



CELADON
BOOKS

STEPHEN AMIDON, AUTHOR OF *LOCUST LANE*, ON CRIME FICTION AND CONTROLLING THE NARRATIVE



STEPHEN AMIDON'S UPCOMING THRILLER *LOCUST LANE* FOLLOWS FIVE FAMILIES IN A WEALTHY BOSTON SUBURB AS THEY TRY TO PIECE TOGETHER THE MYSTERY OF A LOCAL TEEN WHO WAS FOUND MURDERED.

As thriller fans will discover, there is a lot to discuss after reading this book! What main themes did you set out to explore in writing *Locust Lane*?

The book's main theme is one that has interested me throughout my career: In a crisis, how far would you go to protect your child? What secrets would you keep? What laws would you break? In *Locust Lane*, every main character is a parent dealing with a child in trouble, whether they are a victim of crime, struggle with addiction, or face grave accusations. In a larger sense, having children presents a person with intense, often contradictory demands. It's an almost impossible job. How do you teach a young person right and wrong? How can you be objective about a kid who is so close to you, so much a part of you? Can parental love actually be damaging? You can read every parenting book ever printed, listen to every podcast, devour every blog, pick the brains of all your family and

friends — but at the end of the day, you are going to be in situations where you have to make decisions and take actions for which you are not prepared. And this is where the drama starts....

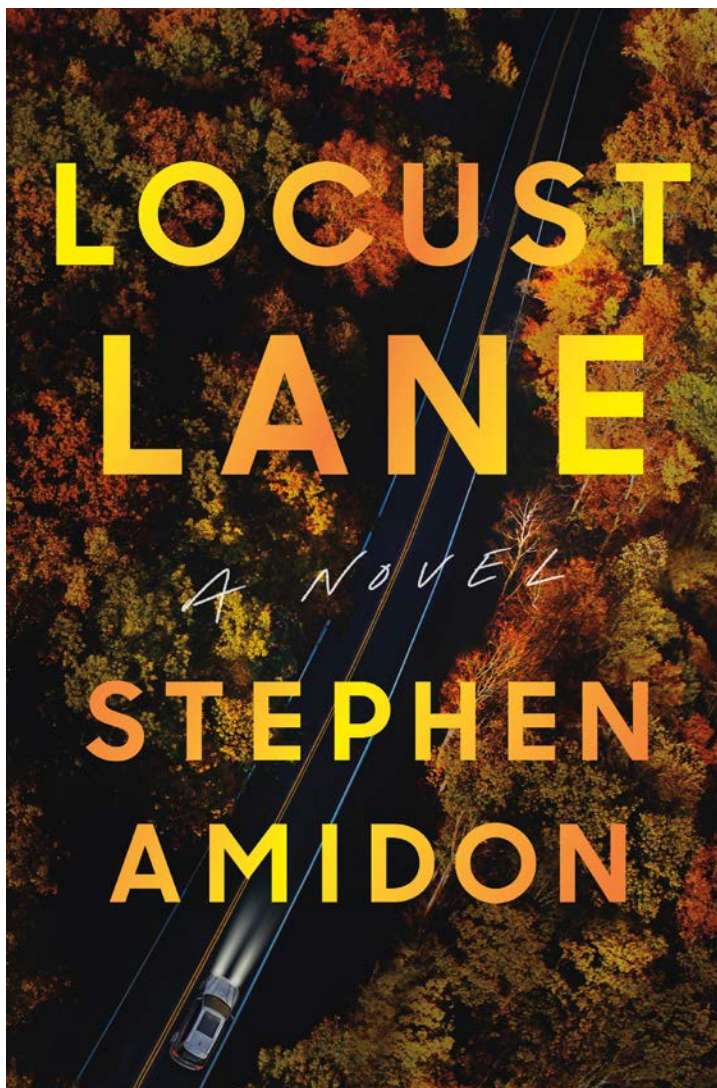
The narrative is told from alternating perspectives of the parents in the community, rather than the teenagers, who were closest to the victim and the crime. Why did you decide to tell this story from their various points of view?

My novel is about the terrible event that happens in that big house on Locust Lane, but it is also about the aftermath of the crime as it plays out among people who weren't there but must deal with it. As any parent of teenagers can tell you, their child's life is riddled with enigmas. In many ways, raising a teen is like reading a mystery story. What should we believe? Which clues are potentially serious? What is your child saying behind the closed doors of chats and texts? What are they doing when they are

out of sight? Given this dynamic, I thought it would be interesting to put the reader in the position of the bemused parent instead of the kids who actually know what happened.

One compelling plot driver focuses on certain individuals in the community trying to "control the narrative." In the social media age, do you think it is easier or more difficult to do this? And how have you seen modern-day crime narratives change as a result of such easily accessible tools of manipulation?

Social media had turned us all into storytellers. With the power granted us by Twitter and Facebook, the desire for each of us to "control the narrative" definitely becomes more tempting. In the old days, the reporting on an incident like the one depicted in *Locust Lane* tended to be fairly monolithic: The police and reporters would investigate, and then the story would be reported in newspapers and on television news.



Even eyewitnesses had to rely on the traditional media to voice their testimony. Counter-narratives were difficult to broadcast. Now we live in a world of thunderous whispers, where gossip, speculation, and downright lies often overwhelm factual reporting. In so many cases, there is no longer an official story, but rather a cacophony of competing narratives that are impossible to sort out. In my novel, as the events on Locust Lane unfold, two of the main families involved compete to see who can control the narrative, with one

relying on a toxic Twitter thread while the other resorts to using its power to sway local newspapers. In a way, it's a battle of new money versus old. The irony being that in the end it is one of the oldest forms of communication — a hand-delivered letter — that may determine the story's outcome.

Most of your fiction has been set in the suburbs, from your 1991 short story collection *Subdivision to Locust Lane*. What keeps drawing you back to the suburbs again and again?

On the simplest level, it's

where I grew up and where I have lived for much of my adult life. It's what I know. Perhaps this is why two of the greatest influences on me as a writer — John Cheever and Richard Yates — saw the suburbs as their turf. But there's a deeper reason at work: The divide between the seemingly serene facade of the suburbs and their often dark, dangerous interiors provides rich dramatic ground for me. For many people, life is a quest for security, for normality and predictability. I believe the American suburbs might be the greatest expression of those desires. Cities are chaotic, the countryside is lonely, but the suburbs, with their freshly cut lawns and three-car garages, offer a promise of safety and community. Which is why when things go wrong there, when hidden secrets and passions and crimes emerge, it can seem all the more powerful. How can there be a bloody murder on a street with million-dollar houses and an annual block party? How can someone who coaches Little League be a killer? Was that really the soccer mom's Suburban involved in the deadly hit-and-run?

You have both written a screenplay, *The Leisure Seeker*, and had two of your novels — *Human Capital* and *Security* — adapted for the screen in the U.S. and Italy. What is the most exciting thing about seeing your writing come to life in that medium?

My involvement in

screenwriting came about in a most unexpected way. Ten years after *Human Capital* was released, I received a totally unexpected letter from an Italian director, Paolo Virzi, who wanted to film the book. The rest, as they say, is history. Paolo's movie became a sensation in Italy, leading to further adaptations of my work, as well as several screenwriting opportunities. The most exciting thing about this good fortune has been seeing other artists — actors and directors and writers and designers — interpret and reimagine a world I created in the quiet of my office. Watching a filmed adaptation of your work is like seeing your dreams writ large. The characters may not look like you imagined — they might not even speak the same language as the originals — and yet they are your people, struggling with the same desires and obstacles and crises. It's a powerful alchemy.

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