



THE
JUSTICE
GAME

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RANDY
SINGER

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The Justice Game

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PRAISE FOR RANDY SINGER

“As a lawyer, Randy Singer has lived the drama of the gun issue as it plays out in the courtroom. In *The Justice Game*, he brings that drama to life in a riveting story that captures the passions of both sides of the American gun debate.”

DENNIS HENIGAN

VICE PRESIDENT FOR LAW AND POLICY AT THE BRADY CENTER TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE AND AUTHOR OF *LETHAL LOGIC: EXPLODING THE MYTHS THAT PARALYZE AMERICAN GUN POLICY*

“A great read! In *The Justice Game*, Randy Singer has crafted a fast-paced, suspenseful ride through our legal system. This entertaining story will draw you in from the opening scene. And, as a good book should, it will make you question and consider your own views of gun control.”

ALAN GURA

ATTORNEY, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, WHO SUCCESSFULLY ARGUED LANDMARK SUPREME COURT GUN RIGHTS CASE *DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA V. HELLER* (2008)

“Encore! Randy Singer does it again with another intense, thought-provoking novel that leaves his reader wanting more. *The Justice Game* invokes readers to question long-held opinions and consider the difficult aspects concerning weapon control.”

MISTY BERNALL

MOTHER OF SLAIN COLUMBINE STUDENT CASSIE BERNALL AND AUTHOR OF *SHE SAID YES*

“What a page turner! In *The Justice Game*, Singer captured me from page one with brilliant storytelling and a gutsy message about gun rights in our country. Just when I thought his stories couldn't get any better, this book is even better than his last. Do not miss this read!”

AARON NORRIS

TELEVISION AND FILM PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

“Singer hooks readers from the opening courtroom scene of this tasty thriller, then spurs them through a fast trot across a storyline that just keeps delivering.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

ON BY REASON OF INSANITY

“At the center of the heart-pounding action are the moral dilemmas that have become Singer’s stock-in-trade. . . .an exciting thriller.”

BOOKLIST

ON *BY REASON OF INSANITY*

“In this gripping, obsessively readable legal thriller, Singer proves himself to be the Christian John Grisham. . . .”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

ON *FALSE WITNESS*

“[Singer] delivers a fresh approach to the legal thriller, with subtle characterizations and nuanced presentations of ethical issues.”

BOOKLIST

STARRED REVIEW, ON *DYING DECLARATION*

“Singer . . . hits pay dirt again with this taut, intelligent thriller. . . . [*Dying Declaration*] is a groundbreaking book for the Christian market. . . . Singer is clearly an up-and-coming novelist to watch.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Singer delivers Grisham-like plotting buttressed by a worldview that clarifies the dilemmas that bombard us daily. Don’t miss this book.”

HUGH HEWITT

AUTHOR, COLUMNIST AND RADIO HOST OF THE NATIONALLY SYNDICATED *HUGH HEWITT SHOW ON DYING DECLARATION*

“Realistic and riveting, *Directed Verdict* is a compelling story about the persecuted church and those who fight for global religious freedom.”

JAY SEKULOW

CHIEF COUNSEL, AMERICAN CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE

This book is dedicated to the memory of Karen Farley.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This one is personal.

On December 16, 1988, a sixteen-year-old student named Nicholas Elliot took a semi-automatic handgun to Atlantic Shores Christian School and opened fire. He shot and killed a teacher named Karen Farley and wounded an assistant principal, then burst into a trailer where a Bible class was meeting. When he attempted to open fire on the students huddled in the back corner of the trailer, the gun jammed. The Bible teacher, Hutch Matteson, tackled Elliot and prevented the kind of tragedy that hit Columbine High School in Colorado several years later.

Atlantic Shores was the school where my wife taught. It was the school my kids attended (though they were not there that day).

And when I learned that Elliot had purchased the gun illegally from a gun store in Isle of Wight County through a transaction referred to as a “straw purchase,” I represented the family of Karen Farley in an unprecedented lawsuit against the gun store.

The verdict shocked everyone.

That trial was seventeen years ago—my baptism by fire into the national gun debate.

With this book, seventeen years later, I willingly wade back in . . . wiser (I hope), more cautious, and with a better understanding of both sides. My goal is not to make converts (at least, not in the Second Amendment sense) but to fairly present both perspectives and let the reader decide.

