



Sleight of Hand

Phillip Margolin

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Tenacious investigator Dana Cutler must take down a charismatic and diabolical lawyer before he can pull off the perfect crime in this powerhouse thriller from *New York Times* bestselling author Phillip Margolin.

Charles Benedict—magnetic criminal defense lawyer, amateur illusionist, and professional hit man—and private investigator Dana Cutler are on a collision course set in motion by Benedict's greatest sleight of hand yet: framing a millionaire for the murder of his much younger wife.

Ten years ago, Horace Blair fell in love with Carrie, the prosecutor during his DUI trial. After a torrid courtship, he persuaded her to marry him and to sign a prenuptial agreement guaranteeing her twenty million dollars if she remained faithful during the first ten years of their marriage. The week before their tenth anniversary, Carrie disappears, and Horace is charged with her murder. Desperate to clear his name, the millionaire hires one of D.C.'s most brilliant and ruthless defense attorneys—Charles Benedict.

Meanwhile, private investigator Dana Cutler is in the Pacific Northwest on the trail of a stolen relic, a gold scepter dating back to the Ottoman Empire. Hitting a dead end, she returns to Virginia, perplexed and disappointed—and straight into the twisting case of Horace and Carrie Blair.

It's the perfect crime, unless Dana Cutler can conjure a few tricks of her own to take down a cunning psychopath and expose his diabolical plot—before he can work his deadly magic on her.

Sleight of Hand Details

Date : Published April 9th 2013 by Harper

ISBN : 9780062069924

Author : Phillip Margolin

Format : ebook 384 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Crime

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From Reader Review Sleight of Hand for online ebook

Kim says

This book was simplistic and absurd. A magician attorney is easily able to make witnesses and evidence disappear and the cops are just as easily able to figure out what and how he did it. There is no depth to the storyline or characters. If you like your books spoon fed, you will love this book.

K says

For a who-dun-it, it was quite obvious. The lawyer with a card trick for you. Other plot lines twisted in and out of the novel, but fall in line and move the story forward.

I liked Dana and how she figures out quickly what is going on, and how to fix it.

What I did not find out was why Charles hated Horace so much to frame him for murder. I felt the ending fell flat.

It was a nice and easy read, a good diversion. I have read another dana novel further in her life. If I find others PM, I will read.

Matt says

Margolin creates a masterful book and captivates readers from the opening page straight through until the closing cover. The tale, as simplistic as a millionaire framed for murdering his wife, is much more complex and full of nuances that any admirer of Margolin will enjoy. A seemingly unrelated plotline clicks into place at just the right moment, much like a finely-tuned magic trick. The characters make the story even more interesting, especially as Margolin places them in many untenable situations. A legal/crime drama that is full of loopholes and surprises, while also building on some of the character development in the series' previous books, Margolin leaves ne'er a single jaw from dropping as the story comes to a crashing conclusion. No reader who loves the genre should leave this book, or series, to gather dust on the shelf.

As the book opened, I was totally unsure how things would fit together to bring the story around to fit the inside cover teaser. A seemingly fluff sub-plot is perfectly timed to come to fruiting and any true fan of Margolin's will see just how intricate his writing tends to be and knows to expect the unexpected at the least opportune time. Margolin delivers and leaves nothing to chance at all. His masterful storytelling is, pardon the pun, magical and full of vigour, so much so that one cannot help but look for more out of the book; new angles, more clues to help things end a certain way and even an added plotline on which the next book can connect itself. Alas, all good things must come to an end, but the thirst for more will surely leave Margolin fans begging him to churn out another, without delay.

Kudos Mr. Margolin for your mastery of the trade. I am so eager to explore your future novels, as well as some of your past gems.

Katherine Clark says

Wow--what a terrible book. I so truly do not understand why some books/authors are bestsellers. This was a terrible book. It was a cartoon of a book. It was sensation fiction without the depth of character in a sensation novel. The exposition was so exhaustive at times, it was funny, but yech. And the bad guys were those over the top bad guys. And the good guys figured things out so fast. I don't get it. I am just shaking my head.

