

"IN THE MANNER OF STEPHEN KING
AND DEAN KOONTZ, PARSHALL PENS
A HORRIFYING STORY OF THE UNSEEN
EVILS INHERENT IN OUR SOCIETY."

LIBRARY JOURNAL

THE

A TREVOR BLACK NOVEL

EMPOWERED

CRAIG

PARSHALL

PRAISE FOR CRAIG PARSHALL

The Empowered

“Craig Parshall is a rare breed: someone who is, mysteriously, both a great lawyer AND a great writer.”

STEVEN WALDMAN, founder, Beliefnet; former national editor, *US News and World Report*

“*The Empowered*, with visible demons and angels, is a read that could make you examine your own beliefs. Is the God of the Old and New Testament, who sent angels to fight an evil underworld of demonic beings, the same today as in the days of old? Does God have warrior angels fighting for us? Does he fight the evil of pornography and child trafficking through us? This book reminded me that God uses his people to fight his battles against evil. He is the same today, yesterday, and forever. Spiritual warfare? Yes, I believe.”

CONGRESSWOMAN LINDA SMITH, founder and president, Shared Hope International

“Craig Parshall’s new Trevor Black series is simply riveting. In *The Empowered* we have a great cast of characters, a fascinating plot, and a bombshell or two along the way. I am especially impressed by the informed theology that underlies the Trevor Black books. Parshall knows his stuff; there is no cheesy Hollywood nonsense. The novel illustrates in graphic and frightening ways the danger of evil and the peril that is around us. Highly recommended.”

CRAIG EVANS, professor of Christian origins, Houston Baptist University

The Occupied

“In the manner of Stephen King and Dean Koontz, Parshall pens a horrifying story of the unseen evils inherent in our society.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“*The Occupied* is a spiritual thriller that resurrects the lone-wolf hero and gives him a mission from God. This book is the answer for those seeking Christian alternatives to popular crime thrillers. A dash of the supernatural ups the ante, making for a grim and grisly string of murders in this first installment of the Trevor Black novels.”

FOREWORD MAGAZINE

“*The Occupied* is a well-paced supernatural mystery that builds layers into the mystery as it also strips them away. Parshall writes with just the right amount of suspense, allowing readers to sleep at night but making *The Occupied* the first thing they pick up in the morning.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“A gripping tale that exemplifies Ephesians 6:12: Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

WORLD MAGAZINE

“One of the greatest challenges for a writer is making the invisible world real. Craig Parshall has done exactly that. . . . If you're fascinated by the supernatural and how it exists in a moral universe, then this is the book for you.”

PHIL COOKE, filmmaker and author of *One Big Thing: Discovering What You Were Born to Do*

“Craig Parshall has combined gritty naturalism with believable supernaturalism to produce a real page-turner.”

WARREN SMITH, author and vice president, Colson Center for Christian Worldview

“In *The Occupied*, Craig Parshall takes us into the supernatural world for a thrilling ride that also educates us about the unseen realm. In the end we discover that it is crucial that we know who occupies us.”

KERBY ANDERSON, president, Probe Ministries; host, *Point of View* radio talk show

Other novels by Craig Parshall

“An enjoyable romp for legal thriller aficionados.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON TRIAL BY ORDEAL

