

The serial the world didn't know it needed!

John Parrot's
COCONUTS
& CARNAGE

Volume 1 - December 2024

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Message from the Publisher

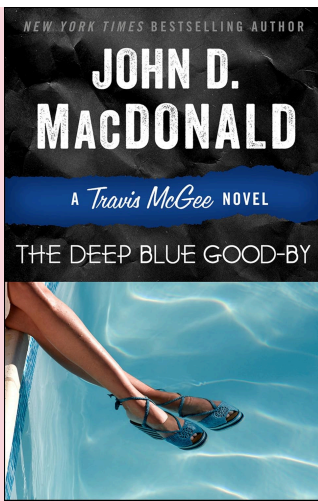
Greetings and salutations!

You've found your way to the first issue of *Coconuts & Carnage*. If this was your intention, keep reading.

At worst, you'll be cheated out of a few minutes of your precious life. At best, all your wildest dreams will come true.

Having said that, I'll say this - welcome and watch out for falling coconuts,

~JP



REVIEW: THE DEEP BLUE GOOD-BY

There's a reason guys like me are still talking and writing on websites like this about Travis McGee more than fifty years after John D. MacDonald's fictional boat bum and salvage consultant ambled onto the world stage for the first time.

If this is the first you've heard of Mr. McGee or the book that hosted his first appearance, welcome to *The Deep Blue Good-By*. Gather 'round kiddies. You're in for a treat.

Verily, verily, before there was Carl Hiaasen, Randy Wayne White, James W. Hall, Wayne Stinnett, John H. Cunningham, and Tim Dorsey, there was a fiction writer named John D. MacDonald.

Through the 1940's and 1950's, MacDonald laid fingers to his trusty typewriter keyboard, producing a variety of pulp fiction novels, all the while developing the voice which would spring forth through the character of Travis McGee in the 1964 novel *The Deep Blue Good-By*.

In a nutshell, McGee lives on a 52-foot houseboat, the *Busted Flush*, which he won in a poker game thanks to the eponymous hand. His athletic and military background combined with a tendency to tilt at windmills in defense of the manipulated and downtrodden.

With the self-described job title of 'salvage consultant,' he takes his retirement in small doses along the way, in order to extract maximum enjoyment, rather than saving it all for the end.

The reality is that McGee stands ready to help (usually after some convincing) good people who have been taken advantage of by bad ones.

This kind of help comes at a price, though. Half of the value of anything recovered goes into McGee's pocket, plus expenses.

There must be a great demand for this kind of work, though, because 21 Travis McGee novels appeared over the next 20 years, ending with the *Lonely Silver Rain* in 1986.

MacDonald passed away the following year.

This brings us to *The Deep Blue Good-By*. If you haven't read or aren't making plans to read this book by the time you finish this article, I want you to turn in your beach bum card right now.

I'm serious. Put it on the table and get out. Travis McGee and John D. MacDonald are that important to what we do around here.

The Deep Blue Good-By begins with Travis lounging on the *Busted Flush*, downing adult beverages whilst admiring the contortions of his cabaret dancer friend, Chookie McCall, as she perfects a routine.

Since our hero is a magnet for psychologically or physically damaged women (sometimes both), it isn't long before he decides to take on the problems of a friend of Chookie's who has fallen victim to the worst kind of predator manipulator, losing something of value in the process.

Strangely, she's not exactly sure what is lost, though that minor detail doesn't slow our hero down for long.

From his home dock, slip F-18 at the Bahia Mar Marina in Fort Lauderdale, McGee is soon sleuthing his way up and down the Atlantic seaboard, over to Texas, and down into the Florida Keys.

Along the way, he picks up a female house guest who was also abused by the main baddie. Under McGee's tough love, she's soon doing well enough to hop in his bed for amorous activity.

By the time the novel arrives at a satisfying climax on board a yacht somewhere between Miami and the Bahamas, we're ready for McGee to inflict a suitably vile brand of retribution on Junior, the villain we've grown to fondly despise.

At Coconuts & Carnage, we don't believe the Alpha and the Omega is too strong a term to apply to *The Deep Blue Good-By*. Maybe another writer would have happened along to launch the quirky Florida pulp-noir-adventure genre, but they didn't, and John D. MacDonald did.

We thank the Bard of the Beach from the bottom of our ever-lovin' fictional hearts for the gift of McGee.