Amorak Huey says

Margolin is one of those prolific bestselling type thriller writers whose work I hadn't yet gotten to, until now.

Alas, I'm in no hurry to return. This was an empty shell of a book, like the outline of a real story, with some of the most perfunctory prose I've come across in a while.

From the opening paragraphs:

Charles Benedict was a minor leaguer in the power and influence department, but even in this elite company he stood out because he was strikingly handsome and charismatic, *the person toward whom the eyes of not only women but men were drawn when he entered the room.*

Benedict was six feet two inches tall, with a cultivated tan. His salt-and-pepper hair was cut short and his trim, athletic build, ramrod posture and chiseled features brought to mind the Special Forces heroes in action movies. When Benedict moved, it was easy to imagine a field of force emanating from him, and there was no question that his physical presence contributed to his success as a trial attorney, although more sinister factors sometimes came into play.

Emphasis added, because that phrase is a remarkable accomplishment, managing a combined degree of vagueness and awkwardness that should not be attempted by amateurs.

Sigh. The rest of the book is just as shoddily written, just as cliché-riddled, just as talky and lazy in its descriptions and points of view. The plot barely holds together, relying on many bizarre, inconsistent overreactions to keep things moving forward.

Just one example: A woman thinks a private investigator might be spying on her. So she cooks up an elaborate scheme to get the PI out of town, involving a disguise, thousands and thousands of dollars, a fake stolen artifact, several actors, gunfire, a mysterious house on a stormy island, and assorted other details I'm sure I've forgotten. It's all quite insane. Yet it is absolutely essential to the plot.

To be honest, I'm not sure why I even finished reading this book.

Jerry B says

We discovered Margolin early in his career and have read his every novel, but definitely tend to enjoy some more than others. His stories range from highly suspenseful mysteries with twisty plots, to tales that lack character development and overpopulate complex clue discoveries.

This latest reprises investigative reporter Dana Cutler, a character with whom we are not particularly enamored, who spends much of the book chasing an ancient scepter from the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, she weakly supports the police in catching a wily (and villainous!) defense attorney, who's an amateur magician on the side {hence the title}, who may well have framed his own client for a murder. We can't really reveal more about the complicated plot without spoiling the story line.

Part of the problem is that it takes Margolin fully half the book to setup the remainder, which made for some slow and tough going early on. So by the time we got to the juicy part, we were getting tired of keeping track of like five sub-plots, even presuming that in the end they would all "magically" converge. Margolin's novels remind us in a way of Steve Martini's, both lawyers turned writers – some dazzle, some fizzle, but we tend to read on!

Al Stoess says

Standard Margolin stuff, I like his earlier books more than what he has done recently.

Jovdb says

A couple of questions: as a prosecutor, Carrie should know that roofies can show up in the blood and could have had a sample taken to prove Benedict drugged her; if she hadn't had sex with her husband for as long as she implied, surely the morning after her night with Benedict, she would know if he'd had sex with her the night before; and, lastly, that scene in the courtroom where Benedict does the switch, not believable - what about chain of custody evidence?

Another question: how did Benedict know about the prenup?

A good story. I like Dana Cutler and will look out for other books about her.

Jo-Anne says

I love Phillip Margolin's books and can't resist his Dana Cutler stories.

This book starts out with what seems to be two separate, unrelated stories. Although both were interesting, I kept wondering how they would come together.

