

“The House Always Wins: A Las Vegas Ghost Story”

Media kit

ABOUT THE BOOK

Synopsis

Anna Christiansen’s small-town life is about to go haywire. A young reporter stuck in a dead-end job, Anna falls head over heels for an interview subject, the bass player in an up-and-coming alt band. In short order, she pulls up stakes, moves to Las Vegas, gets married and pregnant, and buys a big fixer-upper haunted by the ghost of a Sin City racketeer.

That’s when Anna gets notice from a corrupt casino owner that he’s buying up all the properties on her street to make way for a parking lot. But Anna has poured her heart and soul into the house and digs in hard to fight the system — not the easiest of tasks in a city where bribery, mayhem, and murder are standard operating procedures.

Can Anna’s tough-guy ghost provide the help she needs to prevail in this dangerous cat-and-mouse game? Will Anna’s life be left in ruins? Or worse?

Quick hits:

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Author: Brian Rouff

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Pre-orders: [Amazon.com](#)

Inspiration

The house in “The House Always Wins” is based on an old fixer upper author Brian Rouff and his family lived in from 2002-05 on St. Louis Ave. in Las Vegas. Purchased cheap because it needed a tremendous amount of work, it was an entertainer’s house — previously owned by Jack Eglash, a noted producer of musical shows on The Strip — who had worked with everyone from Sinatra and Elvis to Carson and Rickles.

“It was a cool, old, one-of-a-kind house,” Rouff said, “with state-of-the-art appliances from 1960. That house, I always felt, was haunted.”

The St. Louis house was full of strange noises. Lights left on would be off, and drawers distinctly remembered to be open would be closed. There were even patches of strange temperature changes.

“It’s an old house; you could make a logical case for everything, but that’s not a book,” Rouff said. “I started thinking, ‘What if it’s haunted? And what if a young couple bought it? And what if it’s a friendly ghost? And what if he’s a dead mobster who helps them fight a corrupt casino owner who will stop at nothing to get the house?’ Now *that’s* a book.”

Back story

“The House Always Wins” is 10 years in the making. After self-publishing his last book, “Money Shot,” author Brian Rouff took a few years off.

“I thought I was out of ideas. And energy,” he said. “But the idea for ‘The House Always Wins’ crept up on me and started tugging on my sleeve. ... It’s the most personal of my books. It’s based on a real house we lived in. And the ghost’s early backstory is my father’s story growing up in Detroit during Prohibition.”

Rouff began writing in fits and starts in 2007 before the Great Recession brought progress to a screeching halt.

“As a small business owner, the recession was all-consuming,” he said. “I just didn’t have it in me to keep working on the book too. It was always in the back of my mind, though, and I kept taking more and more notes and throwing them in a manila folder. Eventually I thought, ‘If I die before I finish this book, I’m going to be pissed.’ I really needed to finish it.”

Finally the economy leveled out, and he read what he’d written. Like most authors would do, he promptly threw it all away because he didn’t like it anymore and started from scratch.

Because Rouff travels so much for work, “The House Always Wins” was written largely on the road — in hotel rooms and on airplanes. The book was finally completed in November, at which point he began talks with an old friend, Anthony Curtis, the founder of gaming book publisher Huntington Press. Curtis mentioned that the company had just partnered with PGW (Publishers Group West), one of the leading book sales and distribution companies in the United States, and was planning to re-launch its fiction division.

“The stars lined up just right,” Rouff said. “I’m really pleased that Huntington Press picked this up. As the local publisher that specializes in Vegas and gaming, they really get our city and what I do. They changed very little, whereas someone from out of town wouldn’t have gotten all the inside references; they would have seen it as fat that needed to be trimmed. It was a really good fit. Exactly what I was looking for. And the timing couldn’t have been better.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Rouff was born in Detroit, raised in Southern California and has lived in Las Vegas since 1981, which makes him a long-timer by local standards. A 1977 UCLA graduate with a degree in communication studies and a minor in journalism, Brian has spent his entire professional career in media and advertising. In 1987, he founded his own marketing firm, serving clients in such diverse fields as hospitality, computer consulting and sports information. In 2003, he merged his

company with Imagine Marketing (now [Imagine Communications](#)), where he serves as managing partner.

Brian is also a professional public speaker, having facilitated hundreds of advertising and marketing workshops during his 35-year career. He has also become a regular contributor to www.living-las-vegas.com.

In 1999, Brian decided to fulfill a lifelong dream by becoming a novelist. His first book, “[Dice Angel](#),” is a quirky mystery that gives readers a behind-the-scenes peek at the Las Vegas that exists beyond the Strip. “[Dice Angel](#)” is currently the top-rated Las Vegas book on Amazon.com, with a 4.8 average customer rating based on 127 reviews.

