

*Murder mystery: multiple serial killers unwittingly target one another.*

## Death Boards

by John McCann

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# Death Boards

死亡

A TALE OF A SERIAL KILLER – WITH A TWIST –  
AND THEN A TWIST WITHIN THAT TWIST

A Crime Novel  
by John McCann

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死亡

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First Edition

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to:

W.O. Hugh C. Thompson, Sp/4 Larry Colburn and Sp/4 Glenn U. Andreotta, the helicopter crew who intervened to stop the slaughter at My Lai, Vietnam, on March 16, 1968

and

Maya, Kaitlin and Marie

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man  
Of moral evil and of good  
Than all the sages can.

William Wordsworth

## Chapter 12

Department of Public Safety  
University of Delaware  
413 Academy Street  
Newark, DE 19716

Lutz and Peck were surprised at how long it took to drive down I-95 to Newark, Delaware. They expected a lot of road construction on I-95, a perennial consumer of federal tax dollars, but the line of single cars and trucks seemed to go on forever.

Two hours after leaving Philly, they arrived at their first stop: the Office of Public Safety at the University of Delaware. They had called ahead and were expected and greeted by the day supervisor of the school security staff, Sgt. Frankie.

After introductions and offers of coffee and a trip to the restroom, Frankie began the discussion. "I'm sorry you boys had to come all the way down here because I haven't been able to come up with anything based on the pictures you emailed us. I've searched all records of student arrests going back 20 years just to be sure, paying special attention to Oriental students and anyone arrested for beatin' up females and, of course, all of our reported rape case. The more recent records are available only on-line so I printed out copies for you. I even pulled reports on cases that were dropped due to lack of evidence or withdrawn by the girl. Everythin's over there," he said, pointing to a table in an adjoining room.

Peck thanked the sergeant but said they'd still like to look for themselves.

Once in the room the first thing they noticed was the awful smell, a combination of mold, sweat and vapid air. Lutz thought about opening some windows until he saw they were casement types and

sealed shut. “What a mess,” he mumbled under his breath to his partner.

They took turns examining each file and report. The files contained surprisingly few pictures of either the victims or their attackers. Lutz went back to the main room to ask Frankie about that.

“We wanted to take pictures, but we were told that would be a violation of their rights, unless we or the state police made an actual arrest, which quite frankly rarely occurred. You’ll see when you look through the files that most times the complaints were eventually withdrawn. I know some of the kids were raped but we couldn’t do much without the cooperation of the victims.” Lutz thanked Frankie and returned to the smelly room to update Peck.

Eventually, the two detectives selected three files, more out of a sense of obligation than need, and asked Frankie to make copies for them. Frankie was surprised and happy to do so. They also asked the sergeant if he would mind calling the Alumni Affairs staff to alert them of their arrival and purpose. Frankie was happy to do that too.

The directions to the Alumni Relations Office Frankie gave led them to a beautiful old home off East Main Street, almost in the middle of the campus. Their plan was to page through old yearbooks, from 1980 to the present, profiling Asian students, both male and female. Maybe they would see someone with a likeness to their suspect.

Unlike the Public Safety Office, the accommodations in the Alumni Relations Office were first class: nothing but antique furniture, expensive Persian rugs, portraits of wealthy high end graduates – and the sweet smell of clean air. A student was serving as a receptionist and greeted them with a cheery “Hello. How can I help you?” After the officers introduced themselves, the student used her desk phone to make a call.



Shortly thereafter, a middle aged woman wearing a name tag over her sagging left breast, with the words ‘Mrs. Margie Smedley’ engraved on it, greeted them in the reception parlor. She identified herself as an assistant director of alumni affairs, then proceeded to tell them that it would have been ‘nice’ if they had made an appointment since she was ‘quite busy’ and that it would take some time to retrieve copies of all the yearbooks they wanted to look at. She added she’d do the best she could. Peck started to say something in reply, but Lutz lightly grabbed his arm first. Lutz simply said, “Thank you. We will wait here if that is okay with you.”

After Smedley left the room, Peck made it a point to light a cigarette and blow slow moving ‘o’ circles of smoke at the “No Smoking” sign which hung on a wall covered with beautiful wine colored paper. When he was done, he snuffed out the cigarette on the sole of his shoe and placed the butt behind a vase filled with fresh flowers which sat in the middle of a polished table dated from the Federal Era. Lutz contented himself with walking around the room looking at pictures of various ‘historic moments’ in the history of the university.

