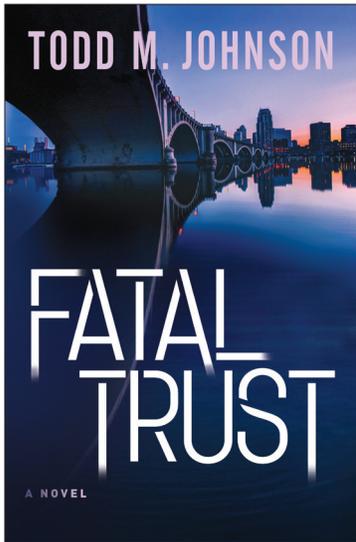




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH TODD M. JOHNSON



Fatal Trust

by Todd M. Johnson

Trade Paper ISBN: 978-0-7642-1235-2

\$15.99; 352 pp.

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-4412-6481-7

Release Date: August 2017

Media Contacts

FICTION PUBLICIST: Amy Green

952-829-2596

agreen@bethanyhouse.com

CANADIAN MEDIA: Ellen Graf-Martin

519-342-3703

ellen@grafmartin.com

Please send tear sheets to:

Amy Green

Bethany House Publishers

11400 Hampshire Ave. S. #200

Bloomington, MN 55438

1. What was your inspiration for Fatal Trust?

While Fatal Trust is my third novel, it's my first book not based on a case that I or a partner handled in my real-life practice. The story was inspired by a combination of elements: my attending a Norman Rockwell art exhibition back when I was in law school, which was robbed months later—a robbery that has never been solved; an interest in the history of organized crime in the Twin Cities through the 1960s; and an interest in exploring how actions have consequences, for ourselves and for the people around us. I believe this is part of the spiritual fabric of our world, although sometimes we don't appreciate the origin of the consequences we face or the loving care of God in helping us to overcome them.

2. What Christian themes did you explore in Fatal Trust?

So a central theme is that our actions really do have consequences. The events and characters' choices in the novel speak toward the idea that, whether intended or not, consequences come as a result of our choices and they carry a ripple effect that touches those around us. I believe this is foundational to the world God created, particularly in its fallen state. I also believe that even if we don't plan for or foresee the consequences ourselves, part of God's genius is the way he plants the seeds to bring about the solutions to those consequences, and usually before we even realize it.

3. A significant part of the story involves landmarks in and around the Twin Cities.

How did you select the landmarks?

I moved to Minnesota when I was ten years old and have, with a few stints elsewhere, lived in the Twin Cities ever since. Most of the places I selected were either those I thought had significance or places that have been important in my life. These include the State Fair Grounds where I've attended dozens of fairs with friends and family; the protagonist Ian Wells's apartment, located where my wife and I first resided after getting married; Hennepin Avenue with its storied past and still a focal point for Minneapolis; the Mississippi and Stone Arch Bridge and the Guthrie Theater overlooking the river. Other landmarks include Summit Avenue in St. Paul, the childhood neighborhood of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald holds a special place in my heart because, like Fitzgerald, I also attended Princeton University and actually belonged to the club (Cottage Club) where he wrote This Side of Paradise – and from which he was ultimately expelled!

I have posted a "tour map" on my website, where quotes from the story are placed alongside photographs of these landmarks. For the State Fair and Guthrie pictures, my daughter and I visited some of the locations, and she took the photos.

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4. The end of the story links to your first novel *The Deposit Slip*. What's the significance of this?

Fatal Trust ends with a linkup between its characters and the main characters from *The Deposit Slip*. It's my intention to write a third novel that brings these two together to form a loose trilogy. Each of the books ends with matters unresolved. *The Deposit Slip* concludes with an assassin still at large, the family of a deceased lawyer unaware of the true circumstances of his death, and the lawyers who could seek revenge wind up destroyed by the story's events. Without giving away the plot of *Fatal Trust*, this too ends with matters unresolved—including favors owed by the characters who could exact a price from them. It's my intent that the surviving characters from both novels will face the intersection of these unresolved issues and with serious consequences.

5. How do you go about selecting the characters' names for your novels?

Many of the names are chosen simply because I find them interesting. I keep a list of names I think are evocative for future books. I have also reached out to friends and family to ask if they'd like me to name characters after them, with the understanding that those characters carry no intentional resemblance to them. It is purely to have fun with people I know, and the answer has always been a wholehearted "yes"—with one great exception. My wife has forbidden me to name any characters after her in my books to date, though I'm still working on her. But one of the characters in *The Deposit Slip* bears my daughter's middle name, Erin, and the protagonist in *Fatal Trust*, Ian, bears my son's name.

6. Is it true that you created a trailer or preview to promote *Fatal Trust*?

Yes. Bethany House has produced a preview for the novel based on a script I wrote. With the tremendous talent of voice-over artist Gary Groomes and other colleagues, and with a great engineer and videographer, we created a short video we hope captures the suspense and intrigue of the story. The video can be seen on YouTube, with links posted on my author website, as well as the Bethany House website.

7. What will be your next book?

As I mentioned, my next book will be a kind of sequel to both *The Deposit Slip* and *Fatal Trust*, rounding out a loose trilogy. I've also been working on a political-historical thriller, which I hope to finish in the next six months or so, based on events surrounding Ernest Hemingway's death.