



A Deeper Darkness

J.T. Ellison

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"WHAT LIES BEHIND grabs you by the throat and doesn't let go. Ellison is a great talent—enjoy."
—Catherine Coulter, # 1 *New York Times* bestselling author

Revisit book one in J.T. Ellison's heart-racing Sam Owens series...

As a medical examiner, Samantha Owens knows her job is to make sense of death. But the day the Tennessee floods took her husband and children, she has been pulled into a suffocating grief no amount of workaholic ardor can penetrate—until she receives a peculiar call from Washington, D.C.

On the other end of the line is an old boyfriend's mother, asking Sam to do a second autopsy on her son. Eddie Donovan is officially the victim of a vicious carjacking, but under Sam's sharp eye the forensics tell a darker story. The ex-Ranger was murdered, though not for his car. Forced to confront the burning memories and feelings about yet another loved one killed brutally, Sam loses herself in the mystery contained within Donovan's old notes. The tale told between the lines makes it clear that nobody's hands are clean, and that making sense of murder sometimes means putting yourself in the crosshairs of death.

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"Shocking suspense, compelling characters and fascinating forensic details." —Lisa Gardner, # 1 *New York Times* bestselling author

"A terrific thriller...fans of forensic mysteries, such as those by Patricia Cornwell, should immediately add this series to their A-lists." —*Booklist*

A Deeper Darkness Details

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From Reader Review A Deeper Darkness for online ebook

Dotti Elrick says

I really wanted to love this series as much as her Taylor Jackson series. But I had a hard time getting into the story. This series focuses around Taylor's best friend Sam. Sam is the chief medical examiner for Nashville. As the story gets underway, we learn that two years earlier, Sam lost her husband and twins in a flash flood. Sam is still grieving, and not handling her loss well.

When she gets a call to go to Washington D.C. at the request of an old boyfriend's mother, she sees it as a way to escape for awhile. Eddie Donovan was her college sweetie. They loved each other, but Donovan broke it off with Sam when he joined the Army. He was going to be a Ranger. Now, fifteen years later, Donovan was killed in a car jacking. His mother has asked Sam to perform a second autopsy. She just knows something else is going on.

When she arrives, she meets Donovan's wife and children. She doesn't realize how much it hurts that he's moved on and how happy he was with his life.

The second autopsy does show something that was missed the first time. It prompts the detectives working the case to take another look. Then a second man is killed, and it's learned he was in the same squad as Donovan. Now they have two dead men who are linked by their jobs and their service together.

Sam does a lot of healing in helping Donovan's wife and mother deal with their own loss. But she doesn't really start to feel better until she meets Xander, another Ranger who served with Donovan.

This story really dragged for me. There was a lot of internal dialog from Sam trying to deal with her own issues. Then throw in some detecting, then back to Sam's issues. It picked up in the last five or so chapters when they started closing in on the killer. But up to that point, it was so slow. I found it hard to pick it back up when I had to stop reading. I hope the next book is as exciting as the other series. This one was just so-so for me.

Christa says

A Deeper Darkness was a wonderful, suspenseful book. I have admired the character of Samantha Owens in Ellison's Taylor Jackson series, and it was wonderful to see her as the main character of her own book. The story of what she went through, and the loss she suffered in the past few years, was heartbreaking. This book had some great secondary characters, and a fast moving plot that kept me guessing throughout. It was a compelling book, and I hope that Ellison will continue this as a series.

Samantha Owens has been through almost unimaginable tragedy over the last few years, and when her former medical school lover is shot and killed during a carjacking, she feels that everyone she has loved is dead. At the request of her former lover's mother, she leaves Nashville behind and goes to Washington, D.C. to conduct a second postmortem on Eddie Donovan. As soon as Sam arrives, it starts to seem as though someone is out to get the men in Eddie's former Ranger company. Sam assists the detectives in the case as they try to puzzle out what is happening. As she helps them go through the clues, she is unsure of which of those connected to Eddie she can trust. While working to uncover who is behind Eddie's murder, Sam has an opportunity to evaluate what she has left in her life and to try to come to terms with herself.