Brian’s second novel, “[Money Shot](#),” is the story of an unhappy middle-aged man who wins a chance at redemption by attempting a million dollar shot during halftime of the NCAA basketball tournament.

His third novel, “[The House Always Wins](#),” to be released in October, is a Las Vegas ghost story based on an actual haunted house the author and his family lived in during the early 2000s.

Rouff also contributed a chapter to the Las Vegas serial novel “[Restless City](#).”

On a personal note, Brian is married with two grown daughters and five grandchildren. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, movies, music, sports, and the occasional trip to the casino buffet line.

Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

Q: You’re an ad guy. How did you get into writing?

A: Like most people, I always thought I had a novel or two in me. But I never got a chance until my mid-forties. By that time, I had spent more than two decades in the ad biz, writing every imaginable type of promotional material: TV and radio commercials, brochures, press releases, newsletters, you name it. It paid the bills, but none of it was for me. Excellent training, though. It teaches you to get to the point fast.

I tell people that writing novels about Las Vegas is how I handled my midlife crisis. Safer than a Harley and cheaper than a divorce. Beyond that, I wanted to write books that really capture what it’s like to live in this crazy town. Most books and movies about Las Vegas are written by “carpetbaggers” — folks who come here for a week or two and think they’ve got a handle on this place. I remember one famous author wrote about the “onramp to Maryland Parkway.” Stuff like that makes me crazy.

Q: You’re a 60-something man. What made you write from the perspective of a 25-year-old woman? And what was that like?

A: It was definitely a challenge. In my other books, the main characters were jaded middle-aged men who knew Vegas inside and out, so I’d already told that story more than once. I wanted to

do something different. Not only is Anna a young woman, but she's new to town. She allows my readers to see Las Vegas with fresh eyes.

Fortunately, I'm surrounded by young women — I have two grown daughters, and most of my colleagues at work are young women. So I would constantly ask, "Do young women know this?" "Do young people still talk like this?" "Do you know this reference?" "Do you know this movie?" It was very important to me to not slip up in that respect. I wanted to see if I could pull it off.

Q: What was your writing process for this book?

A: This book was different for me; I wrote it out of sequence. If I was inspired, I just wrote it, trusting the universe that I'd be able to stitch it together in some manner that made sense. That gave me a few sleepless nights.

It's also the only book I've written where I knew the ending in advance. So I wrote it first.

Q: You've said this book is your most personal, which one wouldn't assume since the protagonist is a young woman. So what does that mean?

A: The beginning story is my dad's story. He grew up side by side with The Purple Gang, Detroit's Jewish version of the Mafia. In fact, they made the Mafia look like Boy Scouts. When I was young, he told me all kinds of cool stories about them. He was invited into the gang, but he knew there wasn't a lot of future in that. It wasn't for him. Which is why he lived to be 87, I guess.

Dad's been gone 20 years, and I haven't heard those stories in at least 40 years. But the unconscious mind remembers everything — and what it doesn't remember, you can Google.

Q: How did you come up with the ghost's personality?

A: In addition to The Purple Gang, the ghost in the book is based loosely on Meyer Lansky and Moe Dalitz. A dead racketeer, he teaches Anna some lessons on how to fight the system. Like many Las Vegas scions of the community, he was on the wrong side of the law back in Detroit, but he reinvented himself here and became an honored, upstanding member of the community. Part of the lure of Las Vegas is you can reinvent yourself.

Q: How do you see yourself as an author?

A: There are many authors whose names are practically synonymous with a city they write about. There's Elmore Leonard and Detroit; Laura Lippman and Baltimore; Carl Hiaasen and Miami. In Las Vegas, I feel there's a vacancy, and I want to fill it. I've been here 36 years, and I've been paying attention and taking notes. I have an in-depth appreciation of the city along with an awareness of the usual annoyances. In my books, the city becomes its own character.

I'm not there yet, but I think I can be.

Q: How would you sum up 'The House Always Wins'?

A: I would describe it as a David and Goliath story that's a fun and nostalgic blend of fantasy and reality.

SAMPLE CHAPTER

THE HOUSE ALWAYS WINS

CHAPTER 24

I awoke in the blackness of night with a song in my head. It happens more than you'd think. Messages bubbling up from deep in the tar pits of our subconscious, biological emails we block or ignore or tamp down during the day, but that scurry in like termites when the lights go out and our guards come down.

