



J.R. SANDERS

AUTHOR

CONTACT



+951-675-4917



jr@jrsanders.com



jrsanders.com



linktr.ee/jrsanders



facebook.com/authorjrs



instagram.com/jrsanderswest

Available for interviews
and book signings.

RECENT BOOKS

Bring the Night: A Nate Ross Novel
2023

Dead-Bang Fall: A Nate Ross Novel
2022

Stardust Trail: A Nate Ross Novel
2020

CONTENTS

- Page 2, 3: Photos/Images
- Pages 4, 5: Book Reviews
- Pages 6-8: One-Sheets
- Pages 9-12: Sample Questions

BIO

J.R. Sanders is an award-winning Southern California writer, whose nonfiction frequently appears in law enforcement and Old West history magazines. His most recent novel, *Bring the Night*, is the third in the series featuring Los Angeles private investigator Nate Ross.

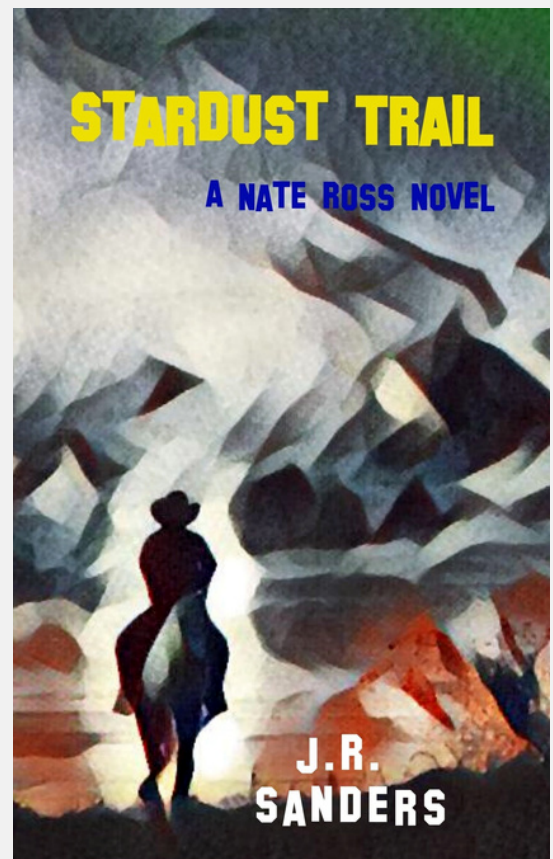
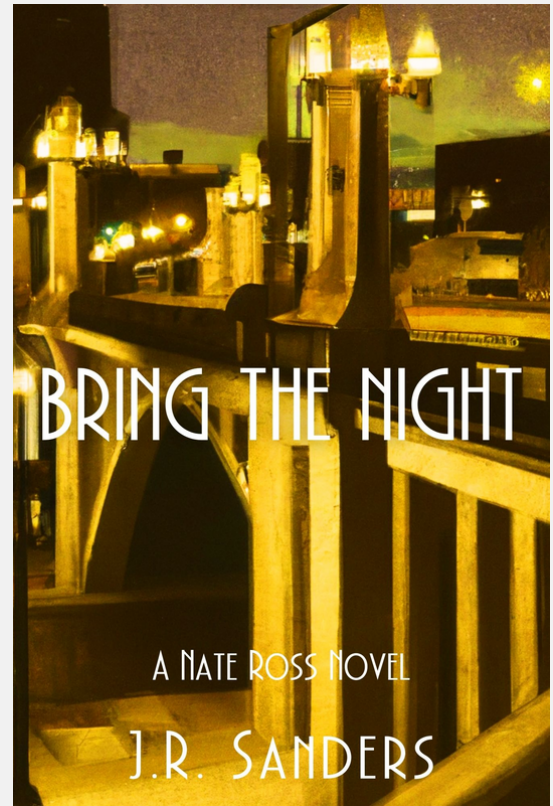
MEMBERSHIPS

- Western Writers of America
- Private Eye Writers of America
- International Thriller Writers
- Western Fictioneers
- American Crime Writers League