This was a compelling book that I did not want to put down. There was a great deal of suspense, and a few surprises. I loved reading about Sam Owens, and I thought she made a great, well-developed lead character. I am hoping to read more about her and some of the wonderful secondary characters that were introduced in

this book. I received *A Deeper Darkness* as an ARC through Netgalley.

Debbie says

Dr. Samantha Owens has lived the last two years of her life in a fog of tragedy, only surviving by focusing on her work as the Chief Medical Examiner for Nashville, but not really living since the waters of a cataclysmic flood stole her entire family from her. Sam gets a call from the mother of a former love Eddie Donovan, a love that is now also lost to tragedy but his mother is not convinced of the circumstances of his death and calls Sam to perform a second autopsy to be sure. Needing an excuse to escape from her self imposed prison for awhile Sam answers the call to help even though she hasn't heard from Eddie since they broke up after his decision to join the service. When she arrives in DC she's not welcomed by everyone, Eddie's wife isn't at all happy to be hosting a former girlfriend and the detective on his case sees her as a distraction at best and a hindrance at worst. This does not deter Sam as she goes about her business letting the dead tell their secrets and this death is no different it also has secrets to tell, secrets that are pointing in the direction of murder especially as further evidence comes to light and another murder is committed that has ties to Eddie and his time as an Army Ranger serving in Afghanistan. The more Sam digs the more questions arise and with the help of detective Darren Fletcher who's come to welcome her help they start putting pieces together, but the answers are still just out of reach and the terrain is getting very hazardous as the body count is piling up. But being here a part of something bigger than her, Sam realizes that a partial healing is taking place and is realizing that the human heart is much more than mere valves and blood flow and much more resilient than she first thought. The question is will she survive this new threat long enough to find out what else her heart is telling her or will she become just another victim of a different kind of flood.

JT Ellison has once again gone above and beyond what I expect and done it beautifully. She's taken fact and fiction and together she's woven an intricate patterned drama filled mystery. She uses the very real Tennessee flood of 2010, some call it the thousand year flood where very real lives were lost and some of those exactly as was depicted here. She also brings light to life after combat for our homebound men and the real healing they must also go through. Her storyline is imaginative, it's illusive, it's brilliantly filled with twists and turns and kept me from closing the pages until I either found out what happened or fell asleep trying to. Her narrative is that of the profession shown, the cop-speak and doc-speak fluently mixed with the everyday dialogue of everyday people. Her characters are all so well defined that I knew them intimately by the end of the novel, some I came to care for and some I hoped to stand under a large falling tree. Is this a mystery, very definitely but it's so much more, it's a love story, past present and future, it's a drama with an edge and it's a story about one woman's weakness, her strength and her will to live on.

If you're lucky enough to have read JT's Taylor Jackson series then you already know Sam, if this is your first foray into the vivid mind of Ms. Ellison you will learn all you need to know and yet at the end you might be itching to find out what else this talented author has written while you'll also get to know Sam a little better as well.

JT it's as always my immense pleasure to be an early reader for you and I look forward not only to your next story but the fact that you'll be sharing yourself with my B&N.com book club later on in the year.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

I am sure I have read at least one or more of JT Ellison's Taylor Jackson series novels though I don't seem to

have a record of it. A Deeper Darkness is an engaging spin off from that series featuring Taylor's best friend, Medical Examiner Samantha Owens.

Asked what I thought of A Deeper Darkness, the first phrase that came to mind was 'easily consumable'. It's a quick read that demands very little and provides a few hours of entertaining escape. The novel is deftly plotted with clues to piece together and twists that maintain suspense. The pace keeps the pages turning and the main conspiracy storyline resolves in a tension filled confrontation. Ellison references topical events and issues - the Tennessee floods, women in front line combat, the struggles of returned armed forces servicemen and women and obsessive compulsive disorder which provides added interest and depth to the story.

The characters of A Deeper Darkness are well developed with interesting personal histories and motivations. I liked Samantha and thought Ellison did a credible job of creating a well rounded, sympathetic protagonist. The details of Samantha's tragic personal background is revealed piecemeal throughout the story with her OCD a symptom of her grief and emotional stress. Donavon's death is yet another blow despite it being so long since their intimate relationship ended and explains why Samantha is so willing to get involved further in the case. The conflict between Samantha and Donovan's wife, Susan, seemed a little forced to me though that element is quickly resolved.

