

A conversation about **SHOOT TO THRILL**

with **PATRICIA LAMBRECHT AND TRACI LAMBRECHT**,
the mother-daughter writing team known as
P.J. TRACY

1. How did you conceive of the idea for this fifth Monkeewrench novel, *Shoot to Thrill*?

We always take our cues from what's going on in the real world and extrapolate from there (going to the dark side, of course). Over the years, we've watched as digital technology has improved at the speed of light, and we knew without question that such a powerful and useful tool would ultimately be exploited by not-very-nice people to do not-very-nice things. Throw into the mix the increasingly viral nature of the web and society's obsession with celebrity, and suddenly we had more scenarios and story lines than we could process.

2. *Shoot to Thrill* is a mystery about a network of crime forged over the Internet. But as you note in the Introduction, the Internet changed dramatically from the time you started the book to when you completed it a few years later. How did the Internet change, and how did these changes affect the book?

The internet didn't necessarily change as much as society did in response to the internet. We think of the internet as a crucible where all sorts of chemical reactions are possible, both good and bad. What strikes us most is the impersonal nature of the web, and the oddly disconnected communities it engenders. Relationships of all kinds are forged, bonds are cemented, conversations are conducted ad infinitum, but in the end, it's not real human interaction. You're not engaging face-to-face, you're just throwing out things into the ether, as an imaginary person, to an imaginary person. There's no real sense of moral imperative or personal accountability for what you say or how you impact other people; and no real-life or real-time consequences associated with your actions. That is a recipe for disaster.

3. The book brings up some important questions about the nature of the Web and its powerful influence on society, as it instantly brings together individuals from across the country and the world. What are your personal views on the Internet, and on the global interconnectedness it allows?

The internet is great. But inevitably, some people who use it are not. Technology is a Pandora's Box and always has been, and once it's open, it is what it is, for better or for worse. There will always be bad protoplasm out there exploiting technology to commit nefarious deeds, whether it's via the internet or an airliner.

4. Do you believe the Web should be more heavily monitored than it is now? Are there cautionary measures that you would like to see taken, either on the part of servers, or the users?

That's dicey territory, increasing web monitoring without stomping all over the First Amendment. We're not sure that's possible or even wise. Overall, the servers do a good job, considering the volume of data they're dealing with, and their screening capabilities are improving all the time. Users need to step up to the plate too, and realize that they have a personal and moral responsibility to help keep the web safe. How many of us have seen terrible things on the web that make us uncomfortable, and yet we never report it, or even give it a second thought once it's off our screen? In the end, society must police itself. That's what morality is.

5. Whether you're describing police procedure or highly advanced anti-crime software, the book always feels authentic and convincing. How much research was required for this book? What were your sources?

In keeping with the theme of the Monkeewrench series, we always do a lot of research on the internet. We do vet some of the technical and procedural content with professionals, but we never give up our sources!

6. From computer geeks, to FBI agents, to cold-blooded killers, you always manage to create characters that are genuine, nuanced, and believable. How are you able to get inside the heads of such disparate characters?

Insanity and wine.

Are any of your characters inspired by people you know in real life?

Anantanand Rambachan and Annie Belinsky.

7. As a mother-daughter writing team, what is your process of writing together?

We've never been able to properly analyze our collaboration process, especially since it's always in flux. In fact, we're kind of afraid to even ponder such a thing.

8. As *USA Today* wrote of your previous novel, “Most collaborative novels are about as well stitched together as an autopsied corpse; *Monkeewrench* is a rare exception, sewn as seamlessly as the work of a master tailor.” How do you work to establish such cohesion and seamlessness in your novels, and in *Shoot to Thrill* in particular?

Honestly, having a unified voice as two writers isn't a conscious process, it's a matter of shedding yourself entirely and fully becoming the characters you're writing about. Essentially, it's method acting without make-up or a stage.

9. As a writing duo, you have written numerous books together. But the *Monkeewrench* series has earned the greatest following—garnering fantastic reviews and an avid fan base, and selling over a million copies. Why do you think people have responded so well to this series?

Some readers like to laugh, and we think we're pretty funny. Some people like to be frightened, and we know we're pretty frightening. And at least two of our readers are just flat-out sick psychopaths. But enough about our family.

10. Your *Monkeewrench* novels have been compared to the work of John Sanford and Harlan Coben. Who have been your influences and inspirations?

Everybody we've ever read, fiction and non-fiction alike, is an inspiration and an influence, as is everything we observe in day-to-day life. We're vigilant and thirsty sponges, and watching people is probably the greatest inspiration of all. That, and *South Park*.

11. In a note to the reader at the front of the book, you write that *Shoot to Thrill* is “the most rewarding book we've ever written.” What made it so rewarding?

As we were writing the book, the things we had imagined for a work of fiction actually began happening. Literally, we would write a new scene, and a few days later, it would show up on the news. So our greatest reward was learning that we controlled the world with our thoughts. We are now determined to start using these powers for good.

12. What can we expect next from the *Monkeewrench* crew?

They haven't told us yet.