon will take the remaining 30 percent.

Orcutt hopes his neighbors and friends will enjoy that Dakota and Svetlana eat at the Millbrook Diner, shop at Marona's Market, and - while trying to recover a stolen painting - are chased by a gang of thugs through the Town of Washington.

"This isn't about money for me," said Orcutt. "I want people to read this. I want these characters to live and they're not living as long as they're sitting on my desk."

# Hudson Valley in the books

BY HVN WEEKEND STAFF

Local author Chris Orcutt's mystery novel, "A Real Piece of Work," features a private detective who lives in the Hudson Valley and delves into a world of stolen art, secret identities and murder.

In a case that leads from Manhattan to Millbrook and from the Catskills to Washington, D.C., what begins as the simple recovery of a painting soon reveals an international art scam and a chilling secret that has remained hidden since World War II.

"He grew up here," Orcutt says of his detective, Dakota Stevens, "and he lives up here when he isn't on a case. His office is in Manhattan, so I guess you could say that, like everyone else, he has a long commute."

The first novel in a new series, a substantial portion of the novel's action takes place in Dutchess County and the Catskills.

"There's a chase through the Town of Washington, a shootout scene in Union Vale, and something almost unbelievable in the mountains," Orcutt says.

As a former FBI agent with experience in the field and the lab, Dakota Stevens combines the wit and grit of PIs Marlowe and Spenser with the ratiocination of Sherlock Holmes. However, his "Watson" is a Ukrainian-American chess champion with runway legs, predator eyes and fluency in seven languages.

"A Real Piece of Work" was inspired by two events. In 2000, Sotheby's and the FBI uncovered a long-running art scam by New York dealer Ely Sakhai, in which he forged masterworks, switched the provenances and sold the paintings in separate parts of the world. The other event was the systematic looting of Europe's art treasures during WW II. Over 100,000 works from this period are still missing.

Orcutt has written professionally for 20 years as a journalist, scriptwriter, playwright and speechwriter. His short fiction has been published in a variety of literary journals. It has also won a few modest awards, most notably MOTA's Emerging Writers and 55 Fiction's World's Shortest Stories. As a newspaper reporter for the *Millbrook Round Table*, he received a New York Press Association award.

"Even though I'm pretty tech-savvy, I never imagined I'd be publishing this on Kindle," Orcutt says. "But the benefits of e-publishing — better royalties for the writer and more content sooner for readers — far outweigh the drawbacks."

