

Ghost Town

Author Marcus Sakey sets his latest paranormal romance/thriller in Chicago. Here, a peak at the soon-to-be-released tome and the spots around town that inspire the scribe.



Marcus Sakey

"I DIDN'T PULL ANY PUNCHES ON THIS ONE," reveals Marcus Sakey, the best-selling, Chicago-based author of the new ghostly thriller "Afterlife." He's not kidding: The novel, which will be released July 18, features murder, cannibalism, passionate romance and a ghostly existential plane—and that's in the first 20 pages. Before it was even published, the story ignited a Hollywood bidding war that ended with Academy Award-winning director Ron Howard purchasing the film rights through his Imagine Entertainment studio. "That was an awfully good day," laughs Sakey.

This isn't the author's first taste of success. Fans know him as the creator of the "Brilliance" trilogy, which sold more than 1 million copies and was auctioned off to film studio Legendary Entertainment for a cool \$1 million.

While the "Brilliance"

film is still in process and "Afterlife" won't be hitting the silver screen for at least a couple years, Sakey's third novel, "Good People," has already made its Hollywood debut. Released in 2013, the film adaptation starred James Franco and Kate Hudson. It scored just 10 percent on Rotten Tomatos, although Sakey is quick to point out he wasn't involved in writing the screenplay. "To be honest at the end it didn't work out the way I hoped," he laments. But he's learned his lesson and will personally be penning the script for "Afterlife."

Set in Chicago, Sakey's ninth novel makes real-life locations around the city the settings of major scenes. Read closely and you'll recognize the Mariano's in West Loop, Wrigley Field and the luxe Langham Hotel as the main characters traverse the town.

The plot centers on FBI agent Will Brody and his boss

(and lover!) Claire McCoy as they hunt a serial sniper. But events spiral, Brody dies and his spirit must navigate a ghostly version of Chicago to get back to his love. "I imagined this existence, knowing that the woman I love and everything I love was so close, but that I'd never be able to touch them again," Sakey says. "And that feeling just sort of gutted me."

If that sounds spooky, it's because it is. Even suspense queen, fellow Chicagoan and author of "Gone Girl" Gillian Flynn raves the book is "thrilling and funny and disturbing and sharp as hell." While Sakey admits that he had fun creeping himself out imagining he was surrounded by ghosts, he wants to assure fans, "The goal is to cost you some sleep, but hopefully because you're reading, not because you can't sleep anymore."

INSPIRING LOCALES

Sakey spills his personal places to relax, refuel and reinvigorate his creativity

Harold Washington Library

"I love the exterior architecture, the garish colors and the big gargoyles," he says. "My personal favorite spot is on the 9th floor, the Winter Garden. It's a perfect place to read, write or think. There's rarely anyone up there." 400 S. State St. 312.747.4300, chipublib.org

Slurping Turtle

"Let the steam warm you up and suck down noodles until you can't move," laughs Sakey. "I like the hakata tonkotsu." 116 W. Hubbard St. 312.464.0466, slurpingturtle.com

Le Colonial

It's a hard place to beat for a romantic spot. You've got to ask to sit upstairs on the veranda," he recommends. "Come hungry and order a couple things." 937 N. Rush St. 312.255.0088, lecolonialchicago.com



The Winter Garden



Ramen at Slurping Turtle



Le Colonial