

OVER MY DEAD BODY

DAVE WARNER

ABOUT THE BOOK

Cryogenicist Dr Georgette Watson can bring frozen hamsters back to life. Now what she needs is a human body to confirm whether her technique is a game changer. When fate and family connections throw a body in her path, Georgette is granted her wish.

In New York City, with winter closing in, there's a killer is on the loose, slaying strangers who seem to have nothing in common. Is it simple good fortune that Georgette, who freelances for the NYPD, has just managed to revive the greatest detective of all time?

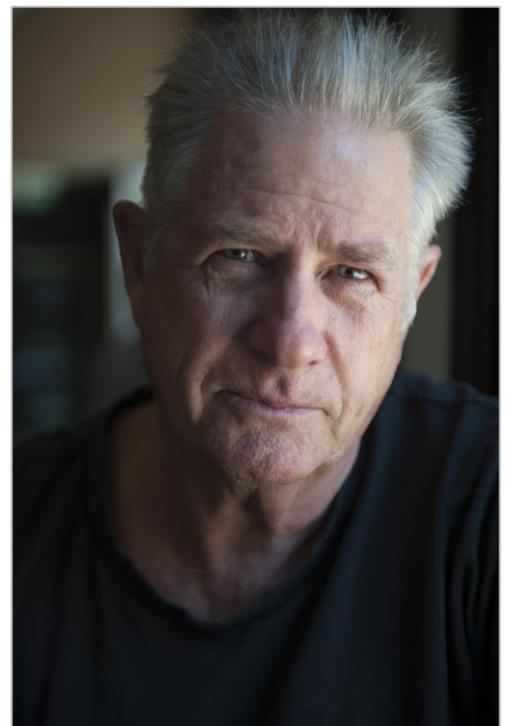
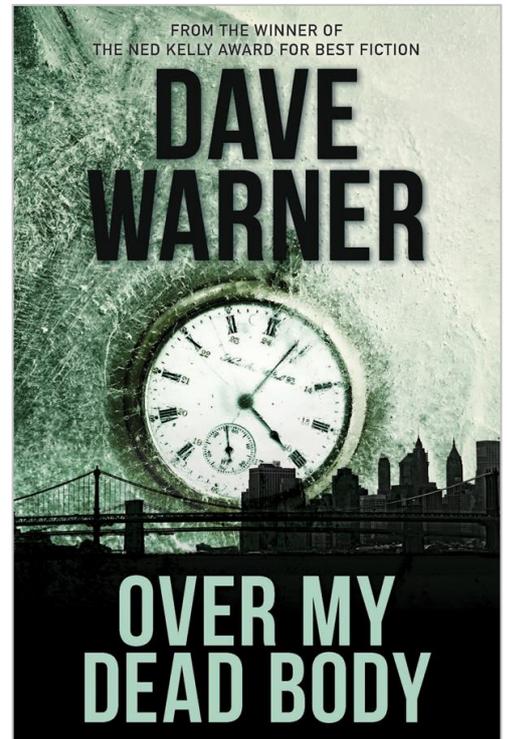
Will Holmes and Watson be able to crack the crimes in a world that has changed a lot in two hundred years, even if human nature has not?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Warner is an author, musician and screenwriter. His first novel, *City of Light*, won the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Fiction, and *Before it Breaks* (2015) the Ned Kelly Award for best Australian crime fiction. *Clear to the Horizon* (2017) features the lead characters from both these books, and his most recent crime novel is *River of Salt* (2019). He first came to national prominence in 1978 with his gold album *Mug's Game* and his band, Dave Warner's from the Suburbs. In 2017 he released his tenth album, *When*. He has been named a Western Australian State Living Treasure and has been inducted into the WAMi Rock'n'Roll of Renown.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Throughout the novel, Holmes fondly recalls cases he has solved, though these cases are Warner's own fiction. What 'rules' do we expect an author to play by when installing the character of Sherlock Holmes into their own work?
2. Are the skills of Sherlock Holmes still pertinent in the twenty-first century? To what extent is Sherlock Holmes 'superhuman', or is he just a clever chap?
3. How does Warner depart from any crime conventions in this novel, and if so, how does he blend his departure with the conventional?
4. How does Warner accommodate the conceit that the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes is actually 'real' (albeit in Warner's fictional world)?
5. How many plot lines exist in this book and how does the author deploy them to create his twists?
6. What do you make of the novel's structure? What difference does it make to be able to see the story from Sherlock Holmes's point of view? Why does the author introduce this particular viewpoint when he does?