I tried to create compelling characters on both sides of the debate. In fact, I was so determined to be balanced that I did something I've never done before and, as far as I know, no other novelist has ever done either.

I asked my readers to determine the verdict for this book.

We put together an online video showing a news report about the

fictional case at the heart of this book and portions of the closing arguments for both lawyers. We asked readers to watch the video and render a verdict. The verdict in this story reflects the verdict of a majority of my readers.

Thanks for taking this journey with me. In a very real sense, you are always the jury. And just like in my real trials, I've got a few butterflies as I submit my case to you.

For *The Justice Game*, the jury is out. . . .



PART I
WRONGFUL
DEATH

1

RACHEL CRAWFORD CLOSED HER EYES while the show's makeup artist, a spunky woman named Carmen, did a quick touch-up.

"The sun looks good on you," Carmen said. "The Diva's fake 'n bake turns her orange."

"The Diva" was WDXR prime-time anchor Lisa Roberts. Lisa treated the staff like dirt and was easy to hate. Five foot ten with long, skinny legs, Lisa always complained about how much weight the camera added to her figure. Her chair had to be adjusted higher than everyone else's, the camera always had to be positioned to capture her left side (exposing a mole on her left cheek that she considered sexy), and her water had to be cold with just the right amount of ice.

"Maybe my next report will be on tanning beds," Rachel said. Carmen removed the makeup cape, and Rachel checked herself out in the mirror.

She was no Lisa. A little shorter, heavier, with more of a girl-next-door look. But Rachel had one thing Lisa didn't—it was the reason for her glow.

"I hear tanning beds cause cancer," Carmen said, perking up with the thought. "Not just skin cancer, either—liver, thyroid, all kinds of nasty stuff."

Rachel did a subtle sideways twist, so casual that Carmen didn't notice. The blouse Rachel wore fit loosely—not so much as to be obvious, but just loose enough. She would have a few more weeks before her secret was out.

As a new reporter for the WDXR I-team, Rachel had been working on a piece about the effect of cell phones on pregnant women. In two weeks, she would break her own exciting news on air as part of that piece. For at least one night, Lisa wouldn't be the center of attention. Tonight, however, she had a very different story to cover.

"Thanks, Carmen," Rachel said. She scooped up her pad and water bottle

and headed toward the door. “This water’s way too warm,” she said, mocking Lisa’s perfect diction. Carmen cackled.

“Plus, it goes straight to my hips,” Carmen shot back, cocking her chin in the air as she gave Rachel a dismissive little shake of the head.

Rachel smiled and left the makeup room, settling into investigative reporter mode. Most of tonight’s report was already on tape. Things had gone well during the 5 p.m. newscast. What could possibly go wrong at six?

She loved her job. Yet she loved the thought of being a mother even more. She wanted to do both—part-time I-team reporter and full-time mom. But that was a conversation for another day.



Rachel fiddled with her earpiece, listening to the show’s producer give Lisa Roberts and Manuel Sanchez, Lisa’s co-anchor, instructions about the next few segments. Rachel sat up as straight as possible, though she would still be a few inches shorter than Lisa, and smiled at the camera. The show’s producer started the countdown. Lisa didn’t change her scowl until the man said zero, triggering a magical transformation from spoiled Diva to devoted and caring newswoman.

“Over three thousand international college students come to Virginia Beach each summer to work in the resort city,” Lisa said, reading the prompter. “An unlucky few end up being victims of the sinister human trafficking industry. I-team reporter Rachel Crawford has the details.”

Lisa held her pose as they transitioned to the I-team tape. She might be hard to stomach, but she was a pro. Lisa’s cover-girl looks and unshakable poise would soon carry her beyond the Norfolk market, away from the place Lisa scornfully referred to as a “dead-end Navy town,” the place Rachel loved and called home.

Rachel watched the report for about the fortieth time and allowed herself a brief moment of pride. The segment started with a few shots of The Surf, a popular Virginia Beach hangout, with a voice-over from Rachel about the way international student workers helped keep the place afloat. They had video of two Eastern European women tending bar, waiting tables, even taking out the trash. The camera angles had been carefully selected so the viewers could never quite get a good look at the students’ faces. The tape cut to Rachel, standing in front of the bar, a serious tilt to her head.

“But a few of these girls, who talked to WDXR under condition of anonymity, said there was a dark side to their summer at the Beach.”

