

Skeletons are found in a barrier island. A local detective sets out to determine the names of the people who were there when a hurricane devastated it more than thirty years earlier. His quest starts with a running shoe.

DEATH on HOG ISLAND

By Jim Throne

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DEATH ON HOG ISLAND



Jim Throne

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Also by Jim Throne

The Curse of the Gallows – A Murder Mystery

The Book Nook Murders – A Mystery Thriller

Killer Math – A Technical Mystery

The Last Expression – The Strange Death of the Master

An Author's Word about Death on Hog Island

As you will quickly learn, this novel has an unusual format. Let's take a moment to "set the table," as it were.

The events take place in two times – September **1938** and sometime in **1972**. The major events that occurred on and around a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico in 1938 result in the major events that take place in and around that same island 34 years later.

The **EVEN** chapters (viz, 2, 4, 6...) are the **1938** diary of the novelist whose writings somehow survived the death and destruction inflicted on the denizens of what was called **Paradise Island**.

The **ODD** chapters (viz, 1,3,5...) detail the ongoing extensive investigative and forensic work of the **1972** team as they try to understand how the events of that September week so many decades before led to so many deaths.

If you want to find out what happened in 1938 read all the even chapters first. If you are more interested in how the truth is discovered more than 34 years later, read all the odd chapters first. Or if you want to read the book as I wrote it – sequentially – "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop." – Lewis Carroll.

Jim Throne

Chapter 1: Hog Island – 1972

“You must be one of Lewiston’s finest.” A huge man with a caveman beard, a barrel chest, a yellow vest, and a bright white hard hat stood just at the edge of the white sand beach as the Lewiston police launch eased ashore. Detective Slade Dollar nodded as he stepped from its prow into the shallow water. He hauled the anchor from the boat and tossed it several yards up the beach. He waited as his companion secured the engine and hopped overboard from the aft of the vessel.

The greeter stripped off his leather gloves and extended his hand as the cops approached. “Heard ya comin.’ Guess Andrew flagged ya down an’ gotcha ‘round ta here.” Three others had joined the greeter, each wearing fluorescent vests and yellow hard hats.

“I’m Slade Dollar. Detective from Lewiston,” he said, grasping the man’s enormous paw and immediately ruing it as the man crushed his fingers. Dollar was six-two and two-twenty. The man towered over him and outweighed him by at least thirty pounds. “Desk Sergeant Griff got a call from a Mister Al Donaldson. Said he headed up a company that bought the island. According to Sarge, he kept calling it...” Dollar fished his leather notebook from his pocket and flipped it open. “...Isle of Empyria. Sarge hadda have him spell it. Said his company was called Empyrian Enterprises. You that guy?”

The man laughed, still holding the Detective’s hand in his death grip. “Nah. Donaldson? He’s the owner a’ dis here piece of nowhere. Woody Sanderson here. Head up dis crew, such as it is. We’re da crew what’s been hired by Donaldson ta level ever’tthin’ in sight!” He laughed again.

“Ah, this is Patrolman Lester Dowdy,” Dollar said, nodding to his partner while trying to extract his quickly numbing fingers. Dollar had taken a real liking to Les since he’d joined the force a couple months back. Dowdy wasn’t a big guy. Maybe five-eight or –nine at the most. Wiry, with largish ears and a hook nose that looked like he’d come in second in fisticuffs. Elvis style sideburns, hair shoulder-length. *A sign of the times*, Dollar thought. *Clean shaven, buzz-cut. My style.*

Sanderson grinned at Dowdy, gradually releasing his grip on Dollar’s hand as he did. “Dose guys are my crew here. Julio, over dere, leaning on the shovel. Fritz, the long tall guy in the cowboy boots, sitting on the tree stump over there. Andrew, the black dude what flagged you guys down.” Julio was obviously Hispanic, slight, with large floppy ears and beady black

eyes. Fritz wore his sandy hair in a pony tail and fidgeted with the straps on his coveralls, increasing and decreasing their lengths.