Detective Darren Fletcher is the the cynical but dedicated officer, I enjoyed his wry sense of humour and his partner, Detective Lonny Hart provides a good foil for him.

Even though we meet a few members of the Ranger team briefly, and others not all, Ellison ensures they are encapsulated as individuals. I would have liked to learn more about them but it wasn't strictly necessary in terms of the story.

I enjoyed A Deeper Darkness and I am intrigued by the premise for the second installment of this series, titled Edge of Black, due for publication in December.

Quillracer says

This book is very stereotypical for the genre. The main character, Samantha Owens, traumatized by the drowning of her husband and children two years earlier, has withdrawn into herself until the death of a former lover draws her into the investigation of multiple murders. And, of course, interacting with two new men in a city far from her home slowly draws her out of her shell.

There are tense scenes throughout this novel but it never quite reaches a peak. The reader never breaks into a nervous sweat wondering how the heroine will escape the danger she faces.

A major character in the story is named Susan. Keeping Sue and Sam straight sometimes was a challenge.

This book wasn't good enough to make me want to read more of the author's work.

Melissa says

I'm not really sure how I feel about this one.

I didn't love it, but I didn't hate it.
I wasn't wowed, but I wasn't disappointed.
It wasn't entirely predictable, but it wasn't satisfying either.

See what I mean? **My feelings are all over the place.**

Samantha Owens is a medical examiner that's called upon by her first love's mother, to return to D.C., to complete an autopsy. Her son's been murdered and she's convinced it's more than just a random carjacking. She wants Samantha to find out if Eddie's body provides any evidence to support her theory.

It's been years since Samantha has laid eyes on Eddie, but really? **Is it just me, or is it a little awkward and morbid for someone to cut up the body of a person they once loved?** Wouldn't you just suggest someone that you trust emphatically for the job, instead? For some reason, I just couldn't get past this or accept that anyone in their right mind would even consider doing this. It felt ~~gross, weird,~~ wrong.

I was kind of thrown by the ending, too. All along, the author led us to believe that maybe the spark between one of the detectives and Doctor Owens would lead to something more, but in the last few chapters she crams in a relationship with someone else entirely. It felt so rushed. Almost like an afterthought. Looks like maybe it was something she had to squeeze in for the next book. According to the blurb, Dr. Owens is starting over somewhere new with said guy.

If I'm being completely honest, I'm not feeling very motivated to continue on with the series. So, I guess that means **this is the end of the road for me and Dr. Owens.**

Angela says

wow what a rollercoaster ride. 5 men and a woman who are stationed in Afghanistan years later they start to be killed. Who is doing the KILLING and WHY ????

Kjen says

This was a good read for me and my first J.T. Ellison, as well. The characters were real and well developed. I enjoyed the imagery...both spatial and emotional. Sam is a very intriguing character...strong but damaged. The first half was slower since I had to get used to the POV constantly changing. This is just an author style issue and is expected when reading an author who is new to me. By 60% things really pick up and there is better flow. I love Xander, of course, and would like more details on their relationship as the series continues.

Elvan says

Great read. I think I like Dr. Sam even more than Taylor Jackson. Angst and intelligence are such a great combo in a heroine.

The novel loses a star for dragging in the middle, and for telegraphing the bad guy a bit too early for this reader. Looking forward to more ME time in the next book and the new release coming out very soon.

Gina says

Goodreads Description- As a medical examiner, Samantha Owens knows her job is to make a certain sense of death with crisp methodology and precision instruments.

But the day the Tennessee floods took her husband and children, the light vanished from Sam's life. She has been pulled into a suffocating grief no amount of workaholic ardor can penetrate—until she receives a peculiar call from Washington, D.C.

On the other end of the line is an old boyfriend's mother, asking Sam to do a second autopsy on her son. Eddie Donovan is officially the victim of a vicious carjacking, but under Sam's sharp eye the forensics tell a darker story. The ex-Ranger was murdered, though not for his car.

Forced to confront the burning memories and feelings about yet another loved one killed brutally, Sam loses herself in the mystery contained within Donovan's old notes. It leads her to the untouchable Xander, a soldier off-grid since his return from Afghanistan, and then to a series of brutal crimes stretching from that harsh mountainous war zone to this nation's capital. The tale told between the lines makes it clear that nobody's hands are clean, and that making sense of murder sometimes means putting yourself in the crosshairs of death.