After about 15 minutes, Smedley returned, wheeling in a silver tea serving tray. It was loaded with over 30 yearbooks. Her nose crinkled as she came into the room as if something was not right. “Here is the material you asked for. Please let the receptionist know when you are done.” She then walked away as quickly as her little white-on-blue leather heeled shoes could carry her.

As soon as Smedley left, Lutz sought out the receptionist. He noted with irony that the young woman was Asian. He asked her if there was an empty office they could use. She quickly led the detectives down a hallway to a room with a desk, two chairs and a computer.

Three hours later, the two men had identified over 50 pictures of Asian students, but none bore much resemblance to the image of

their suspect. The detectives were disappointed but not surprised: they knew it was a long shot. The fact that the suspect was wearing a UD sweatshirt did not mean he or she was ever a student there, let alone a graduate.

One thing struck Lutz as odd, however. “Peck, are you surprised at the number of graduates whose pictures are missing? See in the back of each book. The names are listed but with the notation ‘Pictures Missing.’ I noticed that a couple of the ‘Pictures Missing’ names seem to be Asian. Let’s at least make a list of the names, run them against the state drivers’ license databases and see if we get any hits.”

Peck agreed and started looking back through his half of the yearbooks, jotting down names as he did so. “Hey, Lutz, is ‘Lee’ Asian or American?”

After they had finished, they stopped to thank the receptionist for her help. That is when Lutz noticed the name tag the student was wearing. “Pardon me for being rude - I don’t mean to be - but your name tag says ‘Jennifer London.’ That’s not an Asian surname.”

The young girl laughed. “Oh, that’s okay. I’m Korean. My parents were Christian missionaries there. I was adopted.”

Lutz and Peck looked at one another. Lutz shook his head. “Damn. Never thought of that.”

## Chapter 19

Patrick Mason Residence  
4300 Block of Aberdale Drive  
Philadelphia, PA 19114

Senator Mason could see the lights were on in the living room of his son's home as Simmons drove by looking for a space to park. A fine mist had started as soon as they had gotten off I-95, just enough to require that Simmons start the window wipers in the car. Simmons had to drive with a bursting bladder the last ten miles. The light moisture now falling further reminded him of that, as if he needed a reminder.

After Simmons found a parking spot, he asked, "Which house is Patrick's?" The Senator pointed as he started to walk back up the street towards the house with the trimly maintained lawn and living room light on, with Simmons close behind.

Mason knocked on the door and hit the buzzer almost immediately after the knock. Neither man noticed the man perched in a car at the end of the street.

After about 30 seconds, the Senator saw his son's face through a lifted curtain. Patrick gave his father a semi-smile and unlocked the door. *What am I going to say to him and why did he bring someone with him?* Patrick thought as he stepped back from the door to let his father and Simmons inside.

After an awkward pause in the short hallway that led to the living room, Patrick gave his father a brief hug, and then extended his hand to Simmons. "You must be Clint Simmons. My Dad told me about you. Please come in and sit down. Can I get you anything to drink?"

“Just point me to the bathroom, thanks, Patrick, before I pee on your floor!” The younger Mason pointed and said, “Straight down the hallway, second door on the left.”

The light in the hallway was dim: however, Senator Mason could see that his son looked thinner and more hollow than normal. As Simmons moved quickly towards the bathroom, Mason reached out and gave his son another, longer hug.

As they walked into the living room, Mason asked, “Have you talked to Maria or Mike? They’re coming down tomorrow.”

“No, I haven’t,” Patrick replied. “And really, Dad, I don’t think that’s even necessary. I saw the hearing today and I almost fell out of my chair. Look at me - do I look like a murderer to you? Patrick heard the toilet flush and stopped talking for a moment. Then he said sotto voce, “Dad, why did you bring him here?”

The Senator did not respond as Simmons returned to the living room. Simmons could taste the tension in the air. He thought for a moment and then said, “Senator, are you and Patrick hungry? Why don’t I get us something? Burgers okay? Any suggestions, Patrick?”

The elder Mason spoke first. “That’s a good idea, Clint. If you go back up Aberdale Drive and make a left at the light, you will find several fast food places. I’d like two plain cheeseburgers, no fries. Patrick, how about you?”