The next shot featured Rachel interviewing one of the workers. The editors had blocked out the student’s face and digitally altered her voice. She talked about the owner of The Surf—Larry Jamison—the man who had promised the girls jobs and paid for them to come to America.

“If you didn’t become one of ‘Larry’s girls,’ you could never get out of debt, no matter how hard you worked. Plus, there were threats.”

As Rachel explained the scam, a Web site appeared on-screen. The girl’s images were distorted but it was obviously a porn site, one that Rachel had traced back to Larry Jamison.

“We asked Mr. Jamison about these charges,” Rachel said on the tape. “He refused to be interviewed for this report.”

In a few seconds, they would be live again. Rachel checked her earpiece and turned toward Lisa. She heard a pop that startled her—it might have been a few pops—something like firecrackers, coming from the other side of the studio’s soundproof door. She glanced at the doors but nobody else seemed bothered by it.

“Five seconds,” said a voice in her ear. “Four, three, two, one . . .”

A cameraman pointed to Lisa, and she turned toward Rachel. “Those girls you interviewed seemed so vulnerable,” Lisa said. “Did they understand they could press charges against this guy?”

Out of the corner of her eye, Rachel noticed a flash of commotion at the back of the studio. Like a pro, she stayed focused on Lisa, explaining why the girls were not willing to come forward.

“Hey!” someone yelled. “He’s got a gun!”

Shots rang out as Rachel swiveled toward the voices, blinded by the bright lights bearing down on her. She heard more shots, screams of panic and pain—pandemonium in the studio. “Get down!” someone shouted.

There was cursing and a third barrage of shots as Rachel dove to the floor, crawling quickly behind the anchor desk—a fancy acrylic fixture that certainly wouldn’t stop a bullet. Overhead, the suspended “on-air” monitor blinked off. In the chaos, Rachel looked over to see Lisa, wide-eyed with fear, her fist to her mouth, shaking with a silent sob.

For a moment, everything was still.

2

RACHEL HUDDLED BEHIND THE DESK, paralyzed by fear. Her breath came in short, staccato bursts, miniature explosions into the deafening silence. She pressed both hands against her face, half praying, half listening—shaking with terror.

She heard footsteps and heavy breathing.

She gasped when she caught the gunman in her peripheral vision, towering over her—Larry Jamison, the target of her I-team report. The man was wild-eyed, his gray hair disheveled, his face red and stubbled. He pointed a flat black pistol at her that looked like a chopped-off version of a weapon from a Rambo movie. He hit the magazine release and jammed a second magazine into the gun as the first one hit the floor.

“You’re the one,” Jamison hissed, grabbing her by the hair and yanking her to her feet. He pressed the barrel into the small of her back. From behind, he wrapped his left arm around her neck and wrenched her close. Rachel could smell sweat and alcohol, his putrid breath moist on her ear.

“Everybody at your posts!” he demanded. “I want this show live in two minutes or this sweet thing dies.”

Trembling, Rachel scanned the studio. One of the cameramen, a gentle giant Rachel had spoken with on many occasions, lay next to his camera, blood pooling from his chest. She noticed a young female camera operator hunched in a corner. The control booth had been deserted. She couldn’t see Lisa and Manuel—they must have crawled to the other side of the anchor desk.

“Get back to your camera!” Jamison shouted at the woman in the corner. He fired several rounds into the wall above her head. Sparks flew and she screamed, scrambling to her station. “Two minutes,” Jamison repeated. “I’m talking to one of my partners on my Bluetooth right now. He’s waiting for the television signal.”

Rachel fought for breath as Jamison squeezed his left arm tighter around her neck, dragging her toward the end of the anchor desk where Lisa and Manuel sat huddled together on the floor. Jamison pointed his gun at Lisa. “Looky here.”

He laughed as she stared at him in horror. “Get back behind your desk. We’ve got a show to put on.”

Trembling and sobbing, Lisa stood. She backed slowly away from Jamison, climbing into her anchor seat.

“Good girl,” he said. He pointed his gun at Manuel and squeezed Rachel’s windpipe tighter with his left arm. The room was beginning to spin.

“We’re not on the air yet,” he hissed, his frustration showing. “Somebody get in that control room.”

Manuel glanced quickly at the booth. “They’re gone.”

“I can see they’re gone!” Jamison shouted. He turned and unloaded another stream of bullets toward the control booth, the gunshots echoing in Rachel’s ear. The bullets shattered the glass of the booth into tiny shards that dropped onto the sound and edit board.