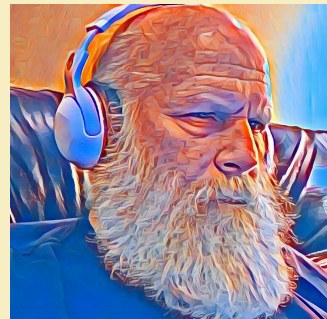
~JP

10 QUESTIONS FOR WAYNE STINNETT

** Writing machine, Wayne Stinnett, shows indie writers who dream of fortune and glory how it's done.*

Who are you and what's your background?

My name's Wayne Stinnett and my background is so varied it would take volumes to cover



everything. I'm a storyteller these days, but up until 2014 I was an over-the-road trucker, specializing in over-sized loads. Before that, in the latter part of the twentieth century, I worked in construction, commercial fishing, divemaster, taxi driver, deck hand, and I'm a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, just to name a few occupations I draw from in my writing.

Looking back, what advice would you give your younger writing self?

Don't lose those notebooks! I was sort of a geeky kid, but back then we called them bookworms. I always had a small notebook and pencil in my pocket and would jot down interesting ideas, experiences, and sketches. I'd also advise the younger me to not wait until I was a grandpa to take a serious look at writing.

How do you select the names of your characters?

This is always a challenge. In my first book, I pondered each character's name carefully, pulling them out of my own mind. In the second one, I asked my Facebook friends if they'd allow me to use their names. Dozens agreed and when a new character came up, if it was male, I went to the male list of friends and if female, the female list. Then I found a website called Fake Name Generator, where you can enter things like age, ethnicity, country of origin, and sex, and it would give you a full fake bio. These days, it's a lot simpler. With over 7,000 followers on Facebook, I just go there, hit page down four times and pick the first name of the first person that appears. Then I do it again four times, to get the last name.

What type of scene (or even a single scene) is/was the hardest to write?

The death and memorial of my protagonist's mentor, who is based on a real person. It took a long time to write it and I went over it dozens more times to make sure I did right by my friend, even though the name of the character was different.

What literary pilgrimages have you gone on?

I just returned from the British Virgin Islands, where my next book will be set. I go to the Florida Keys at least once a year, just to recharge the fiction battery bank. I attend the Novelists, Inc, or NINC conference every September in St. Pete Beach, Florida, and am a regular at the Key West Mystery Fest.

What is your writing kryptonite (what gets in the way of progress and how do you defeat it)?

Nothing. I don't believe in writer's block. What I do believe in is practice, dedication, planning, and self-discipline. Whether I feel like it or not, I sit down and write every morning, five days a week. I start by reading over the previous two writing sessions, editing and making changes, as I go. And I don't stop until there are 1,000 new words in the manuscript. A lot of people who complain about writer's block add more than that to their social media pages every day. This does two things for me. It gets my mind back into the story and at the end of the manuscript, I've self-edited the whole thing twice.

How do you balance originality versus delivering the goods readers want?

The term 'jump the shark' originated from the TV show *Happy Days*, when Fonzi literally jumped his motorcycle over a tank full of sharks. The show went downhill real fast after that. Each of my books, thirty as of right now, builds on the story of the previous volume, but sometimes the action is ratcheted up and sometimes down. I'm telling the story of a person's life, spanning over twenty-five years. Having lived in the Florida Keys for a time, as well as Mexico and the Bahamas, I have a wealth of characters for inspiration.

What's your favorite under-appreciated or mostly forgotten novel?

The Old Man and the Sea comes to mind. I first read it in the late 1960s and it was nearly twenty years old then. Today, it's pretty much forgotten with readers seeking more modern adventures and stories.

Who was your biggest writing influence and why did they have such a profound effect?

I was thirteen years old when I read *The Deep Blue Good-By* by John D. MacDonald. I went on to devour each of those early Travis McGee novels and anxiously awaited the next, until he died in the early 1980s. In 1974, when I turned sixteen and got my driver's license, my first road trip was from my home in Melbourne, Florida to Bahia Mar Marina in Fort Lauderdale. As I walked up and down the docks looking for slip F-18 and McGee's boat the *Busted Flush*, I noticed that none of the slips had letters, just numbers. The dockmaster came out and asked what I was looking for. When I told him, he looked down and shook his head sadly, saying, "Travis McGee

ain't real, son." It was a huge disappointment for a young man to endure. MacDonald's musings on the overdevelopment of the Florida peninsula, especially the Everglades, are just as relevant today, as they were in the 1960s.

Who is your favorite fictional character of all time, encompassing all media, and why?