“No thanks, Dad, I’ve eaten already.”

Simmons left as quickly as he could, grabbing a red umbrella from a stand near the door on the way out. “I may be awhile because of the rain,” he shouted as he closed the door.

The Senator started towards the kitchen to get a beer or soda when he stopped in mid stride. “Patrick, where’s Mai?”

“She’s at her parents,” Patrick replied. “That’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you about, Dad. Mai and I may be splitting up.” After waiting a second, he resumed talking very quickly. “I’ve been working long hours and we haven’t been able to have any children and her family, especially her father, has been pressuring her to produce a grandchild. He really wants a grandson. I’ve had my sperm count checked and I’m fine. So, there must be something wrong with her. I don’t know. At any rate, Mai left a week or so ago. I’ve been meaning to tell you, but then all the stuff about the senate hearings came up and I just kept putting it off. I didn’t want to burden you with my problems.”

After a second, Mason added, “One other thing, Dad. We had a fight and I accidentally hit her. I didn’t mean to and I apologized right away, but she started crying and I couldn’t get her to stop. That’s when she packed up some clothes and left me. I keep calling and calling her but she won’t come to the phone. In fact, now the phone just rings and rings. No one will even pick it up.”

While talking to his father, Patrick had been looking down at a space between his legs. Suddenly his head shot up. “Dad, maybe that’s what this is all about! Maybe Mai complained to the cops that I’d hit her. Maybe someone told that to that shit-faced senator? Maybe that’s what the so-called police investigation is about! What else could it be? I am not the kind of person who goes around killing people.”

Senator Mason did not know what to say. He knew his son was not a killer and that Senator Biddle was capable of saying anything if it will put the President or a Democrat on the defense. *And then there is the curious phone message from Jenna McFee*, he thought.

“Patrick, I don’t know what to say. I know you’re not capable of killing anyone. But you need to get an attorney right away and have him contact the police to see if you are being investigated for

something. You need to clear your name and I will not be able to help you in any way this time. You know that, right?"

"I know, I know. I also know, Dad, that all this reflects on you and I am really, really sorry. I know I have not always been a good son and that I've worried you and Mom in ways that Mike and Maria never did. I know you love me. I promise I'll get a lawyer tomorrow and have the whole thing checked out.

"Dad, is it too late to call Mike and Maria and tell them there is no need for them to come down tomorrow? I'm going to be busy contacting an attorney and I have a business project with a short due date that I have to get back to."

"I guess, Patrick, but you'll have to make the call and explain everything to them." He then left the room to go to the bathroom himself.

When Mason returned, he could hear Patrick on his cell phone in the kitchen. "Hi, Mike? It's Patrick. Look Dad's here and ...."

Twenty minutes later, Patrick was finished on the phone and Simmons had returned with their dinner. As the tree men began to eat, Patrick added, "I talked to Mike and he's going to call Maria. They now know there's no need for them to come down. Mike said he'll talk to you tomorrow."

After dinner, Patrick then picked up the remote and turned on the TV. Simmons looked at his boss, but said nothing. The trio watched TV and made small talk for the next hour and then Patrick said he was tired and left the room to go bed. Mason then told Simmons what his son had told him. Simmons wondered if there was more to the story but said nothing.

Mason took the guest bedroom and, after checking for any new updates on the story in the media, Simmons rolled himself up on the too soft sofa and tried to sleep.

By 8:00 the next morning, Mason and Simmons were back on the road, smelly and unshaven. Patrick Mason waited until they left before getting up and then made plans to get away.

Neither of them noticed the man sitting in a car, watching.

Office of the Deputy Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C.

Cochise Rivera walked into his office, hung up his jacket and opened the top button on his shirt and loosened his tie as he sat heavily in his chair. He'd worked all weekend and he felt like an Iditarod race dog. Other than some light background music, Rivera had deliberately shut out the outside world on Sunday to concentrate on work.

He'd just flipped on his computer when Mrs. Rominiecki, one of the paralegals, came into his office. He could see she had been crying and, as soon as she saw Rivera, she started crying again.

Rivera immediately went over to her. "Frannie, what's wrong? Here, please sit down."

"Oh, I can't Mr. Rivera. I can't. Haven't you heard? We just got a call from the OAG that Mr. Martinez died. His body was found in a park near his home. He apparently was out running last night and was robbed or something. I don't know.