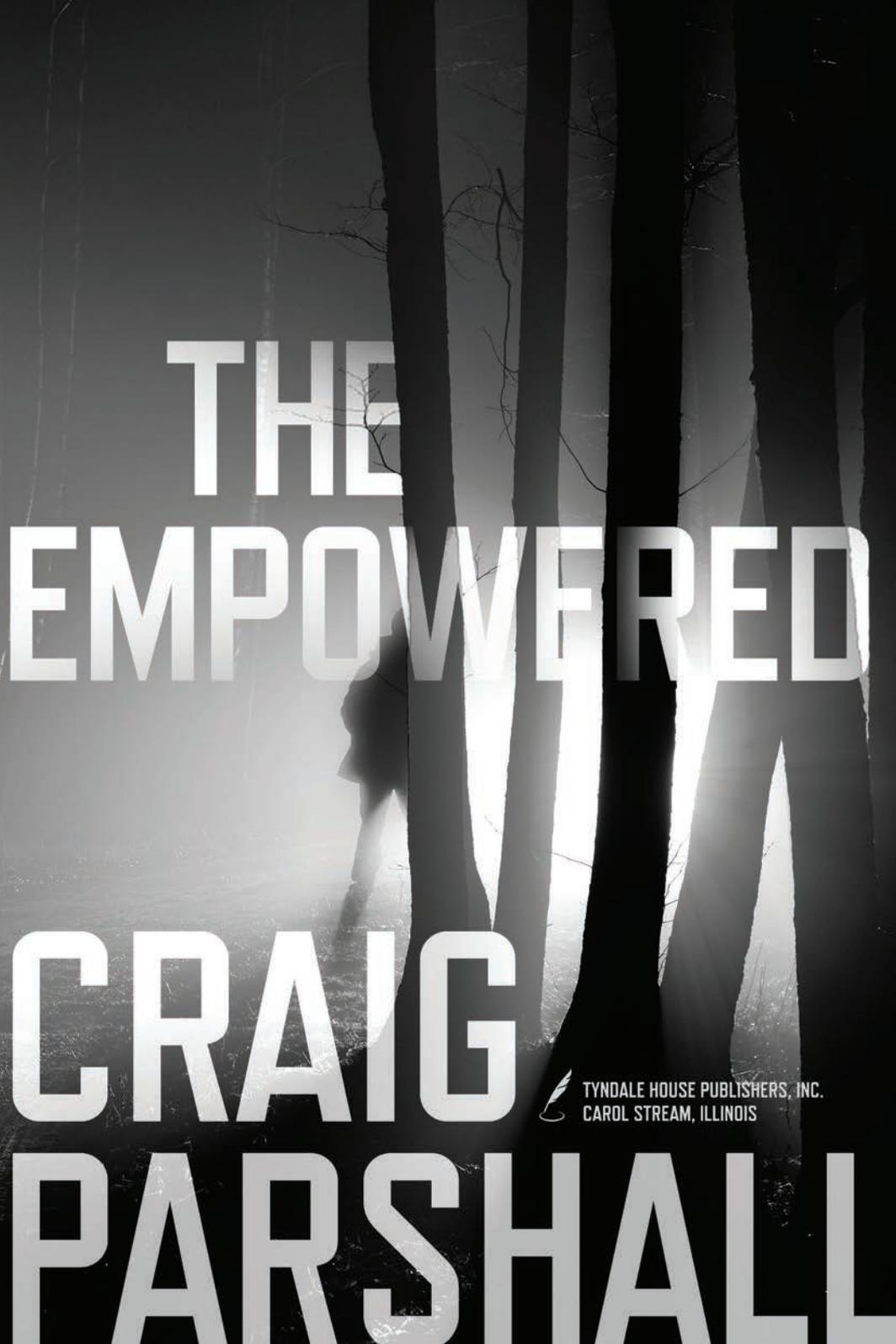
“I simply couldn’t put *Custody of the State* down! I can hardly wait for the next in the Chambers of Justice series. I’m addicted!”

DIANE S. PASSNO, author and senior vice president, Focus on the Family

“Fine Ironman-meets-the-Rapture style. . . . Quick pacing and a heart-pounding resolution lead to a dynamic scene of the afterlife and a cliff-hanger for the next book.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON BRINK OF CHAOS, cowritten with Tim LaHaye

THE EMPOWERED



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The Empowered

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The Empowered is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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PROLOGUE

I was frantic. I had burst through the ring of police and ignored their shouts for me to halt. But at that moment nothing mattered except the person who was at the top of the towering structure and my getting there before it was too late.

Then the race up the stairs, hundreds of them, my breath coming in explosive gasps as I spit out a desperate prayer—“*Dear God, I have to reach her in time.*” I knew what I would likely find if I failed: only the void she would leave behind after beginning her bone-shattering fall toward earth.

I was scrambling, taking steps two at a time, missing and tripping, as I tried to tear the image out of my head of what could happen—her descent from that terrifying height, spiraling downward with one long, wordless scream. Simultaneously, my mind was on fire thinking how this must be delighting the demoniac who had brought all of this to pass. The evil one I had pursued relentlessly, maybe even recklessly. The entrance to the top level was in front of me. I braced myself for the worst.

But as I neared the last concrete step, just before the summit,

where I hoped to stop this tragedy, my gut was seized by another possibility, nearly as horrible. That I was responsible. That my resolve to pursue the Jason Forester case and to unravel the evil forces behind that lawyer's death might have been the cause of everything.

I felt my heart banging in my chest. The feeling of suffocation. Drowning. Panic setting in.

Then I jolted out of my sleep.