Travis McGee. After I got out of the Marine Corps, I worked construction for many years. In the winter, layoffs were typical. I often said I was "taking my retirement in small chunks." If you've read the series, you know what I'm talking about. If you haven't, do yourself a favor and start with *The Deep Blue Good-By*. I'm currently on my 7th read-through of the series. I have all twenty-one in paperback, yellowed with age, and dog eared every other page. Though the writing is dated, the ideas never get old.



Image courtesy of Jessica Gish / Flickr

NO NAME PUB: WORLD-CLASS DIVE BAR WITH A SPICY PAST

Marketing, branding, and t-shirts notwithstanding, it's not really that hard to find No Name Pub. If you can drive a car, ride a bicycle, or walk while following simple directions, you've got it made. The primary confusion is in the name itself.

One might think that No Name Pub would be located on No Name Key. One would be wrong. It's actually on the neighboring Big Pine Key. But if you had a strong arm and a willing iguana, there's a good chance you could throw it far enough to land on the end of the bridge that connects to No Name Key.

Why do I waste time telling you these things?

Because knowing about, locating, and eating at this casual diner should be on any sane human's bucket list. If you're not sane, well...sorry.

So what's the big deal about No Name Pub? For starters, it's located smack dab in the middle of the Florida Keys. 'Nuff said.

ZAGAT awarded No Name Pub as the "Best Casual Dining Experience" among 700 south Florida restaurants. Okay, that's kind of impressive. In reality, it's more than just another dimly-lit dive bar with dollar bills stapled to the walls and ceiling as far as you can see.

I'm not going to waste my time trying to engage your taste buds with jaw-dropping food descriptions. Take a [look at the menu](#) and decide for yourself. No Name Pub has been hanging around since the 1930s and is probably going to be here a while longer.

Oh, before I leave. Here's a claim not every Florida dive bar can make. There used to be a brothel located upstairs. Yeah, I'm pretty sure they don't do that anymore, but you can ask.

Readers might wonder about my bonafides when it comes to discussing No Name Pub. I used to live about a mile from it. I know what I'm talking about.

If the world was coming to an end and there was time for one more meal, I'd probably head to No Name Pub.

~JP

Coconuts & Carnage - Episode #1

The five thousand bucks I owed Clyde Odegard didn't bother me until he got serious about collecting. How serious? Death within twenty-four hours serious.

Clyde was my sports bookie. The sentiments, delivered in outraged bass tones interspersed with belches, caught me in the shower.

He called while I was rinsing cheap shampoo from my hair. Yeah, I still had a landline and analog tape device for messages. Sue me. I stuck my head outside the closet-sized bathroom to listen. Couldn't answer. Not when you owe a man money. I stood naked, motionless, soap in my eyes. Wet footprints on the carpet provided fading evidence of a tentative advance toward my antagonist's voice and then the immediate retreat.

Here's what Clyde had to say.

"Joe, this is Clyde. Clyde Odegard. You are the most irresponsible jackass I know. I have had it with you runnin' me around. You think this is a game? It's over. You owe me five grand, you damn idiot. I still can't believe you bet against the Packers. I give you a week, and you ignore me? I'm a nice guy. Everybody says so, but I don't run my business like this. People pay me what they owe, or I fix it so they don't have to worry about payin' anyone ever again. Is that what you want?"

I shook my head in the empty room.

Clyde paused to deliver a deep burp that rattled the cheap speaker, then continued.



“My God, I’ve had too much sausage. Lois, wanna bring me a beer? And something for my stomach. Joe? You still there? Course not. I’m talkin’ to a damn machine, and I don’t mind tellin’ you I don’t like that very much. You’re probably way the hell on the other side of the state by now, runnin’ like a scared little sissy boy, and I don’t blame you for that. I would, too, if I was a jackass like you. Wait--”

Clyde experienced more digestive distress. I skittered into my home office in search of the mobile phone. The space was a cramped, unappealing room with a lumpy recliner and dusty Kindle on a table beside it. Disorder made it hard to find things.

Greed was the initial reason behind my relationship with Clyde Odegard. The man was not only a sports bookie but the kingpin of the minuscule Wisconsin Mafia.

I wasn't *Grapes of Wrath* poor but could claim legitimate financial exhaustion from long-term subsistence on a blue-collar salary. The original plan had been to fund an early retirement with casino winnings like my cousin, Fred Wumpus, but that turned out to be a big, fat nothing.

Money disappeared through my fingers like water down the drain. Me against the neon bandit, and it never lost. No matter how many buttons I pushed or handles I yanked, no matter how much money I put in, zero was exactly what came back.