He again pointed the gun toward Manuel. “Get us on the air.”

Manuel shook his head, beads of sweat popping on his forehead even in the clammy cool air of the studio. “I c-can’t . . . don’t know how.”

“Then you’re useless.”

Manuel opened his mouth—a silent plea, too scared to talk.

Rachel was losing consciousness fast, the edges of her vision going dark. *How many shots has Jamison fired? How many are left?* She said a quick prayer and threw her elbow backward into his gut, heard him grunt, and tried to squirm free. She had nearly twisted out of his arm, but he drove the corner of the gun’s rectangular magazine against her skull. The blow knocked her to the ground. Dizzy, she could feel blood oozing down her forehead.

She looked up at Jamison with blurred vision. She blinked and crawled a few feet backward.

“You think I’m playing games?” Jamison asked.

Terrified, Rachel shook her head. He smiled at her and popped a second magazine out, quickly jamming a third into place.

Jamison tilted his head back and shouted. “We’re not on the air! Every minute we’re not on the air, somebody dies!”

He took a step closer and looked down at Rachel. “Maybe I’ll start with you.” His eyes flashed with excitement. “Put your hands behind your back and lie facedown.”

Rachel did as she was told, fighting panic. To her left, she saw a flicker of movement, a crouching figure. She forced herself not to look. She hoped it was Bob Thomas, the show's director, a tall and lanky man who had disappeared once the gunshots started. Bob would not let her die.

Jamison walked over to Rachel. He stepped over top of her, straddling her. His breath came in short, hard bursts.

"Beg."

For a split second contempt battled her fear. She wouldn't beg for this man—he'd fire anyway. But she knew she needed time. She closed her eyes. "Please don't hurt me," she said. "I can help you get out of this."

Jamison laughed—a fake, contemptuous chortle. "Look at me," he said softly.

She opened her eyes and looked over her shoulder, her neck craned as she stared at her tormentor. He bent closer, his face twisted with the pleasure of revenge. The black barrel of the gun dominated her field of vision, his maniacal grin forming the backdrop. "You need to learn a little humility," he said. "You don't know what it means to beg, do you?"

He grabbed her hair and pulled her head back farther. "*Please*," she said, tears stinging her eyes. Pain throbbed on her cheek and radiated from her neck. She closed her eyes, but the image of the black barrel and Jamison's face wouldn't go away. "*Please* don't shoot."

"That's not begging," Jamison said. He let go of her hair and her head dropped toward the floor. She braced herself, feeling helpless, waiting for the impact of the bullet. She thought about Blake, her husband. About the tiny life sheltered in her womb. It was supposed to be a safe place.

"Open your eyes!"

She did. Just in time to see Jamison turn the gun on Manuel Sanchez. "Say good-bye to your buddy."

"No!" she shouted.

Before Manuel could move, Jamison fired. Rachel gasped as a small hole opened in the middle of Manuel's forehead. He grunted—the air fleeing his body—and slouched to the floor.

Rachel saw Manuel's eyes go glassy as blood poured from his head. She turned away, vomit rising in her throat.

"You need to learn how to beg," Jamison said, his voice flat. "Now get in your seat."

Rachel got to one knee, and the room started spinning. She hesitated,

wiping blood away from her eyes and mouth. She watched Jamison kick Manuel's lifeless body, rolling the co-anchor onto his back.

"Hurry up!" he said.

She stood slowly, thinking about Manuel. Watching him die had changed things. Instead of making Rachel more afraid, it somehow steeled her. She felt responsible for Manuel's death—this whole thing was *her* fault. Jamison was here because of Rachel. Now it was up to her to think clearly. Somebody had to make sure there was no more bloodshed until help arrived.

She staggered to her seat, keeping a wary eye on Jamison. He had moved behind Lisa.

"Get us on the air," he said to Lisa.

"I'm trying," Lisa said, her voice shaking, lips trembling. "But *please* . . ." she choked out, "stop pointing that gun at me."

"You've got thirty seconds," Jamison said.

Lisa caught her breath. She pointed to a spot on the right side of the studio. "Behind there," she said, "is our director. He can run the control booth."

"Nice," Jamison said.