“Yeah. Took us a while to figger out why he was gesturing. Eventually, Les got his message.” The two had bitched about weather and politics for the full twenty minutes from Lewiston to Hog Island and were about to dock at the dilapidated pier when a rotund black man in a hard hat and dirty overalls waved them off. After some to-and-fro yelling, Lester guessed that the two were supposed to head around to gulf side of the island. After negotiating sand bars and tree roots, they beached the boat in a small cove, one of several on that side of the island.

“Answer me this, cop. How come it took so long fer you to git here, y’know?”

Dollar laughed. “I’m a Detective, sir. Detectives investigate. Dowdy’s a cop. He arrests. Why’d it take so long? It’s called paperwork. Besides, your boss was kinda incoherent.”

“Kinda what?”

“Let’s put it this way. Sarge was kinda confused by your boss’s message. Your guy kept raving about finding a body. But Sarge couldn’t get the guy to tell him who found the body and where it was. As I told ya, he kept referring to Empyria. As near as we could tell, there weren’t any Empyrias ‘round here,” Dollar snickered. “Finally, I guess Sarge learned that you guys were out here, on Hog Island.”

“Hog Island?” Sanderson roared. “Is dat what you guys call dis skeeter-infested sand bar? How’d it get dat name?”

Dollar waved off Sanderson’s guffaw. “Original owners raised hogs. According to locals, some time back, a wealthy guy bought the island from the original settlers. He changed the name to Paradise Island but it never took with us townfolks.”

“No shit,” Sanderson smirked. “This usta be Hog Island ‘fore it got called Paradise Island? I heard of Paradise Island. I ‘member my ma listenin’ to some kinda radio game show about Paradise Island. So, this is Paradise!” he whooped and yelled to the others. “Hey, guys, we made it to Paradise! No shit!” Then he snapped. “Y’know, we been sitting on our butts since ‘bout seven this Ay-em, jes’ waitin’ for someone to show up, y’know.”

“Hey, Sanderson,” Dollar said forcefully. “According to Sarge, we got the first call from your boss about nine or so. Sarge thought it was some kinda crank call. Told him there weren’t any islands around here by that name and kinda hung up, if you know what I mean. Yer guy called back

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around eleven. It was long after lunch when we all guessed where the hell you were. My boss told me to get my ass out here and here we are, at exactly..." He looked at his watch. "one fifty-three, Monday afternoon, the second day of October in the year of our lord, nineteen and seventy-two. Another brilliant day in Paradise or whatever the hell your boss wants ta call Hog Island.

"Now, let's not dilly-dally, shilly-shally around, shall we? First off, you folks got any water to spare? We drank ours on the way over. Second, what the hell are you doin' out here anyway? And finally, why the hell did you guys want me and Dowdy out here?"

"Andrew, get yer ass busy and get dese guys some agua." Sanderson waited until the black man gave him a middle finger salute and sauntered toward an encampment a few yards into the trees. "Now, you wanna know what hell we doin' out here, right? I'm straw boss for Wilson Contractors. We're outa Lincoln, Georgia. A few hundred miles north. Donaldson hired Wilson to do some layout, clean-up of this here island 'fore he brings in his architect suits outa Boston. We're da advance team, loosely speakin.' We report direct to Donaldson. Got here yesta'day mornin'. Staying at da Holiday Inn in Bridgeport. Unloaded the light stuff from that barge out there." He pointed toward the gulf.

Dollar saw a dark line on the horizon. "How'd that get here?"

"Wilson tugged it from Lincoln. It's anchored. They'll be back to nudge the beast ashore when we get a spot cleared."

"You came in on the barge?"

"Yeah. We off-loaded our gear and the fuckin' Queen Mary from it. Beached her into those mangroves on the other side of the island. Got direct orders not to land here. 'Don't fuck up the beach.' Four friggin' hours it took us to drag all this shit around that hill and through them trees. Got ol' Julio to whack away at the underbrush with that goddamned machete of his. He's Cuban, y'know. His papa makes cigars in Ybor City. Julio laughs that his knife is sharper than a serpent's tooth."

King Lear, Act 1, Scene 4, Dollar thought. *Julio knows Shakespeare?* Dollar mused. "So, why are you here?"

"'Cause there ain't nowhere else to offload them goddamn heavies. Gonna sully up one a' Isle's pristine beaches I guess. Boss man can bitch all he wants 'cause we ain't gonna get the job done no other way."