Life was hard. Sometimes I hated it.

The ancient Samsung phone was under the recliner cushion. Its charge was low but enough

to summon Google Maps with a thumb swipe. The rest of Clyde Odegard's message played while I scrolled. My body chilled. My stomach churned. It performed complicated gymnastic routines, spastic gyrations spawned by fear of imminent death.

Toes clenched and unclenched in the apartment's threadbare carpet. Waves of nausea rolled through me, setting my insides afire from overtaxed nerves.

No one had ever threatened to kill me before. Well, that wasn't true. Once before, but that was a long time ago and didn't count since we were kids.

Half-tuned to Clyde's ramble, I tapped the screen. There had to be a place far from frigid Sheboygan where a man like me would be safe from a gangster like him. I cursed my parents' genes. Most involved poor judgment and relentless, misguided idealism.

No matter the failures that proved otherwise, I remained convinced my stocks would rise. They didn't.

Traffic lights would turn green in my favor the moment I arrived at the intersection. That didn't happen either.

Slot machines would watch out for me like good friends. Not so far.

And surely a scientific study proving Hostess Fruit Pies and Mountain Dew to be naturally nutritious was right around the corner. But here is the big one. I knew, absolutely knew, that the Super Bowl bet would pan out.

Now I wish someone had hit me with a pan before I took out a five thousand dollar loan and wagered it at the last minute. Clyde, ever the benevolent gangster, didn't require a deposit upfront. The big guy was kind enough to let me throw my wad at the Packers on the strength of goodwill earned for small bets placed over the years.

He figured no one was dumb enough to welsh on him. It was Wisconsin. People have standards.

But I frittered the money away on odds and ends and had nothing to hand Clyde's goon when he showed up to collect.

The spread was horrible. I thought my gut was saying, "Yes, do it!" Intuition maybe. Upon reflection, it was indigestion from the sweet and sour chicken I had for lunch.

I was desperate for money. The water was one day away from being shut off for non-payment. Clyde had caught me in the middle of an extra-long last shower. After this one, I'd be left to melt snow. I expected cable television access to disappear soon. Another fascist business obsessed with timely payments.

It would be tough surviving without SportsCenter and ESPN. Made me shaky to think about it. When the electricity went, I'd freeze to death. Though it now appeared Clyde intended to save the utility company the trouble of serving as the cause of my demise.

The gangster belched again and called for more sausage. "I'm back. Sorry about that. Got the worst gas. I sent Stan Bones over to the factory yesterday to break your knees, but you were

already goddamn laid off! I know I'm not getting my money back now, so I'll have him kill you tomorrow. That okay with you?"

Clyde laughed like the question was funnier than squirrels on skis. "He can't fit you in until the end of the day. Go ahead. Run for it. Make it interesting. If I was a betting man - and I'm not because that's about the dumbest damn way to lose money ever invented - I'd take Stan and the points, you weasel humper. Hope to never see you again, Joe."

Random, paranoid activity prevailed. I bumped into furniture, shrank from shadows, gobbled Oreo cookies, packed clothes, and scribbled a list of items I needed from K-Mart. Guns. Bullets. Fruit pies, for sure. I had enough stray cash to arm myself, and then I'd be flat broke.

Probably I'd head for the Everglades, down in Florida, and hide in the swamp. At least until I was old and senile enough to forget what I'd been running from. Death wouldn't matter then.

The region is remote, by reputation at least. Never been there. I alighted upon the unlikely security solution of training alligators to protect me. I was good with animals. Let's see that poodle-faced gorilla, Stan Bones, try to get through a ring of loyal Florida 'gators.

Not that I was an expert on the gator matter. Were they devoted to their masters like dogs, or more inclined towards betrayal, like a cat? I'd need to condition myself to sleep light until I established their true nature.

On the kitchen table list, I jotted a reminder to check Amazon for an alligator training manual.

Wikipedia said Seminole Indians wrestled the critters. With perseverance, I should be able to instill at least a rudimentary level of obedience. There would be time because it looked like the swamp would be home for a while.

I slept sitting upright in the rear corner of the hallway closet with a steak knife duct-taped to the back of my right hand. Stan might find a break in his schedule and come kill me before morning. The knife turned out to be not a good idea.

At some point, I developed an itch on my forehead, above the eyebrow, and scratched it while half asleep. Took twenty minutes to patch the bloody gash. Another ten to clean up the mess.

Coconuts & Carnage returns next month with episode #2.

TropLit Publishing

4811 State Rt. 142, West Plains
United States of America



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