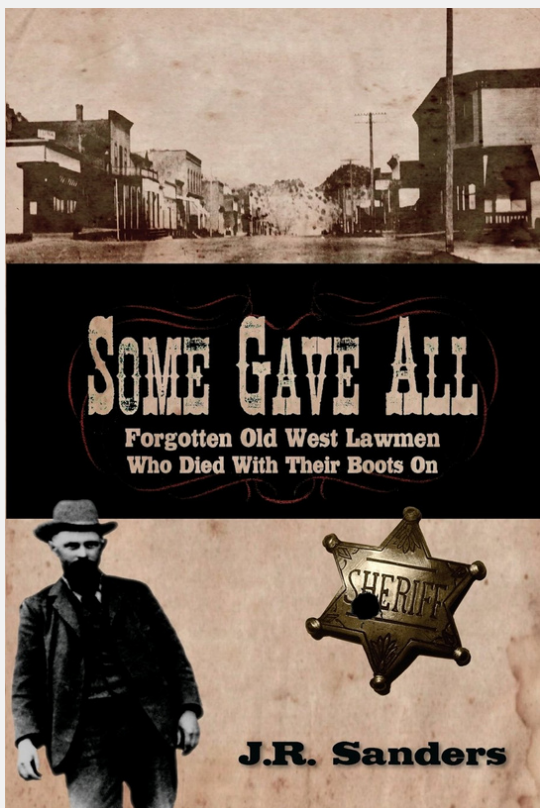
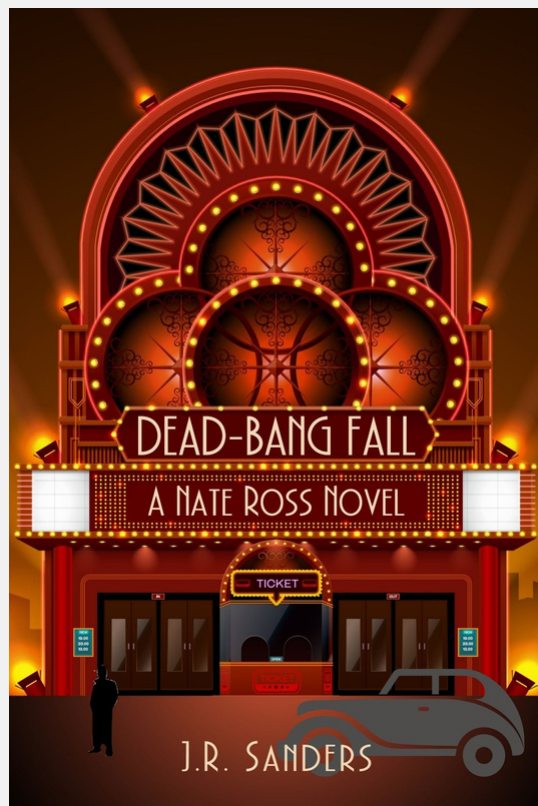
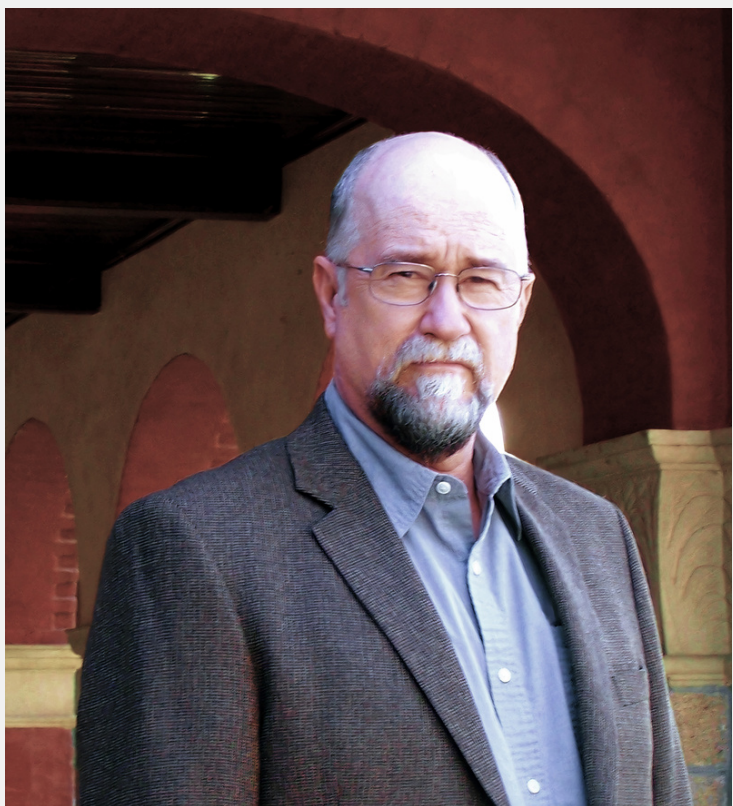
AWARDS

- Spur Award Finalist - Western Writers of America (2021) for *Stardust Trail*
- Silver Falchion Award Finalist - Killer Nashville (2021) for *Stardust Trail*
- Nonfiction Finalist - New Mexico-AZ Book Awards (2014) for *Some Gave All*
- Young Readers Finalist - New Mexico-AZ Book Awards (2012) for *The Littlest Wrangler*
- Third Prize, Children's Literature - Arizona Authors Association for *The Littlest Wrangler*

PHOTOS/IMAGES
(Larger files on request)



PHOTOS/IMAGES
(Larger files on request)



REVIEWS

Western Ways Magazine

International Western Music Association

Winter 2022

Reed's Reading

Recommendations & Book Reviews

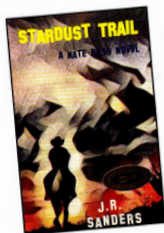


Ollie Reed, Jr.