"Heavies?"

"Dozers, backhoes, trenchers, even a pile driver. Standard construction stuff. We got specific orders," he laughed, waving at palms and live oaks

and underbrush. “Clear all this shit so that the high mucky-mucks can build their fuckin’ ‘Empyrian Entertainment Center and Casino.’ Scuttlebutt says big boss got an ace up his sleeve. Heard tell that dis sand pit was owned by the Seminoles a long goddamn time ago. And ‘cause them injuns is pushing to be their own nation, he’s gonna get ‘em to run the Casino. Tax-free. He gets the buildings. They gets bit of da profit. He keeps da rest.”

“I guess that’s one way of dealing with the government. Okay, I guess that’s why you’re here. Now why are we here?”

Sanderson guffawed. “Hey, cop, we don’ call out youse badges for jus’ anythin’. Lookee over there,” he said, pointing to a cleared area a dozen yards in from the beach. “Julio – he’s the dude leaning on the shovel – he was scraping away some of the underbrush right ‘bout where he’s standing now. Fritz – he’s over there, sittin’ on the tree stump – he yelled at Julio to stop diggin’ ‘cause he saw somethin’ that looked like a bone. Well, they hollered for me. I come arunning.”

Sanderson walked the officers to the clearing and pointed. The two cops simultaneously pulled on white gloves and knelt to where the grass and debris had been cleared. Dowdy carefully picked up a long off-white object and held it out for Dollar’s inspection.

“At first, I blew him off. Looked like a cow bone or somethin’. But Julio –goddamned superstitious breed, y’know – he says it’s a human leg. I looked again and guessed he might be right. So I tol’ him to clear a little more. Just to see if there were more bones. Lookee over there.” He pointed to a bare earth spot at the edge of Julio’s shovel. “More bones. Looks like ribs to me.”

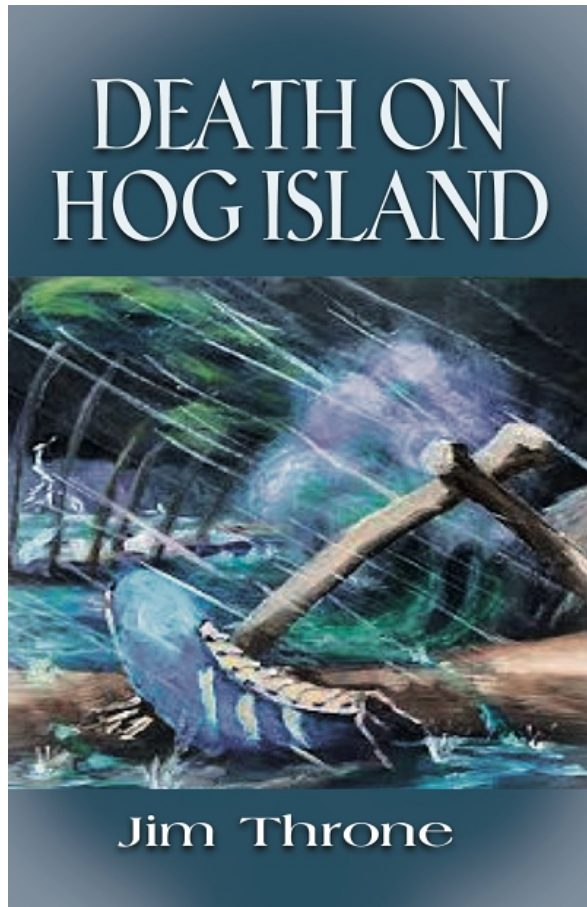
The cops moved to the spot that Julio had just vacated. Dowdy lifted a couple of the bones and looked at the Detective. “Human?”

Dollar shrugged. “Any more?”

He pointed to the base of a Bayonet palm. “Julio sez there’s a skull over there. He won’t go near it, though. Anyway, when he say it’s a skull, well, I tol’ them to stop diggin’, y’know.”

“Can’t blame ya at all,” Dowdy said, grinning at Julio whose olive complexion had turned blotchy.

“Kinda scares me too. *Me asusto.*”



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