“Oh, Mr. Rivera! I didn’t know him well but I know he was a friend of yours. And he seemed like such a nice man. D.C is just not safe anymore, no matter who you are or where you live.

“I’m sorry to be the one to tell you. I just thought you knew.”

After settling Ms. Rominiecki down, Rivera had to do the same for himself. He’d just spent all day Saturday with Martinez, going over all the files on the sales of U.S. technology overseas. It was Martinez who’d spotted the anomaly in the Consci file. All of the files of the firms who’d been cleared of any shady sales practices were generally documented in a uniform way – except the Consci file. That file was the same size as the others but thinnest in terms of substance. It was also almost completely devoid of the kind of back-up documentation and analysis the other ‘cleared’ files had.

Rivera thought for a moment, then called Attorney General Wirthlin’s staff assistant and told her he would be out all day. Next he called Martinez’s long-time, live-in girlfriend, Kathy Savin. Savin, of course, was devastated. He said he’d be right over. He needed to console her, and he needed to retrieve the files they’d worked on together that weekend.

Once in his car alone, he started to grieve for the loss of his friend. After a few minutes, his grief morphed into anger, which grew with each roll of the odometer. By the time he arrived at his best friend’s former residence, focus had replaced shock. His fury, however, was unabated.

He helped Savin as best he could, picked up the paper files and copied over all of the data and document files on Martinez’s computer onto a data stick he’d brought with him. This process went quickly since he still remembered the pass codes from the day before.



As he drove home, he was determined to do all he could to help the police find who had killed his friend. If they failed, he would find the killer himself.

Two days later, after Martinez had been buried, Ms. Savin returned to clean the home before she moved in with a girlfriend. The memories of happy times there were too strong for her to continue to live there.

While cleaning, she noted the odd pile of ashes on the floor in the study and wondered if Will or Cochise had taken up smoking. She dismissed the thought when the soot vacuumed up easily.

Police Administration Building  
Philadelphia, PA

Detective Lutz pulled into a parking spot at the Roundhouse and was about to select a vehicle for the day. He was not looking forward to the dullness the Mason stakeout had become. So far, all the guy seemed to do was go to work and go home. Mason was married, but they had yet to catch a glimpse of the wife. *Wonder what's with that*, he thought.

After picking out a gray Chevy and signing for the keys, Lutz took the stairs to his floor and pushed open the door. He was surprised to see his partner sitting at his desk, rather than his own. As he walked over, he saw Peck with his feet up on the desk and the center portion of the Braille copy of *Playboy* magazine open on his lap. Peck's eyes were closed and the tips of his fingers were moving slowly over the pin pricks on the paper.

“Peck, what the hell are you doing?”

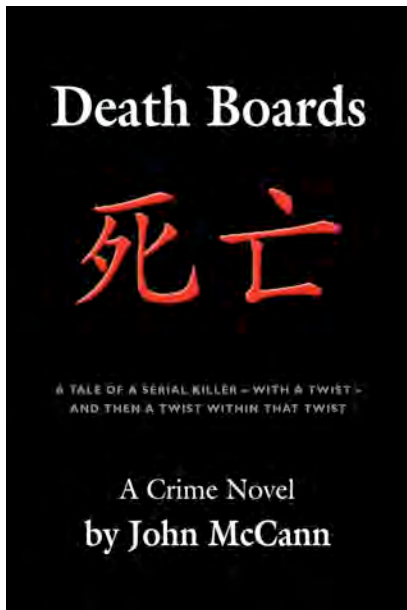
Peck ignored Lutz at first. Then he lifted his legs off the desk and, while still fingering the paper with his eyes closed, said, “I was

just trying to figure out how blind guys can see the centerfold. I don't know how you can appreciate these fine ladies when all you can feel are little bits of pointy paper." He then looked up and smiled at his partner. "And good morning to you too, Detective."

Peck replied, "I can't believe you! There are no pictures in Braille materials, just narrative."

"Really! Well that's good to know – makes sense too when you think about it." Then he added as he got up and grabbed his suit coat, "So when a blind guy says he only reads *Playboy* for the articles, he's telling the truth."

As they walked together to the surveillance vehicle lot, Lutz wondered if Peck was that dumb or just pulling his leg. He decided not to try to find out.



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