7. What effect does it have to include the voice of the unknown predator and at what stage were you able to identify them?
8. What are the potential issues behind the science of cryonics (i.e. cryopreserving humans and animals with the intention of future revival)?
9. Can you see any moral or practical issues that might arise from reviving a person decades after their death?
10. In a crime novel where there are multiple plot lines, can the story accommodate only one psychopath?
11. What difference does it make to a crime novel when there is a personal connection between the investigator and the crime? How often does this occur in the crime novels that you have read?
12. *Over My Dead Body* riffs at times on the shifts in expectations between men and women and the way they relate to each other. What has changed between the time of Sherlock Holmes (Victorian England) and now? What has stayed the same?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

What is the allure of Sherlock Holmes to readers? Why do you think he has endured so long and assumed a life beyond the books of Arthur Conan Doyle?

To my knowledge, Sherlock Holmes was the first detective to become part of the public psyche of crime fiction, and like The Beatles in pop music, the first to break through will always hold a special place. But it's not just that Holmes was first – the idea of a super-brain, master-of-disguise and brilliant martial-arts master who is reserved and ascetic, is an alluring character. Holmes is like James Bond but smarter and monastic. Conan Doyle's use of the sidekick Watson as the instrument to relay the stories to us readers, is also a masterstroke. It means he can delay the solution to the puzzle because we're not truly in Holmes' head. These conventions introduced in Sherlock Holmes have persisted, and the characters of Holmes and Watson become models for many different types of crime fiction stories. When something works well, it naturally means both authors and readers will follow the lead.

What was the greatest challenge in bringing Sherlock Holmes into a contemporary NYC setting? Did you feel any responsibility in borrowing such a famous character?

Firstly, yes, I did feel a great deal of responsibility, especially when I conceived of the idea of bringing back the real Holmes with a contemporary female Watson. That was nearly twenty years ago and at the time there was not the plethora of Sherlock Holmes movies and TV series that followed the expiration of copyright. The biggest challenge in writing the book was what tone to strike, and what points of view to use.

I originally imagined this story as a movie. Now, in a movie, I could see lots of comic possibilities about bringing a Victorian Holmes into the present day, but I also felt that at its heart there had to be a great deal at stake. As much as I liked the idea of riffing on the sci-fi concept of Holmes coming back from the dead, I wanted to consider the reality of what it would mean to be a hundred and thirty years 'dead' and then brought back, and I also thought, that like any crime thriller, it should be scary in parts, with lots of jeopardy.

There are very few examples of this kind of hybrid crime thriller / comedy. In fact, I struggle to think of any books: they tend to be more comic (Janet Evanovich) or satirical (Carl Hiaasen) when humour is involved. The closest model I could think of was the film *Kindergarten Cop*. There are a lot of laughs in Arnie being a kindly teacher, but there is also a bad guy, and real threat. And romance. And in *Over My Dead Body*, I couldn't escape the temptation to dangle romance between Holmes and Watson.

This then set up the challenge of point of view. Who should be telling the story? Conan Doyle always lets Watson tell the story and, to a point, I thought that was fine. In fact, it saved the story getting bogged down in Holmes adjusting to his new world, as it would have to were it told entirely from his POV. However, I wanted to create something really unique in this story I wanted to go beyond the Conan-Doyle model and investigate Holmes from within. What would it be like to be brought back one hundred and thirty years on? How would he feel if his powers weren't as sharp as they once had been? What does Sherlock Holmes think about love? To me, this was the fertile valley the storyline opened up, and in the end, I decided it was best served to give Holmes' point of view quite late in the piece.

And of course, the whole time I was writing, I was aware that many Sherlock Holmes devotees would hate me for doing this, and many of my own staunch fans might not like this 'fantasy' story – but I just loved the story too much to be dissuaded. While the set-up is fantasy, I believe the humanity of the characters is there, the threat is there and it does qualify as a dinky-di crime thriller.

When it comes to putting together a crime novel, what comes first? Ideas, characters, story? Do you always know whodunnit when you start writing?

With me, what comes first varies from book to book. In a number of the books I had a general sense of the type of story I wanted to tell: e.g. in my first novel *City of Light*, I wanted to do a Chandler-style detective story about my home town, Perth, in an era that was particularly pivotal to both me and the city. In *Big Bad Blood* I wanted to do a hard-boiled, complex thriller that allowed me to roam through what in my brain was a weirdly romantic era of thuggery/vice/horse-racing: the early sixties. I followed James Ellroy's model of a cop-based thriller that touched on big, almost Shakespearean themes.

But in whodunnits I find the starting point is – what is the key to the mystery that will blow the reader away? In fact, most times I am not sure who the killer will be till the very end. In *River of Salt* I changed the killer three times.

In *Over My Dead Body* I slowly evolved the idea of the killer as the novel went along but the first thought was – what if Watson was a woman and the original Holmes somehow came back to work with her in 2020? Then I had to concern myself with the 'somehow'!



ABOVE: DAVE WARNER RESEARCHING ON LOCATION IN NEW YORK CITY.