He walked over to the camera and forced Bob Thomas out of his hiding spot, ordering him into the control booth. A minute or two later, the large television on the floor in front of the anchor desk and the other television suspended from the ceiling changed from a technical difficulties message to a live shot of the desk. Rachel was shocked by her own appearance, blood streaking down her face and staining her blouse. She pushed back her hair and waited.

How long before a SWAT team storms this place?

Jamison was just one man. Surely if the four of them acted together . . .

Jamison settled in next to the sole camerawoman operating the huge boom camera. She had it on a wide-angle shot that showed both Lisa and Rachel. Jamison kept the gun on Rachel, periodically glancing over his shoulder to check the studio door.

"This is Larry Jamison!" he yelled, his voice loud enough to be picked up by the wireless mikes that Lisa and Rachel wore. "You've just seen vicious lies broadcast by this television station. Now you're about to hear the truth.

"Introduce yourself!" Jamison shouted. He pointed the gun at Lisa.

"I'm Lisa Roberts," she said, her voice unsteady, an octave higher than normal. Out of habit, she looked straight at the camera.

Jamison swung the gun toward Rachel. For a moment, just long enough to show the slightest flicker of resistance, Rachel didn't speak.

"And I'm Rachel Crawford," she eventually said, "a member of the WDXR I-team."

"Ten minutes ago, this woman lied to you!" Jamison shouted. "And now she's going to stand trial for it."

He checked over his shoulder one more time and then moved forward, circling around behind the anchor desk so that he stood between Lisa and Rachel. Rachel watched as Jamison checked himself out on the TV monitors, then pointed the gun at the side of her head.

God help me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is where I get the chance to thank the real characters who made the fictional ones possible. And because I've used up every ounce of creativity in the book, I will keep it pretty straightforward.

Let's start with the publishing team that is second to none. Thanks to Karen Watson, Jeremy Taylor, Stephanie Broene, Cheryl Kerwin, Ron Beers, and so many others at Tyndale House. You not only believed in this story but made it stronger at every phase. I can honestly say that without the unflinching encouragement and insights of Karen Watson and my agent/friend Lee Hough, there would be no *Justice Game*.

In my efforts to achieve balance and accuracy, I leaned hard on readers and friends. Mary Hartman and Michael Garnier did their stellar job of checking local and legal facts while Jack Spitler and O. E. Burke, two of the most knowledgeable sportsmen and gun enthusiasts I know, provided insight on the technical aspects of the book.

Also, thanks to those of you who watched the preview video and voted for the verdict reflected in this story. A special thanks to the bookstore owners gathered in Hershey, Pennsylvania, who opened the voting and the lawyers and judges of the James Kent American Inn of Court who closed it out. It might interest you to know that the voting was 63 percent in favor of the verdict that I incorporated into the book and 37 percent for the opposite result. A special thanks to Mark Allen for producing the video and Debbie Lykins for getting the word out.

As with most novels, the story is the boss and I've not hesitated to use literary license to help it along. For example, Virginia Beach residents will know that The Purple Cow restaurant has now closed. But The Cow was such an authentic and fun slice of Beach life during its heyday, I kept it open for purposes of my book. Hey, other authors make up entire cities. In the

same manner, you should take the arguments made by the lawyers and the facts surrounding the gun case as rough fictional reflections of real life rather than as claims to factual truth.

In addition to those who directly helped on this book, there are many others who made it possible by showing the author grace in other areas of life. Trinity Church had to suffer through a few sub-par sermons. Willcox and Savage had to embrace the idea of having a loose cannon novelist on deck. And the Singer family had to allow these fictional characters to take up residence in our home and infringe on our conversations for the better part of six months.

In short, this book is not the product of a solitary and lonely attempt to produce literary genius. Instead, it's the natural result of my interactions with readers and editors and family and friends. The good in it can be traced to the fabric of rich and colorful relationships God has put in my life. Not even Justice Inc. could put a price tag on that.

*"Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right."
Psalm 106:3 (NIV)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy Singer is a critically acclaimed author and veteran trial attorney. He has penned nine legal thrillers, including his award-winning debut novel *Directed Verdict*. In addition to his law practice and writing, Randy serves as a teaching pastor for Trinity Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He calls it his “Jekyll and Hyde thing”—part lawyer, part pastor. He also teaches classes in advocacy and ethics at Regent Law School and serves on the school’s Board of Visitors. He and his wife, Rhonda, live in Virginia Beach. They have two grown children. Visit his Web site at www.randysinger.net.