

# the arts



## THE DARKEST EVENING

On the cover of the February *Dog Fancy* magazine, “Exclusive Excerpt – Dean Koontz’s ‘The Darkest Evening of the Year,’” grabs your attention. Interesting marketing; publicize a “dog” book in a publication read by dog people. On page 32, the stunning book jacket silhouettes a Golden Retriever against a fiery sunset. The orange and black cover shot is highly recognizable. The accompanying short excerpt will surely have more people rushing to buy this book.

I don’t usually write about books, but there has been incredible hype about this book, and I fell for it. Last month, I was reading Dean Koontz’ novel, “The Husband,” when the author appeared in prime time commercials touting his new book, “The Darkest Evening of the Year” in an obvious attempt to lure the holiday gift giving market to his latest effort. Hey, it worked on me.

Koontz is a prolific writer, but I hadn’t read any of his books before. I enjoy the suspense-mystery genre for a fast paced, engaging read as long as it’s not too terrifyingly graphic. I want to be entertained and distracted, not frightened to death.

So, I liked “The Husband.” It had enough twists and turns, despicable characters, action and smattering of horror to keep me intrigued. The story is of an ordinary guy, a landscape gar-

dener, who suddenly finds himself in an extraordinary situation. His wife is kidnapped by the bad guys and he has just 72 hours to come up with \$2 million, an incomprehensible sum to him, to free her. Of course, he can’t tell the cops, and the bad guys seem to be all-seeing and all-knowing. His wife was no slouch either, plucky and cool-headed during the worst of times. This book held my attention and, as an untutored writer, I found Koontz’s sometimes fanciful way with words and descriptions a fascinating exposure. No dogs in this one though.

If “The Husband” was a book I enjoyed reading, then another of his books, particularly one with a theme close to my heart, the power of the human-animal bond, would be perfect. We were getting ready for our annual family trip just before the holidays, and a good book seemed like the perfect thing for my Christmas present to me. I believed I would like this book so much I even broke one of my cardinal rules: never, ever take a hardcover book on a plane trip.

I was so convinced I wanted to read this book that I purchased it at the first opportunity, which happened to be the airport bookstore, so I paid not only the hardcover price, I paid full price. I didn’t get to read it first though, my hus-

band Fred did. He finished it, complaining throughout about the content and style, but kept saying he thought I would like it. When I finally got to it myself, I understood his objections. It was just too much for me, and I not only stopped reading it about a third of the way through, which I never do, I left this expensive newly-released book behind in the hopes that someone else might appreciate it more than I did.

There is no doubt that Dean Koontz loves dogs, and he deeply loved his recently departed Golden Retriever, Trixie. If you visit his website, he has an extensive and cleverly animated conversation with Trixie, who is waiting for him at the foot of the Rainbow Bridge. Trixie talks about all the wonderful things there are to do in heaven; she is learning origami and how to play the piano and the angels give her tummy rubs.

Koontz’ love for Trixie was no doubt the inspiration for this book; in fact he says in his website dialog with the dog that he was unable to write for a month after she died. “The Darkest Evening” features several Golden Retrievers, including one with supernatural powers. There are two good guys - the female protagonist is a Golden rescuer - and her architect boyfriend. The two bad guys are socio-

pathic killers who are stalking their good guy ex-lovers. There is a definite message about the importance of dog rescue, adoption, the Golden breed and animal cruelty, but it just wasn’t enough to carry the story for me. The people weren’t real, the dogs weren’t real, the situation was too contrived, and I lost interest early in the book. I wasn’t the only one; over half of the reviewers on Amazon.com didn’t like it either, rating it 3 stars or less.