One story involves Dana Cutler who is a private investigator hired to track down a stolen relic that turns out

to be a dead end. When she returns to Virginia, Dana becomes involved in the second story that involves the murder of Carrie Blair just days before she would receive millions of dollars from her husband Horace according to the terms of their prenuptial agreement and he is charged with her murder. In a series of twists and turns, Margolin pulls the two seemingly unrelated incidences together. The two cases turn out to have a common thread and Dana is pitted against Horace Blair's defense attorney Charles Benedict. Dana uncovers evidence that Horace may have been framed for the murder, but Benedict blocks her attempts to get the answers she needs. This story gets really suspenseful when Dana becomes a target of the real killer as she hunts for the truth.

Margolin creates a masterful book and captivates readers from the first page. This novel was very well written and the storyline was intricately put together. The character development in this story is quite in depth. You get to know a great deal about the main characters, their lives, and their histories.

Sleight of Hand is very well set up. It progresses in a logical fashion from beginning to end while keeping the reader completely captivated with the many different twists found in the story. As usual, I was impressed with Margolin's ability to take multiple story lines and complex characters and bring them together in a way that held my attention.

Jonathan says

Very disappointing of a writer of his skill and background. The plot seems forced and very stale.

Cheryl says

Charles Benedict is a criminal defense attorney, professional hit man and part-time magician. His newest client is billionaire Horace Blair. Horace has been arrested for murdering his wife. The murder is perfect as it comes right before Horace was to pay his wife for 10 years of marriage as part of their pre-nup.

Dana Cutler a private investigator has been contacted by a client who is trying to track down a priceless gold scepter. Dana's investigation leads her to Charles.

I have not read any of Mr. Margolin's books. Sleight of Hand has made me an instant fan of his. All of the characters were interesting. However the most intriguing people were Charles Benedict and Dana Cutler.

First I will start with Charles. Just the way he thought of things and was cool under pressure had me impressed. Also, his sleight of hand tricks were a nice touch to his character and added mystery to him.

Then there was Dana. She is very smart. Quick to think on her feet and has a good sense of humor. She put all the pieces of the puzzle together so quickly that it almost had my head spinning. I was like wow that is amazing. This book was not so much about the murder but more about the crime and all the ins and outs on how to possibly get away with the "perfect" crime. However during one of my crime shows I was watching on Identity Discovery (ID) Channel a detective said "There is no such thing as a perfect crime". Sleight of Hand is a must, must read! Even a second and third read!

Tim says

The beginning and end are the best parts of this story. While Margolin is an excellent author, this story is not one of his bests. It is too long and heavy in violence and body counts. 4 of 10 stars

Andrea V. says

My review,

This book kept me up late at night, reading chapter after chapter to see what happened next...The book was more of an adult book with a little profanity and some inappropriate scenes that may not be your type of book. Getting past that, this novel was a book of suspense and mystery, if you are into solving the puzzle I'd highly suggest this. Dana Cutler, an undercover agent/lawyer has been through a lot in the past, but when she goes undercover and travels far away to find a very valuable item, to win this case she forgets her past and gets the job done. I liked Dana because with her tough past and lonely life she's able to get up in the morning and do her job really good...

Charles Benedict, another main character in the book is also a lawyer, but behind the cases, he has skeletons in the closet. A lot of them.. In my opinion, I don't really like Charles. He is a bad man with bad intentions. He creeps up on someone when they're at their worst to take advantage of them and use it to his pleasure. This book has a lot of parts to it, so it doesn't really stick to one thing that's going on. It has multiple areas with different characters, which at the beginning I didn't really like but getting more into the book it all comes together which I enjoyed.

Overall the book was really good, towards solving these puzzles a lot of weight is off your shoulders. I thought it was a relief to finally know what happened and how it all went down.. But if you're looking to find out more about this book, just read it, you won't regret it.

Mike says

3.5 stars.

It appears my 4yr old review of Capitol Murder also my Margolin applies here so I will just copy paste

""

However, in my opinion, it's how he stirs these ingredients that somewhat annoy me. These books, Capitol Murder no exception, are seemingly several short stories written separately but then weaved together in an attempt to tie a mutual conclusion.