I was introduced to this author late last year and Ellison has now become one of my favorite mystery/suspense writers. Her plotlines are always very dynamic but fresh. Its not always the same ole same ole with Ellison. She has finely tuned characters that after reading several from her Taylor Jackson series, I feel that I really know these "people". Ellison also does not resort to what many female mystery writers do which is depend on a romantic aspect. Ellison seems to avoid this filler and actually forms a good story that can catch the attention of female readers without any bodice ripping.

The Deeper Darkness takes a spin from her Jackson series with ME Samantha Owens as lead in this book. After the death of her children and husband she just cannot seem to get it together. Sam gets a call to do a secondary post on her first love, Eddie Donovan. Feeling compelled to do this for her old flame she travels to DC to do the autopsy. From there she inserts herself into the investigation because she feels at fault for the loss of everyone she has ever loved. With many thrills, spins and turns, Ellison again takes us on her hectic journey to find the truth. However, this story is a little different in that it has a more somber tone than any of the books I have read from Ellison. This book made me sad at times to see the hurt in all of these women's souls. I would love to see this book spin into a new series from Ellison. It also deals with the military and the current events in the fighting in Iraq and Afganistan. As a reader, I could definitely tell that she did her homework on her subject matter. I loved having Sam as a lead and there are so many plots to explore with an ME involved in the police investigation. Maybe she can be the newer fresher Patricia Cornwell's Kaye Scarpetta. This is a 5 star must read for any mystery fan!

Carmen says

Medical examiner Samantha Owens is a wreck. She has been ever since her husband and two children drowned in a flood. Her OCD has become worse and worse, and she is living a lonely and isolated life.

Then she gets an unexpected call - from her ex-boyfriend's mother. Her ex-boyfriend, Donovan, is dead. The police say it was just a random carjacking, but his mother is convinced it's foul play. She wants Sam to come up and re-do the autopsy. Sure enough, what Sam finds brings on a shit storm of problems...

...

This was a good mystery. Well put-together. The over-arching theme of the book is loss. Being a widow, being a parent whose child has died.

You've also got PTSD, war veteran issues, the prevalence of rape in the military, etc.

The author tries to slide a little romance in, but I have to say that I am NOT a fan of mystery-romance hybrids. So I was actually rather annoyed that she starts putting lovey-dovey crap into the book.

But overall, a decent story and a gripping mystery.

Louisa says

Such a fantastic book! Really enjoyed reading it, amazing mystery, loved being with these characters again, and now for more!

First read April 1st-2nd, 2012

Oh, I loved this book! It was heartbreaking what Sam lost, but she grew as a character because of her loss and her pain, and the mystery was so great! Can't wait to see what's going to happen next, and I hope we get to see some of these characters some more!

Michael says

After reading and not particularly loving the middle installments of J.T. Ellison's Taylor Jackson series of novels, I'd given up on the series and Ellison. While I enjoy reading novels set in and around Music City, the fun of seeing local real-world landmarks incorporated into the pages of standard procedural had lost its appeal.

So it came as huge surprise to me when I saw Ellison's latest, *A Deeper Darkness* on the new books shelves at the library that not only did I pick it up but that that back cover blurb was enough a hook to make me want to give Ellison another shot.

In the months and years following the Nashville floods, coroner Samantha Owen is struggling under a flood of her own. She lost her family in the flood and has been muddling through life since that time. When the mother of an ex-boyfriend calls, asking Sam to come to Washington DC to offer a second opinion on the cause of death of her son, Sam reluctantly agrees. Sam and her ex, Eddie Donovan, had a brief romance while in grad school with Eddie breaking off the romance to return to his first love, the military. Donovan served a couple of tours in the Middle East, married and had two children, but never lost contact with Sam.

When Donovan is killed in apparent car-jacking, his mother Eleanor thinks there's something more at work and asks Sam to look into it. As Sam probes into Eddie's death, she discovers a vast conspiracy at work with

several members of Eddie's military team all dying under mysterious circumstances. Working with a local DC detective, Sam begins to unravel the real reason Eddie died and how it all connects to something the DOD is trying to cover up from the team's time in the Middle East.