To have your book reviewed by Ollie, send a copy to: Ollie Reed, Jr., P.O. Box 2381, Corrales, N.M. 87048 or contact him at: olreed.com@gmail.com

Crime fiction with a Western setting is a fixture in today's popular literature. I think you can go back to 1970 when "The Blessing Way," the first of author Tony Hillerman's bestselling Navajo Tribal Police mysteries, was published. The books reviewed in this month's column – one a novel, the other a collection of long stories – are examples of a Western whodunit genre that is alive and thriving.

J.R. SANDERS Stardust Trail



I got the feeling the author had taken my order and written this book just for me. I'm a big fan of those hardboiled, wise-cracking private detectives made popular

by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler back in the 1930s and '40s. I love B Western films starring the likes of Bob Steele, Tim McCoy, Sunset Carson and Johnny Mack Brown. And, of course, I'm big time into Western music. This novel, a finalist for the Western Writers of America 2021 Spur Award for historical novel, has all of that.

Nate Ross is a private detective in 1938 Los Angeles. He used to be with the sheriff's department, but he got run out of there because he testified against crooked deputies, betrayed the brotherhood. Most cops don't like him for that, but he don't like them right back. He's tough, and he talks and thinks in Sam Spade parlance without making it sound like parody. "I knew places like this, and the people who lived in them. Nothing in common but water-stained ceilings and broken dreams."

Early on, Ross rescues and returns a "kidnapped" dummy that belongs to ventriloquist and Western movie comic sidekick Max Terhune, earning him points with Republic Pictures. Soon Republic hires him to find out who is trying to sabotage the filming of a Western titled "Stardust Trail."

Next thing you know he is involved in murder, a decades-old train robbery and the life of Val, the prettiest part of a Western music trio called The Cady Sisters. The Cady Sisters perform at the Hackamore Club, where a lot of the cowboys who work as wranglers, stuntmen and extras on B Westerns hang out. John Wayne hangs out there, too. He's still making "Three Mesquiteers" movies but is about to get his big break in John Ford's "Stagecoach."

Wayne also happens to be an old high school buddy of Ross and becomes a major player in this novel, riding to the rescue at one point.

The plot has more twists than a snorty bronc, taking you through the world of low-budget Westerns and lowlife hoods, down mean streets and into rugged canyons. It's a wild ride but a fun one all the way.

("Stardust Trail," 9781947915503; paperback, 208 pages; \$16.95; Level Best Books; available at amazon.com, Walmart.com, bookshop.org, Barnes & Noble and other bookstores.)

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J.R. SANDERS

Stardust Trail: A Nate Ross Novel

Level Best Books/Historia
Paperback, 208 pages, \$16.95
LevelBestBooks.us

Who would guess that behind the scenes of a B-movie Western a real-life murder would take place? But that is just what private investigator Nate Ross gets mixed up in when he is hired in 1938 to find the missing screenwriter of the movie *Stardust Trail*. Somebody doesn't want the movie made, and Ross finds a trail that leads back 40 years to another murder. The author adds an entertaining crime story to a category popular today.

— Lynn Bueling

Wild West Magazine

August 2014



Some Gave All: Forgotten Old West Lawmen Who Died With Their Boots On, by J.R. Sanders, Moonlight Mesa Associates, Wickenburg, Ariz., 2013, \$19.95.

The American West has added a healthy helping of new mythology to that of other eras, much of it personifying the struggle between good and evil in the form of two men or more squaring off in a dusty street to determine whether law and order will prevail. Bad guys get their just desserts, good guys die martyrs' deaths; a lucky handful of both are remembered by posterity and have their exploits replayed, usually in distorted form, on the large or small screen.

In *Some Gave All* J.R. Sanders focuses on lawmen who also fell martyr to their sense of civic duty but who never obtained national fame. Delving into the still-available newspapers and documentation of the times, he presents the lives and violent times of 10 peace officers and the equally diverse rogues gallery of lawbreakers who cut these lawmen's careers short between 1879 and 1910. As *Wild West* Editor Gregory Lalire writes in the foreword, Sanders "tells these stories with flair, bringing out the drama in the lives and deaths of some of the countless Western lawmen worth knowing."