So, I’ve made my point; in my opinion, this is one book you can skip. But I guess when one has sold over 325,000,000 copies and has had 10 novels on the *New York Times* hardcover bestseller list, a distinction achieved by only a dozen writers, you’re allowed to throw one in for commercial success every now and again. With an intensely comprehensive marketing campaign and distinctive cover design even this bomb will keep Koontz in dog food a long time. ■

*Jan Jaeger is owner of Geronimo’s, Ltd., Nantucket’s pet supply and gift shop, and is a member of DWAA and CWA (Dog and Cat Writer’s Associations of America). Her pets at home are Junior, a Chesapeake Bay Retriever, and three cats. At the shop are cats Messrs. Fish and Chips, Flower bunny, Millie guinea pig and two budgies. Send e-mail to jan@geronimos.com.*

## for the ARTS record

### CHRIS MASON IS NAMED NHA PUBLIC PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

Chris Mason has been hired as the public programs coordinator at the Nantucket Historical Association.

The position reports to the NHA’s education department. Mason will produce and implement programs at the Whaling Museum and historic sites, oversee and develop the Children’s Discovery Room and coordinate the NHA’s internship program. Mason was himself an intern with the NHA during the 2007 season.

Mason has a B.A. in History and Secondary Education from Castleton State College in Vermont, and in December he completed course work at the University at Albany in the Master of Arts in Public History program. His recent employment includes the Waterford Historical Museum & Cultural Center in Waterford, N.Y., where he was the junior class CanalWays program coordinator.

“This is a new position within the education department,” said Kimberly McCray, Manager of Interpretation and Education. “Having had the pleasure of working with Chris last season and recognizing his knowledge, leadership qualities and great enthusiasm for all things historical, we were delighted when he expressed interest in this position. His background, organizational skills, and enjoyment of working with the public make him a wonderful addition to our education department.”

### ESSEX ALIVE AT HEARTHIDE

Enjoy some of the drama of Nantucket’s past while gathered around the hearth. The Nantucket Historical Association will present an informal Hearthside History this Saturday, Jan. 19, at 7 p.m. in the 1800 House, 4 Mill Street.

Through the eyes of the young cabin boy, experience the drama of surviving one of the worst whaling sinkings ever recorded. Thomas Nickerson was just fourteen in 1819 when he sailed on the ill-fated *Essex*. NHA senior interpreter Erik Ingmundson will portray Nickerson, one of only eight who survived that harrowing voyage.

Ingmundson will base his storytelling on a 105-page manuscript written by Nickerson in 1876 but never published, and discovered in an attic in Penn Yan, N.Y., only in 1960. In 1980, the person who found the manuscript forwarded it to Nantucket historian Edouard Stackpole, who verified its authenticity. Nickerson’s journal, which described his experiences in great detail, served as a major inspiration for Nat Philbrick’s award-winning “In the Heart of the Sea.”

After Ingmundson’s first-person monologue, guests will enjoy a round of history charades. Limited seating available; advance reservations are recommended. 228-1894, ext 0. Free for NHA members, \$5 general admission.

### LET’S TALK ABOUT ’SCONSET

Ben Simons, NHA Robyn and John Davis Curator of Collections, will lead a Gam about ’Sconset at the Nantucket Historical Association’s Food for Thought Series on Thursday, Jan. 24 in the Whaling Museum, 13 Broad Street, at noon. Free admission; bring your lunch.

In anticipation of the NHA’s major summer exhibition, ’Sconset 02564: A Celebration of the Patchwork Village, opening in May, Joan Craig and other ’Sconset residents will reflect on the special places, people and memorable moments in the life of the village. The name “Siasconset,” according to some linguists, is derived from the Native American word meaning “near the great bone,” which suggests that it was not uncommon for whalebones to be cast up on the beach there.

Overheard once long ago: “Living on an island 30 miles out to sea is one thing, but living in a very small village on the far eastern end of Nantucket is another. . . . ’Sconset is an extraordinary community.”

The Jan. 31 Food for Thought will feature island resident Allen Reinhard, who will discuss some of the walking paths hidden among Nantucket’s unspoiled moors.

Each talk begins at noon and is free to the public. Bring your lunch. Whaling Museum, 13 Broad Street. For additional information about the Food for Thought series, call 508-228-1894, ext. 0, or visit [www.nha.org](http://www.nha.org) to view the full schedule. ■