

Q & A

WITH **ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS**
AUTHOR OF **FOURTH DOWN AND OUT**
AN ANDY HAYES MYSTERY
A SWALLOW PRESS BOOK

You've written two other books, both nonfiction, and both dealing with legal issues (No Winners Here Tonight, about the death penalty in Ohio; and Hatred at Home, about an investigation into a Columbus terrorist cell). What made you decide to make the jump into mystery fiction?

It's less a jump than a step sideways. As a mystery nut, I've been thinking about a Columbus-based series for years. It just took me fifteen years of working and living here to get a feel for the direction I wanted to go.

Why did you choose the private eye route over a police procedural?

Although Andy Hayes lives and works in Columbus, there are plenty of jobs that take him outside the city from time to time. Police detectives do that too, but I figured I could play a little faster and looser with plotlines if Andy was a freelancer.

Some of Andy Hayes's dialogue is pretty snappy. As you wrote Fourth Down and Out, were you influenced by any other mystery writers?

I'm a fan of the early Spenser novels by Robert B. Parker, about his Boston-based private eye. I've also read a lot of the Matthew Scudder books by Lawrence Sanders as well as Loren Estleman's series about Amos Walker in Detroit, and going back a little farther, the Nero Wolfe books by Rex Stout. One of my favorite writers was Stuart Kaminsky, a prolific author whose series included the adventures of 1940s Hollywood private eye Toby Peters. Then of course there's the Les Roberts' novels about Milan Jacovich in Cleveland, a definite inspiration for Andy Hayes. On the police procedural side, there's Ian Rankin's Edinburgh-based detective John Rebus, and of course Michael Connelly's series about Harry Bosch in Los Angeles. It's a male dominated genre and my influences reflect that, but I've also enjoyed Sue Grafton's alphabetic Kinsey Millhone books and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski's mysteries, among others.

Why set the Andy Hayes books in Columbus?

Columbus is ripe for its own mystery series. It's now one of the biggest cities in the country, and has outgrown its reputation as a sleepy state government town whose only attraction is Ohio State football. It's got an exploding food scene, a vibrant arts community and a dynamic mix of immigrants, including one of the world's biggest ex-pat communities of Somalis. One thing that isn't new is politics, and the king-making role that lawmakers here can play in presidential election years as candidates crisscross Ohio. The city also has its share of 21st century problems, including heroin trade and continuing gun and gang violence. Put it all together and the ingredients are perfect for mystery investigations.

How does your professional work influence your mystery writing?

I'm a legal affairs writer for The Associated Press, which means a lot of crime and courts coverage. So there's a degree of that Law and Order "Ripped from the headlines" approach. Every AP reporter is also a generalist by necessity, and I'm exposed to a lot of different stories, from school issues to politics, which provide fodder for plotlines.

Readers gradually learn about one aspect of Andy Hayes's past—he was an OSU quarterback involved in some kind of scandal decades ago—and we see that the Columbus community is still actively angry at him for what he did. We also learn that even the poor in the city reject necessities like warm clothes if they feature the colors or insignia of the Michigan Wolverines, OSU's archrival. Are sports fans in Columbus really that serious?

I'm guilty of a bit of parody when it comes to how rabid some fans are in the book. Part of that is pushing the stereotype to get a point across. Realistically, Columbus is big enough now that there's room for fans and nonfans alike. That said, the passion for Ohio State football is huge. It's not uncommon to meet people who are virulently anti-Michigan, despite the fact they didn't attend OSU and may never have been to Ann Arbor. It's also true that the best time to go shopping in the city is any Saturday in the fall, and especially in November. If people aren't at the game, they're watching it at home or with friends.

Fourth Down and Out is the debut book in a projected series. Can you tell us more about what's to come?

Andy's second outing involves the reopening of an investigation into a house fire that killed three college students, a thankless job that earns him enemies. Down the road, expect to see him in the crossfire of national politics—perhaps literally—as competing forces in Columbus try to quell bad news that could affect the outcome of a presidential campaign. Other plots will examine human trafficking, terrorism, heroin addiction, casino gambling crime, the anti-government movement, and the death penalty, among other light topics.



**OHIO
UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

**SWALLOW
PRESS**

ohioswallow.com

Fourth Down and Out

An Andy Hayes Mystery
By Andrew Welsh-Huggins

Hardcover 978-0-8040-1152-5
\$26.95 · 272 pages · 5½ × 8½ in.
Electronic 978-0-8040-4059-4
\$11.99

May 2014
Swallow Press, an imprint of
Ohio University Press

Media and Events

Contact Jeff Kallet, publicist
(740) 593-1158 and kallet@ohio.edu

