

The Pawn

“There is nothing not to like.”

—The Suspense Zone

“An exceptional psychological thriller.”

—Bookshelf Review

“Riveting.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“An exhilarating thriller.”

—Mysterious Reviews

“Brilliant.”

—Ann Tatlock, Christy award-winning author

“Seriously intense.”

—Pop Culture Tuesday

The Rook

“It’s a wild ride with a shocking conclusion.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Readers will be on the edge of their seats.”

—Romantic Times, top pick

“Steven James has mastered the thriller . . . Best story of the year. Perfectly executed.”

—The Suspense Zone

“Suspense thriller writing at its highest level.”

—TitleTrakk.com

“Steven James hooked me with his debut, *The Pawn*. Now in his explosive sequel he has absolutely blown me away.”

—The Christian Manifesto

THE KNIGHT

THE BOWERS FILES #3

STEVEN JAMES



© 2009 by Steven James

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

James, Steven, 1969–

The knight / Steven James.

p. cm. — (The Bowers files ; 3)

ISBN 978-0-8007-3270-7 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-8007-1898-5 (cloth)

1. Criminologists—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3610.A4545K57 2009

813'.6—dc22

2009014944

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

Don't you know how the tiger trainer goes about it? He doesn't dare give the tiger any living thing to eat for fear it will learn the taste of fury by killing it. He doesn't dare give it any whole thing to eat for fear it will learn the taste of fury by tearing it apart.

He gauges the state of the tiger's appetite and thoroughly understands its fierce disposition. Tigers are a different breed from men . . . the men who get killed are the ones who go against them.

— Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu, 351 BC

Thursday, May 15
Bearcroft Mine
The Rocky Mountains, 40 miles west of Denver
5:19 p.m.

The sad, ripe odor of death seeped from the entrance to the abandoned mine.

Some FBI agents get used to this smell, to this moment, and after awhile it just becomes another part of the daily routine.

That's never happened with me.

My flashlight cut a narrow seam through the darkness but gave me enough light to see that the woman was still clothed, no sign of sexual assault. Ten sturdy candles surrounded her, their flames wisping and licking at the dusty air, giving the tunnel a ghostly, otherworldly feel.

She was about ten meters away and lay as if asleep, hands on her chest. And in her hands was the reason I'd been called in.

A slowly decomposing human heart.

No sign of the second victim.

And the candles flickered around her in the dark.

Part of my duties at the FBI's Denver field office include working with the Denver Police Department on a joint task force that investigates the most violent criminal offenders in the Denver metroplex, helping to evaluate evidence and suggest investigative strategies. Since this crime appeared to be linked to another double homicide the day before in Littleton, Lieutenant Kurt Mason had asked for my help.

But some local law enforcement officers tend to be territorial, and from the moment I'd stepped off the task force helicopter I'd seen how excited the four men from the crime scene unit were that I was here. It probably didn't help matters that Kurt wanted me to survey the scene with him before they processed the tunnel.

The mine was barely high enough for me to stand in, and narrow enough for me to touch both sides at once. Every five to ten meters, thick beams buttressed the walls and ceiling, supporting against cave-ins.

A rusted track that had been used by miners to roll ore carts through the mine ran along the ground and disappeared into the darkness somewhere beyond the woman's body.

As I took a few steps into the tunnel, I checked to see if my Nikes left an imprint but saw that the ground was too hard. So, it was unlikely we would have shoe impressions from the killer either.

With each step, the temperature dropped, dipping into the low forties. The time of death was still unknown, but the cool air would have slowed decomposition and helped preserve the body. The woman might have been dead for two or three days already.

One of the candles winked out.

Why did you bring her here? Why today? Why this mine?

Whose heart is that in her hands?

The voice of one of the crime scene unit members cut through the dim silence. "Yeah, Special Agent Bowers is inside. He's taking his time."

"I should hope so." It was Lieutenant Mason, and I was glad he was here. He'd been on the phone since I arrived, and now I paused and waited for him to join me.

A beam of light swept past me as he turned on his flashlight, and a moment later he was standing by my side.

"Thanks for coming in on this, Pat." He spoke in a hushed voice, a small way to honor the dead. "I know you're leaving to teach at the Academy next week. I'm hoping—"

"I'll consult from Quantico if I need to."

He gave me a small nod.

Forty-one, with stylish, wire-rimmed glasses and swift intelligent eyes, Kurt looked more like an investment banker than a seasoned detective, but he was one of the best homicide investigators I'd ever met.

It'd been a hard year for him, though, and it showed on his face. Five months ago while he and his wife Cheryl were on a date, their fifteen-month-old daughter Hannah drowned in the bathtub while the babysitter was in the living room texting one of her friends. Kurt and I had only known each other for a few months when his daughter died, but I'd recently lost my wife, and in a way the sense of shared tragedy had deepened our friendship.

Silently, we donned latex gloves. Began to walk toward the woman's body.

"Her name is Heather Fain." His voice sounded lonely and hollow in the tunnel. "I just got the word. Disappeared from her apartment in Aurora on Monday. No one's seen her boyfriend since then either—a guy named Chris Arlington. He was a person of interest in the case . . . until . . ." He let his voice trail off. He was staring at the heart.

I looked at Heather's body, still five meters away, and let her name roll through my mind.

Heather.

Heather Fain.

This wasn't just a corpse, these were tragic remains of a young woman who'd had a boyfriend and dreams and a life in Aurora, Colorado. A young woman with passions and hopes and heartaches.

Until this week.

Grief stabbed at me.

Kurt's comment led me to think he might have reason to believe this was Chris Arlington's heart. "Do we know the identity of the second victim?" I asked. "Whether or not it's Chris?"

"Not yet." An edginess took over his voice. "And I know

what you're thinking, Pat: don't assume, examine. Don't worry. I will."

"I know."

"We have to start somewhere."

I focused the beam of light on the heart. "Yes, we do."

Together, we approached the body.