

JB police chief writes award-winning mystery thrillers

by MAX JAEGER
STAFF WRITER

As Jacksonville Beach's chief of police, Bruce Thomason exercises a lot of authority, but as an author, it's his characters who control him.

"I'm sitting off in a corner, on my laptop, and the dialogue and the action's taking place in front of me and I'm simply recording what I'm seeing and hearing," he said.

Two novels into his fiction career, Thomason is winning national book awards. He received the 2011 Readers Favorite

Award in the fiction-thriller category and was named a finalist in the same contest for the suspense category and a finalist for the Indie Excellence Book Award.

"If you want to find out how good your books are you need to enter them in competitions and let other people who are in the business look at them and evaluate them," he said. "Just to get a finalist, knowing there were hundreds competing was very gratifying," he said.

Both novels are part of an ongoing series chronicling Jacksonville Beach detective Clay Randall's work tracking down serial killers, making drug busts and contending with rogue cops.

Thomason said he is at a pivotal point as an author. He is finding his voice — or rather his characters'.

He said his first novel, "Body Toll," was a recounting of action with little insight into the actors, but "The Six O'Clock Rule" is more of a character study, he said.

With a third novel in the series on the way, tentatively titled "Perception of Power," look for a more developed style than the first two.

Thomason said he read Stephen King's "On Writing" and was struck by a passage where King said while he was writing, his characters took over.

"When I read that I thought, 'that is so pretentious. I mean c'mon, you're



Jax Beach Police Chief Bruce Thomason writes his novels on a laptop in his Jacksonville Beach home.

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— BRUCE THOMASON

and tries to be descriptive while leaving analysis and judgment calls up to the reader.

In writing his forthcoming book, he is toying with ambiguity — trying to create a character who can be interpreted in radically opposing ways.

Thomason said he has sold several thousand copies of his books, which are available in hard copy at Barnes and Noble, Books-a-Million, The Bookmark in Neptune Beach, Books Plus in Fernandina, and on Amazon. There are also electronic editions for iBook, Nook and Kindle. He has said that he is happy to meet with book clubs and other groups interested in the books.

Thomason will be retiring in the near future, he said. He and his wife are discussing just when that will be, but he said it won't be more than two years from now.

"When I do step away, I hope to spend a lot more time writing," he said.

the author'... I owe him an apology," Thomason said.

Thomason's wife edits his stories and gave him a big piece of advice about characters: no one is completely good or bad.

"I don't completely agree with it, but I kept it in mind while I was writing 'The Six O'Clock Rule'," he said.

Composition has always been a part of Thomason's life in one way or another. In high school, Thomason entered short story contests. He won first prize his first year, for a short story about baseball.

"Write what you know," he said.

As an officer he wrote police reports, and as a chief he writes council memos and scenarios for assessing new hires.

"My wife's been at me for years to write about the crazy stuff I've encountered," he said.

His characters are composites of people he's known; he takes particular characteristics and exaggerates them, he said.

"Most of the characters are created out of my head, but some have definite connections with people I've known," he said. "People accuse me of being Clay Randall, but I really try hard not to put myself

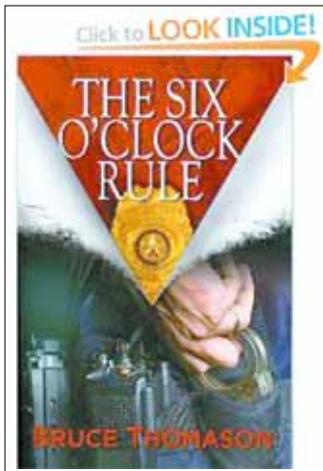
in [the stories]. I see him as a completely different character."

Similarly, the scenarios he writes about are inspired by his police work, but they aren't taken straight from a police report.

Thomason said he thinks most people won't get a bad impression of Jacksonville Beach based on the gritty action in his stories.

"I love this city; I love the setting here on the ocean, so it's a natural place to base the stories," he said.

He also said he doesn't like first person narration



The title of Jax Beach Police Chief Bruce Thomason's latest book, "The Six O'Clock Rule", reflects advice he gives all new officers. He tells new hires to make sure they would be proud of their actions if they became the subject of a six o'clock news broadcast.