In my restless slumber, the sheets of my bed had been wound over my face. I yanked them off. After rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I looked at the clock—3 a.m. The little window over my bed had been left open, and I could hear the roar of the ocean tide that was crashing against the beach a hundred feet from my cottage. I took a few deep breaths, still groggy, and said it out loud.

“It was a dream.”

But then a second later, the numbing realization as the memories smashed their way in.

No, not just a dream. It really happened. All of it.

1

TWO WEEKS EARLIER
OCRACOKE ISLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

Even at the beginning, when I first learned about the death of Washington lawyer Jason Forester from my friend Dick Valentine, I had that peculiar sense of mine that a supernatural force was behind it. Dick was a New York police detective. We still kept up our unique partnership even though it had been years since I left New York City.

On that particular day, I had just launched out in my fishing boat to the deep blue sea when the call came in from Dick. He shared a lawyer joke. I pushed back with a cop joke of my own. We laughed. Then Dick got down to business. He said he had a strange case involving the death of a government lawyer

he wanted to share with me. Once upon a time I had been a criminal defense attorney, so naturally I was all ears.

Dick told me everything he knew about the Jason Forester matter. He explained that on the day of his death, Forester, an assistant United States attorney for the District of Columbia, had been focused on a particular investigation he had been working for months. The target was a criminal enterprise as horrible as it was secretive. He had vowed to track it down and personally drag the bad guys to justice by the collar.

“Then, at one minute after six that evening, while most of the staff was packing up,” Dick said, “a secretary was trotting out of the building for the day but stopped and rapped on the door of Jason Forester’s office. She tossed a FedEx envelope on his desk. ‘This just arrived for you,’ she said. It was probably the last conversation anyone had with Forester before he died. At least that we know of.

“So, as far as we can tell, Forester was sitting there in his Washington, DC, office when he opened the envelope. It must have been only minutes later when his heart slammed to a halt. Fifteen minutes after that, the office cleaning crew wanders in and finds the corpse of Jason Forester. He was seated at his desk.”

From what Dick’s source told him, Forester had a look of wild horror on his face, like something you might expect on a Halloween mask.

“Except for a couple of pens and a blank legal pad, the FedEx envelope was the only thing on his desk. Jason Forester was still hanging on to the letter.”

Dick took a moment, then added, “It took two big paramedics to pry his fingers loose.”

I didn't wait for the punch line. I interrupted Dick and asked what they knew about the FedEx delivery.

"It was sent from some printing, mail, and express delivery shop in New Orleans. The sender's name and address on the package were fakes."

"Any security cameras in the store?"

"Nah. And as luck would have it, the staff couldn't recall much about the person who dropped it off, except that the guy paid cash for second-day delivery."

"Any investigation?"

"Sure," Dick said. "You'll never guess who headed it up. Vance Zaduck, Forester's boss. He's the head honcho as the US attorney for the District of Columbia. But the FBI lab didn't find anything on the letter or inside the envelope. You know, no anthrax. No toxins. So Zaduck reports there had been no foul play."

"What'd the letter say?"

"Death threat. Not unheard of in Forester's line of work. So Zaduck decided it was a hoax. Just happened to arrive at Forester's office with coincidental timing. Now, on the face of it, an unsuspecting mind could concede that Vance Zaduck had a point, because it turns out Forester had a medical history of cardiac arrhythmia. Autopsy confirmed it. So Zaduck concludes that Jason Forester died of 'natural causes.' Then kicks it up to the attorney general's office for the formal wrap-up. The word I'm getting is that the AG is simply going to rubber-stamp Zaduck's findings."

I knew there had to be more to the story, otherwise Dick wouldn't have bothered to bring me into it, and I told him that.

Dick said, “Yeah. There’s a backstory all right. An anonymous tipster called me and gave me all of this intel. That’s how I found out. Told me everything I just told you. With one more detail.”

“What’s that?”

“The tipster, someone I suspect to be reliable, told me that Forester’s demise was ‘death by voodoo.’ That’s a quote.”

Dick let that sink in, then asked, “What do you think?”

“Me?” I replied. “I’d file it under ‘possible death by supernatural causes. Further investigation needed.’ But that’s just me.”

“Thought so,” Dick said.

He didn’t push the matter. Not then.

A couple of days later, though, Dick called me again. About the same subject. Jason Forester, AUSA. The dead federal prosecutor.

When I picked up his call, Dick asked me, right out of the gate, “So, just wondering, is Trevor Black still chasing demons?”

