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An interview with Mike Angley, award-winning author of the Child Finder Trilogy

As a retired Air Force officer, what made you decide to write novels following your first career?

“I’ve always loved to write, but I postponed my long-term goals while I pursued my Air Force career. In hindsight, I think that was a good thing because it allowed me to focus on my writing with the precision it needed. I retired as a Colonel having spent 25 years as a Special Agent with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, or OSI for short. The OSI is the Air Force version of NCIS, so I had plenty of rich experiences to inspire my writing, from running felony-level criminal investigations, as well as counterintelligence and counterterrorism operations around the world. In my last assignment, I was the Commander of OSI Region 8, Air Force Space Command. Among the many hats I wore, I was the chief architect of spaced-oriented counterintelligence operations. I like to tell people, ‘If it entered or exited Earth’s atmosphere, then I had a dog in the fight!’”

What is the *Child Finder Trilogy* about?

“The trilogy is a thriller series with paranormal and religious edges. It features a protagonist, Air Force Special Agent Patrick S. O’Donnell, who is as tough as 24’s Jack Bauer, but with the endearing, family-values heart of 7th Heaven’s Eric Camden. He’s an early-thirties Air Force Major assigned to the Pentagon when the 9/11 terrorist attacks take place.

“In the debut novel, *Child Finder*, Agent O’Donnell’s haunting dreams about missing children reveal a hidden psychic gift which the government eagerly exploits, drawing him into a Top Secret program to find missing kids. But to make matters complicated, Uncle Sam has other ideas in mind for his unique paranormal talents...after all, there is a War on Terror underway. One thing’s for sure—ever since joining this new, secret community, he is surrounded by murder, and the very real threat of harm to his own family!”

And the second book?

“*Child Finder: Resurrection* launched in November 2009. It has been a year and a half since Agent O’Donnell left the secret child rescue program after it went horribly off-track, resulting in murder and endangering his own family. And just when he thinks he’s comfortably put this painful past behind him, he receives a call from his mentor. The murky, shadowy Top Secret community where he once was center-stage has been revised, revamped, resurrected!

“The government needs his psychic skills more than ever. A sick, twisted, menacing child killer is on the loose, and no one but Pat can stop him. But Agent O’Donnell soon discovers this new nemesis is more than he bargained for. Nothing can prepare him for the psychotic genius he must fight...and the life and death cat-and-mouse game that entraps him! Once again, Pat must

call upon his faith and strong spiritual connection with God to sustain and guide him, especially during his darkest hours as he battles...pure evil.”

When will the third and final story publish, and what happens in it?

“*Child Finder: Revelation* (to publish circa March 2011), is the grand finale, so to speak. Many people believe the saying, ‘The truth is out *there*.’ But as my website says, ‘The truth is in *here*, and it’s not what you think!’ The twin daughters of the U.S. Ambassador to Korea are abducted during a terrorist attack in Seoul that threatens to touch off a second Korean War. The President of the United States picks Patrick O’Donnell – personally – to find and rescue them. As he carries out this dangerous mission, he is surrounded by a mystery he cannot solve. The Vatican is directly involved in the situation, and even his trusted mentor seems to be hiding something from him. What he discovers about the girls’ abduction — especially *where* they have been taken — shocks the foundation of international relations. But more intriguing is what makes these particular children so special. What O’Donnell learns about them, and *himself*, involves sensitive government secrets he regrets ever knowing. These new revelations will rock his faith, his concept of life, and his understanding of his place in the universe.”

How did you develop the character of your protagonist?

“I took a chance. I realized that most protagonists in this genre are rough and tough, and rarely show a soft side. I wanted both! Pat is a family man (has two small children), a deeply-faithful Christian, happily-married, and has an incredibly strong moral/ethical compass. At the same time, he is a ‘kick-ass’ investigator and counterterrorism operator. These contrasts come into play as he enters this Top Secret program – he finds himself pulled in many directions where he must make tough moral/ethical decisions (is everything he is asked to do actually legal?). He wants to save kids, but at what price? I also used his faith for contrast as well. He is a man who grew up with an unfulfilled sense of calling – is it the psychic gift and rescue of children? He’s not sure, so he grapples with what it all means.”

Please talk more about your military career.

“I retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2007 at the rank of Colonel. I was a career OSI Special Agent, and served on thirteen different assignments throughout the world. Among these were five tours as a Commander of different units, to include two squadrons and a wing.

“I enjoyed an exciting and dangerous career, experiencing all things imaginable as a criminal investigator and a counterintelligence and counterterrorism operator. Following the 1996 Khobar Towers terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia, I was dispatched to command all OSI units throughout the Middle East, with responsibility for 23 countries. During my tenure my teams and I effectively neutralized numerous terrorist threats to U.S. forces in the region, to include an imminent threat to senior Department of Defense officials. In 2004, I commanded all OSI units in South Korea where we countered a classified target in Seoul. I was honored when the President of South Korea presented me with a Presidential Citation and medal, and the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) Commissioner decorated me with the KNPA Medal of Cooperation.

“Earlier in my career, while commanding an OSI unit in northern Japan, I conducted an operation that effectively blocked a KGB agent’s efforts to steal critical U.S. technology, and

thereby stymied Soviet military advances for years. In 1999, I was the Chief of Counterintelligence within the Directorate of Intelligence, U.S. Strategic Command. My office competed for the prestigious Killian Award, a White House level honor that annually recognizes the very best intelligence unit in the entire U.S. government. We came in as first runner-up for this significant honor!”

Did any of your experiences in law enforcement factor in to the *Trilogy* plot at all?

“Generically, yes. The main reason I decided on this concept for the series was because of the number of crimes against children I worked in the Air Force. Every one of them literally broke my heart, and as a dad myself, it made it even tougher on me. In some respects, *Child Finder* is a kind of catharsis, enabling me to save some kids even if fictional. Of course, my experiences at Air Force Space Command influenced me. I was exposed to things I thought occurred only in science fiction movies, and some things I don’t think anyone’s crafted into a good story yet (wink). I embrace technology in my books as a result of these esoteric experiences.”

Obviously Pat O’Donnell stars in all three books, but what about other characters? Will any of them migrate over to the other two books?

“Pat would be nowhere without his team! His career mentor, Colonel John Helmsley, accompanies him on his journeys, as well as the team psychiatrist, Dr. Woodrow ‘Woody’ Davis.”

When *Child Finder* debuted it received a glowing review from the *Library Journal*, and earned placement on its Summer Reads List. Were you nervous about the review process?

“VERY nervous! As a debut author, I had zero experience with reviews until then. While everyone involved in my writing projects has been supportive and positive, getting my first impartial review flooded my gut with butterflies.”

What about the awards your debut novels have received?

“I am thrilled that *Child Finder* won the Silver Medal for fiction in the 2009 Military Writers Society of America’s Annual Awards program. My second novel also won a Silver Medal for Fiction from the MWSA in the 2010 awards program, and it also received a Fiction Award from the Public Safety Writers Association in 2010. These are all huge honors for me, and my association with the professionals in both MWSA and PSWA has been a whole lot of fun.”

What do you want readers of your books to walk away with?

“Inspiration. Plain and simple, I want them to be inspired by my protagonist and his exceptional moral grounding. I want them inspired by his love of wife and children, his love of God, his dedication and devotion to his country. I want readers to believe again in the goodness of people. And with regard to *Child Finder: Revelation*, I want them to challenge everything they have come so comfortably to believe about life.”

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