Somehow it works but it's painful getting there. Especially when characters (oh so many characters you truly cannot keep up) are asking questions the Reader was told the answer to chapters ago. Also there's the repetitiveness side effect played here.

I have read maybe 5 Margolins but I challenge this author to attempt to write one novel with one central main character without bouncing around to ten other POVs. (Most of such POVs clearly created to fill pages).

""

Mihir says

Full review over at [Fantasy Book Critic](#)

ANALYSIS: After discovering Phillip Margolin via *Wild Justice* nearly a decade ago, I have made sure never to miss any of his amazing mystery-thriller books. Phillip Margolin is a master storyteller and often comes up with complicated plots that feature a vast character cast. With this new standalone book, he brings back a character from his previous published Washington trilogy. Dana Cutler is the main protagonist of this tale, which borrows some plot points from the classic *Maltese Falcon* storyline and is the author's ode to it as well.

The storyline characteristically begins in Margolin fashion with various distinct plot threads; the first one focusses on Dana who is still doing what she does best and trying to stay out of mortifying cases as shown in the previous trilogy volumes. Fate and the author it seems have other plans for her as she soon finds out. The storyline also features a very fascinating character in the form of Charles Benedict who is a defense attorney to many shady characters but does it with such suave and charm that it often belies his deadly wiles. The second plotline deals with Carrie Blair who is the wife of Horace Blair and soon to receive twenty million dollars with their impending separation. Things however never go as planned and of course the stage is set for a confrontation of minds between Dana and Charles.

Their entanglement occurs in ways that are very unpredictable and almost entirely unexpected. The plot is twisted and of course laden with several surprises that will keep the reader motivated to flip the pages and figure out the main mystery. This is the main aspect of Phillip's writing that I so adore, besides Jeffrey Deaver, it's only Phillip Margolin who consistently comes up with these fantastic plots that have me guessing while not seeming to be rehashes of his previous books (John Grisham I'm looking at you). When dealing with a large character cast, characterization is very vital to the success of its plot and this book is no deviation from that successful formula. Besides Dana and one minor character, everyone else is a new character and a fully rounded one at that.

In regards to character cast, reader, who have read the previous books wherein Dana was featured will love this new twist in her professional life whereas for new readers the author gives enough background details for them to understand her and her psyche. Also the author takes care not to spoil the previous books beyond what was mentioned in their blurbs and even so only some details of the first book of the trilogy gets mentioned. I quite liked this aspect as this way for older readers, there was no rehash of previous events which they are familiar with and for new readers the previous books remain unspoiled. In regards to Charles Benedict, the character while fascinating does some things which would be hard to believe in a real-life court of law. In this regard I think the author was just trying to create a flamboyant character and so I can overlook some of these discrepancies in regards to his tricks.

Lastly there's the pace of the plot, which makes the read a lively one and constantly prods the reader forward. I thought that this book was one of his better paced ones as the author had complete control over his

story with all the twists and revelations. No page seems to be wasted with any side digressions and everything that is revealed is of importance to the end climax. Readers hopefully should enjoy this twisted ode to Dashiell Hammett's masterpiece which while not fascinating as the original still delivers as a thrilling story.

In regards to any negatives with this story, it reminded me a bit of Proof Positive in regards to the final climax and plot resolution. Perhaps some readers might feel that it is a generic storyline and so experienced readers might not find it entirely to their liking. Overall though there's not much for me to complain or point faults at with this book. Readers have to keep in mind that this is no literary novel but a mystery thriller that has aims to keep the readers guessing till the end and entertain them wholly. On this front the book and author have succeeded entirely.

CONCLUSION: I thoroughly enjoyed this story and while Dana Cutler wasn't one of my favorite characters in the author's previous work. In this book I thought she was a good protagonist to anchor the storyline. Sleight Of Hand simply confirms Phillip Margolin's place among the top rung of Mystery/Thriller writers with the addendum that he's also one of the most under-appreciated ones.