In this instance, the lyric came from the Talking Heads' classic "Once in a Lifetime": "And you may tell yourself/This is not my beautiful house ..."

Just a fragment, but enough to concern me, because later in the song I remembered it says: "My God, what have I done?"

This would require some analysis, because on the surface, at least, I was happy. I loved the baby that grew day by day inside of me, I loved Aaron more than ever, I loved my "beautiful house" that we were bringing back to life with our own four hands (mostly), and I loved the life we were building. So where the heck did the doubt come from?

Sure, I experienced random pangs of homesickness; ironic because, when I left Scandia, I was literally sick of home. But nothing to prompt this.

I stared at the nothingness before me, feeling around the unrumped sheets on Aaron's side of the bed, a sign he hadn't yet returned from his lounge gig with Meltdown at Bally's. Perhaps the answer was as simple as loneliness (mixed with a dash of isolation)—just the big old house and I still getting to know each other. I chewed on that possibility for a moment as the sounds of the night encroached: a siren, a car horn, a barking dog, a train whistle. Plus, the usual creaks and moans typical of middle-aged structures (and people). A melancholy chorus if ever there was one. I pulled the covers up higher and shuddered.

Could I dare hope for a second round of blessed sleep? The beginning of my second trimester was making it more and more unlikely these days. But as the warmth and oblivion enveloped me, another sound made its presence felt, tiptoeing around the threadbare outer edges of my consciousness. Barely present at first, indistinguishable from a dream, but then muffled, like your parents' murmurs from behind closed doors. It required my absolute concentration to will it into focus, the way you'd adjust the dials on a telescope to bring a distant celestial body into crystalline view. It was as annoying as walking with a grain of sand in your shoe; try as I might, I could not ignore it. So I threw back the blanket and slipped into my robe, cinching it tight at what passed for my waist. Could I have left the TV on before going to bed? I clearly remembered turning it off, although my memory wasn't what it used to be, the growing alien in my tummy stealing my mojo by the day. Stupidly, I flicked on the light and set off to find the source of the babble, not stopping to think it could be burglars or worse.

A downstairs room-to-room inspection yielded nothing. But as I got closer to the stairs (all 17 of them), I noticed a second element added to the mix: the faint, but unmistakably pungent, aroma of cigar smoke.

A smart woman would have called 911. But what would I say? I hear a TV and smell a cigar? Please send your crack SWAT team immediately? Instead, I made my way to the kitchen and grabbed a rubber mallet from the rack, the kind you use to pound chicken into cutlets. I'm sure the sight was laughable: a pregnant woman awkwardly wielding a cooking utensil certain to strike terror in the heart of any home invader.

I stopped to catch my breath on the upstairs landing before completing my ascent and moving methodically down the long hall, poking my head into each room to—what? Assure myself it was all a figment of my overripe imagination? Was that really preferable to an actual intruder?

The hammering of my own heart was the only sound I heard. Just as I decided to return to the ground floor, it started up again, the noise and the stench stronger than before, now punctuated by what sounded like a crowd of people laughing. Peering down the far end of the corridor, I could just make out bluish light spilling out from under the door of the guest room, a 10-by-10 space I'd set foot in only a handful of times before.

Again, I considered bailing, but my natural reporter's curiosity got the better of me and I soldiered on, each step like walking in Jell-O. My puffy feet delivered me to the door nonetheless. Now the sounds were unmistakable: the tenor tones of a man's voice, ethnic, possibly Hispanic; and a woman, whiny and strident, engaged in a hilarious back-and-forth conversation (if the waves of raucous laughter were to be believed). Did this room even have a TV? I couldn't recall.

The door knob felt smooth and cool in my hand. Before I could talk myself out of it, I gave it a turn and pushed. It didn't budge. One last chance to run, or at least shuffle, away. To heck with that. Focusing all my adrenaline and fear and crazy pregnant-lady strength, I put my shoulder into the door like I'd seen in so many cheesy action movies. After a nanosecond pause, it gave way with a thunderous *crack!*

As my eyes adjusted to the room, they settled on the source of the sounds, a small black-and-white TV with a coat-hanger antenna, the kind I barely remembered from Gramma's house when I was little. (Years later, in my college Marketing 101 class, I learned that Gramma was a "laggard," essentially the last person on the planet to adapt new technology). On the screen, I recognized Lucy and her husband from "Nick at Nite" in mid-quarrel, with Lucy saying, "I may not be able to understand what you say when you say it, but before you say it, I can understand what you're going to say perfectly."