Such is the comprehensive nature of Sanders' storytelling that several chapters call to mind a Wild West version of the contemporary television show *Law and Order*. After the background and buildup leading to the crime, he pursues the aftermath—which, if the killer is taken alive, transfers the action into the courtroom, where one must read on to learn his ultimate fate—whether dangling at the end of a rope, getting away with murder or somewhere between these two extremes.

The lawmen profiled in this book were courageous but only human, each having to make decisions that didn't always pan out. In 1885 U.S. Marshal Harrington Lee "Hal" Gosling let his sense of decency get the better of prudence when he accompanied convicted train robbers James B. Pitts and Charlie Yeager on their way

from Austin, Texas, to the San Antonio Jail with some of their female relatives in tow—a decision that cost him his life and those of two others. More tragic was what occurred on July 19, 1898, when the law trapped a violently disturbed explosives worker named Quong Ng Chong in the powder magazine of the Western Fuse and Explosives Co., just outside of Oakland, and tried to talk him out. The outcome was felt beyond San Francisco, and the body count included four deputy sheriffs and a constable, still the greatest single loss of law enforcement lives in California history.

Sanders' stories may not always have the neat symmetry of one's favorite traditional Western, but they do illustrate the violent psyches that pervaded the West even as it was transitioning into the 20th century. The names here may not be as familiar or catchy as Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok or Bat Masterson, among the biggest names in Western mythology. But the true grit displayed by the protagonists in *Some Gave All* should provide enough real-life drama to interest any aficionado and prove that truth played straight can hold up alongside any fiction

Jon Guttman

Western Ways Magazine

International Western Music Association

Fall 2011

Reviews

- BOOK REVIEW -

J. R. SANDERS

The Littlest Wrangler



J.R. Sanders' book adapts and fleshes out the story and earlier history of Jack Thorp's famous *Little Joe The Wrangler*...only this time things end happily!

It's aimed at ages 8-12 and deservedly won a prize in the Arizona Authors Association's Literary Contest & Book Awards. *The Littlest Wrangler* has downloadable workbook questions available about the

story and the genuine cowboyin' techniques portrayed. Included are art opportunities for the kids, puzzles using facts of the story and a copy of the Code Of The West. Rule #8 says to "talk less and say more." Sanders took that advice and didn't waste words. His narrative is vividly direct and his character dialog is crisp. It rings true from beginning to end and should intrigue young readers about this curious Cowboy life we celebrate.

I highly recommend throwing a lasso around *The Littlest Wrangler* and getting into the hands of young folks you'd like to see begin to "get it." Eighty pages.

Book (softcover): \$12.95 from Moonlight Mesa Associates, 18620 Moonlight Mesa Road, Wickenburg, AZ 85390 or online through www.moonlightmesaassociates.com with workbook materials through www.jrsanders.com — Rick Huff

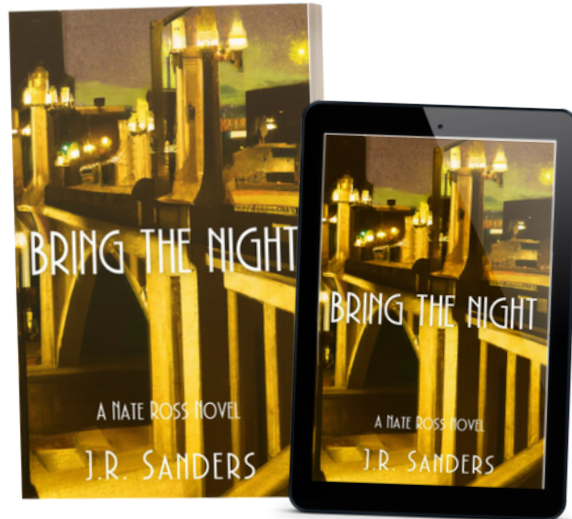


"Suicide was all the rage in L.A. the summer of '39."

When an oddball sister and brother hire him to find out if their father's suicide was suicide, private investigator Nate Ross figures he's in for an easy job. That is, until he discovers that the evidence doesn't add up and the cops - who are strangely cooperative - have rubber-stamped the case and filed it away.

Soon Nate's dealing with crooks on the lam, dodging local bigwigs and shady lawyers, and chasing a clear-cut case of murder. Meanwhile, he wrestles with a conflict of interest as he's forced to investigate his own client.