If you're familiar with the Taylor Jackson series, you'll probably remember Sam Owens as supporting character to the Taylor-universe. Even if you don't recall this, Sam reflects on how Taylor would react to certain events unfolding in the novel.

Thankfully, many of the weaknesses that turned me off the Taylor Jackson series are downplayed in this novel, though they could rear their ugly head if Ellison decides to begin an on-going series about Sam. Ellison's novels are always one that demand a quick turn of the page, with fresh revelations, clues and twists coming at just the right pace to keep the reader interested and speculating on how they'll all fit together. As a procedural novel, *Down Among the Darkness* is as confident as other, bigger name procedural entries on the market today.

Because Sam is reeling from the death of her family, the novel wisely doesn't indulge in the romantic subplots that hampered some of the later Taylor novels. There's still a few hints sprinkled throughout, but at no point does *Darkness* abruptly shift gears from the central mystery to personal romantic entanglements.

However, for a novel built on Sam's loss and tragic events surrounding the Nashville floods a couple of years ago, Ellison keeps the revelation of exactly what happened to Sam's family too far off-stage, to the point that after said specifics are presented in the final pages of the novel, I found myself thinking it would have been better for Ellison to never address them directly on the printed page. Leave it up to the reader to piece together things from Sam's reactions and growth over the course of the story.

And while Ellison is good, she's still quite up there in the upper pantheon of great mystery writers that are on my "must read" set of authors like Michael Connelly, Laura Lippman or Elizabeth George. Each of those authors offers compelling, page turning mysteries with on-going characters with complicated and interesting back stories and histories. Ellison has the mystery side down, but so far her characters don't feel like old friends like Tess, Lynley or Harry Bosch.

TJ says

Samantha has been a particular favorite of mine throughout the Taylor Jackson series so I was excited to see her get her own series. Upon reading, however, one realizes there are some noticeable shortcomings in this first installment. First, with all the different points of view running, along with the series set up, the story slogged along at a snails pace. It wasn't until almost 3/4 of the way through that the suspense actually picked up enough to truly keep the pages turning.

The most jarring problem, however, was the insta-love at the end of the book. Where did that come from? The characters didn't even meet until the last quarter of the book. We're told they spend a few days getting to know each other then, BAM! The very next scene has her in love and moving in with him... What?!?! We didn't even get to see any relationship develop! Leaving the reader feeling sorely cheated.

Still, now that the foundation has been laid AND If one ignores that BIG relationship glitch, this could prove to be a great new series.

Wendy Hines says

Samantha Owens is a medical examiner and she's very good at her job. But since she lost her husband and her children to the Nashville floods, her heart isn't in it anymore. She just goes through the motions. She's been grieving for over two years now and when it gets to be too much for her, she cleans herself. It could be just her hands with sanitizer or a full body shower. She counts to herself, One Mississippi, two Mississippi... She isn't sure what to do anymore. She doesn't want to live and she doesn't want to die.

When an old friend calls her with the sad news that Samantha's first love, Edward Donovan, has died, Sam is overwrought. She's always wondered 'what if' as the years have rolled by and she knows she still loves him. When his mother begs Sam to come up and do a second autopsy, Sam's defenses slam down. She doesn't know if she can handle it, but if Eleanor is right, that Eddie was murdered, then he deserves justice and all she can do to help.

When she arrives, she is met by Eddie's grieving wife, Susan with coolness. Susan knows how much Samantha and Eddie meant to one another at a different time, but she is still jealous. Eventually though, she overcomes her feelings to ask Sam for her help in finding out who killed Eddie. Sam's findings do prove Eddie was killed and she involves herself in the investigation. But when things begin to heat up and someone tries to kill her, she realizes that she does want to live, but at what cost?

J.T. Ellison will remember Samantha as the best friend of Taylor Jackson, Ellison's Taylor Jackson series. Taylor does not make an appearance, but Samantha holds her own, even as she's grieving and trying to right her upside down life. With grief, friendship, the blossom of romance and the searing intense heat of suspicion that only Ellison can provide, *A DEEPER DARKNESS* is a must read for thriller fans! I can't wait for more!