Dick didn’t have to ask. He already knew the answer. Back when I was still collecting mail at my expensive penthouse in Manhattan, Dick took pity on my plight as an attorney in a mess of trouble and hired me as a consultant to his Manhattan police precinct.

Mind you, he hadn’t employed me to deal with the usual fare. Instead, I worked on a crime spree that had all the gruesome hallmarks of the supernatural. At first, Dick’s partners at the precinct treated me as a joke on two legs. But they stopped laughing when we caught the demon. I use the word *demon* in its literal sense. And now Dick Valentine does too.

Dick asked me if I remembered the details he had told me the last time we talked.

I hadn't forgotten, of course. How could I? Forester, the victim of voodoo.

"Well," he said, "any thoughts?"

I asked him a few questions. Like whether he had taped the conversation with the anonymous tipster or recognized the caller's voice.

"Nope," Dick said. "It came to my cell, not to my precinct desk. And the informer was using one of those voice distorters. Couldn't even tell whether it was a man or a woman."

Then I posed the obvious question. "Why 'death by voodoo'? I must be missing something."

"The person wouldn't elaborate on the voodoo part, except to say—and I quote—'connect the dots.' That's exactly what I was told."

"Where do I fit into this?"

"Well, it's about a dead lawyer, and you have a legal background. Or at least you used to, you know, before they yanked your license to practice law."

"Thanks for the memories."

Dick rolled on. "Also, Forester's death is spooky, and we both know that's your home turf. And then there's the fact that you and Forester's superior, US Attorney Vance Zaduck, have a history together."

Dick was right, of course. My dealings with Zaduck went all the way back to law school, where we were not only classmates, we were opponents in the year-end moot court case (which I won). After getting our law degrees, we faced off again in a bitter criminal case. I still remembered, with a touch of nausea, that messed-up case with Zaduck where Carter Collins—my

client, a promising young boxer—ended up going to prison, although Zaduck had to cover up some key evidence in order to win it.

“Any other reasons for sharing this with me?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Dick said. “I knew Jason Forester. He was a good prosecutor. Tough. Honest. Part of a joint organized-crime task force set up between Washington and New York, which is how I met him. He prosecuted some mob bosses at first, followed by a stint going after terrorists. Switched to child porn investigations against creeps who kidnap kids and use them in perverted videos. Forester was a legal hero in my book. Then came his unfortunate black magic demise. And whenever I hear about a case that makes my skin crawl, well, I naturally think of you.”

I took a moment. “Not sure. Was that a compliment?”

Dick chuckled. Then he got serious and added, “Trevor, if something from *the other side* was involved in Jason Forester’s death . . . you know, unseen forces, violent and nasty—your specialty—we both know that a routine Department of Justice investigation won’t be able to get to the bottom of it. Not in a million years.”

I needed to connect some dots of my own. “How do you know your unnamed caller was really an insider?”

“The caller rattled off the data on Jason Forester’s federal PIV smart card, along with his Social Security number, his date of birth, and the date he began work at the US attorney’s office. Everything checked out.”

“So why you?”

“Somehow the phone tipster knew I had a law enforcement connection with Forester, and the caller needed to tell someone

‘outside the Beltway.’ I asked why that was. The informant said there was a criminal investigation Forester was running, and it might have something to do with his death. That the caller didn’t know, quote, ‘who can be trusted on my side of the Potomac.’”

Dick Valentine ended the call by asking if I would look into the Jason Forester incident. He wondered if I could help the US attorney’s office to “see the light,” convincing them that this incident required a deeper look-see. I told him I’d think about it.

I knew that if I said yes to Dick, it would mean another matchup against Vance Zaduck. That could send me down a very embarrassing, very public waterslide. I had read recently in the *National Law Journal* that Zaduck was receiving serious consideration for a judicial appointment to the United States Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. That made him a rising star in the legal universe. The DC Court of Appeals is a prestigious bench. In fact, judges from that bench are frequently culled as possible nominees to the United States Supreme Court. No question about it: in recent years, Zaduck seemed to have the amazing knack of catching the wind at his back.

I, on the other hand, was a washed-up, ex-New York City criminal defense lawyer, disbarred for refusing to undergo psychiatric examination as a condition of saving my law license. Between me and Vance, guess who wins the credibility contest.

In the big picture, though, “credibility,” as attorneys use that term, has only limited utility, mostly in things like lawsuits, media debates, and Washington politics. When you’re doing combat with the powers of hell, “credibility” doesn’t help you much.