From there, my eyes wandered to a leather recliner on the far side of the room, where an ancient man in equally ancient PJs sat puffing on a stogie the size of a torpedo, the tip glowing an intermittent bright orange, the smoke curling up to the ceiling in the flickering light of the television screen. And, as if the entire scene weren't strange enough already, the man was as

ethereal as the smoke, a shimmering silver-gray specter drifting in and out of, well, whatever passed for reality in this room. Not much taller than a jockey, he was sporadically solid enough for me to discern a few features: the head bald, other than a scattering of wispy white hairs, large gnarled hands, and glasses with window-frame lenses held up by ears the size of satellite dishes.

As my raggedy mind tried vainly to process the spectacle, the man or whatever he was turned to me and said in a rusty voice, "I like what you've done with the place."

The rubber mallet made a dull thudding sound as it bounced off the hardwood floor. The scream I heard might have been my own.

WHAT OTHER AUTHORS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT

"Rouff has a chance to be to Vegas what Carl Hiaasen is to Florida." – Tod Goldberg, author of "Gangsterland."

"Las Vegas is a city of ghosts. Some apparitions haunt its mobbed-up past. Others seem to walk among us. Author Brian Rouff understands Las Vegas and its ghosts better than most, and it shows in his latest novel, 'The House Always Wins.' It's entertaining and intriguing and will make a great addition to your Las Vegas bookshelf."—John L. Smith, author of "Of Rats and Men and Even a Street Dog."

"A love story. Vegas. A house with deadly secrets. Brian Rouff does it again with 'The House Always Wins'" – Gretchen Archer, author of the "Davis Way Crime Caper" series.

"From its quintessentially Vegas title to its rewarding ending, 'The House Always Wins' is the story of young love, a cross-country road trip, a haunted house, and a war with a corrupt casino owner—all captured with the depth and detail only a genuine Las Vegas insider can deliver. Brian Rouff weaves past and present seamlessly in this unique tale with a Vegas ghost so real you won't have any choice but to believe." – Megan Edwards, author of "Getting off on Frank Sinatra."

Brian Rouff's 'The House Always Wins' features a plucky heroine who blindly leaps at love, finds a new home, and, in fighting for both, finds herself. Love with a bit of intrigue, wrapped in humor, and tied with a bow of Las Vegas magic, the story is a delight! – Deborah Coonts, author of the "Lucky O'Toole" Vegas adventure series.

"Las Vegas may be overexposed, but Rouff, as usual, finds a fresh angle. His mobster ghost story is funny and poignant and contains inside intel on Vegas that only a longtime resident could mine." – Matthew O'Brien, author of "Beneath the Neon."

"'The House Always Wins' is a fun ride through Vegas old and new where the underworld meets the afterlife. From prenatal care to departed gangsters, there's a little bit of everything in here." – David G. Schwartz, author of "Tales from the Pit: Casino Table Games Managers in Their Own Words."

“A page-turner with a humorous twist you won’t want to put down.” – Morgan St. James, author of “A Corpse in the Soup.”

“Brian Rouff’s latest, ‘The House Always Wins,’ is a masterful piece that takes the reader down a serpentine path leading to a chilling finish that surprises and delights. Like his other books, it captures the spirit of Las Vegas and keeps the reader in suspense throughout an engrossing story.” – Marc David, author of “1,001 Things You Didn’t Want to Know.”

“‘The House Always Wins’ rings true of old time Las Vegas. Oddly built one-of-a-kind homes? Check. Dead mobster haunting the place? Check. Over-reaching casino owner taking more than he’s entitled to? Yeah, it’s Vegas, baby!” – H. G. McKinnis, “A Justified Bitch.”

"Gripping, adventurous, and romantic, this witty read will keep you guessing and give a glimpse into the real world of Las Vegas, one that Rouff is clearly familiar with. Scary, good fun." – Constance Ford, author of “Little Bird.”

“Anna Christiansen takes on City Hall in this gripping Sin City story. Her mission in ‘The House Always Wins’ is a classic tale that’s equally suspenseful, well-written, and memorable. Author Brian Rouff keeps the pages turning as he pulls out all the stops in his latest Las Vegas novel.— Cathy Scott, author of “Murder of a Mafia Daughter” and “The Killing of Tupac Shakur,” journalist and blogger.

ARTWORK * INTERVIEWS * REVIEW COPIES * PUBLIC APPEARANCES

- Images are available in all formats (i.e. .jpg, .tiff & .eps) and can be e-mailed or provided as a custom digital link. Images available include: book cover, author headshot.
- Review copies of the book are available.
- Interviews with author Brian Rouff can be scheduled.
- Public appearances/talks on Las Vegas and writing can be scheduled.

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