The more threads he pulls, the more things threaten to unravel completely. But with the help of old sidekicks, and a couple of new ones, Nate may get to the truth first. If he doesn't die trying.



Bring the Night



Author: J.R. Sanders

Publisher: Level Best Books/Historia

Genre: Crime/mystery/hardboiled

Format: Paperback, 172 pages

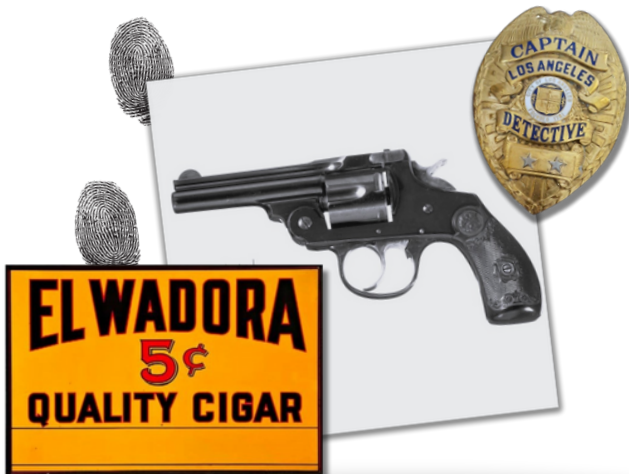
Other Formats: Kindle

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978-168512-245-4 (Kindle)

Distributed by: Ingram



J.R. Sanders is a native Midwesterner and a longtime denizen of the L.A. suburbs. He currently lives in Southern California with his wife, Rose, and rescue dogs Ruby and Marlowe.

His first Nate Ross novel, *Stardust Trail*, was a 2021 Spur Awards Finalist for Best Historical Novel and Silver Falchion Award Finalist for Best Investigator.



To contact J.R. Sanders;

email: jr@jrsanders.com

phone: 951-675-4917

website: jrsanders.com





P.I. Nate Ross's latest case, a penny-ante theft caper, turns deadly when one of the miscreants is murdered and Nate's the prime witness. It turns more complicated when the number one suspect, a former friend and disgraced colleague, shows up asking for Nate's help, only to vanish again. Nate's forced to confront more than one ghost from his past as his struggle to prove his on-the-lam client's innocence brings him up against hostile cops, a pair of rolling assassins, film pirates, mobsters, and a girl who may need his help or may be playing him for a chump.



Dead-Bang Fall

Author: J.R. Sanders

Publisher: Level Best Books/Historia

Publication Date: April 5, 2022

Genre: Crime/mystery/hardboiled

Format: Paperback, 168 pages

Other Formats: Kindle

Price: \$16.95 paper/ \$5.99 Kindle

ISBN: 978-1-68512-094-8 (paper)

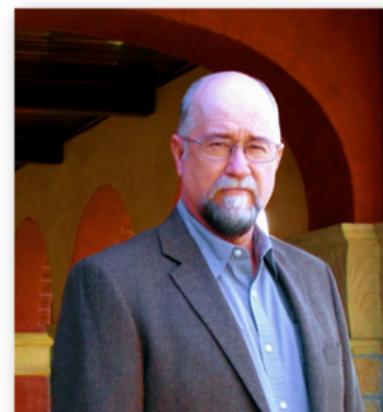
978-1-68512-095-5 (Kindle)

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STARDUST TRAIL

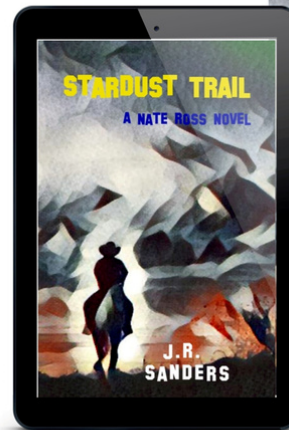
A NATE ROSS NOVEL

J.R. Sanders

In the spring of 1938, L.A. private investigator Nate Ross searches for an alcoholic screenwriter whose absence is stalling production on Republic Pictures' latest Western. When the missing rummy turns up dead, Nate's plunged into the world of B-movie cowboys as he follows a twisted trail of murder and sabotage leading back nearly forty years to a bloody, real-life, "wild West" crime.



J.R. Sanders is a native Midwesterner and a longtime denizen of the L.A. suburbs. He lives in Southern California with his wife, Rose, and their rescue dogs, Ruby and Marlowe. His previous books include *Some Gave All: Forgotten Old West Lawmen Who Died With Their Boots On*.



Stardust Trail



Author: J.R. Sanders

Publisher: Level Best Books/Historia

Pub. date: March, 2020

Genre: Crime/mystery

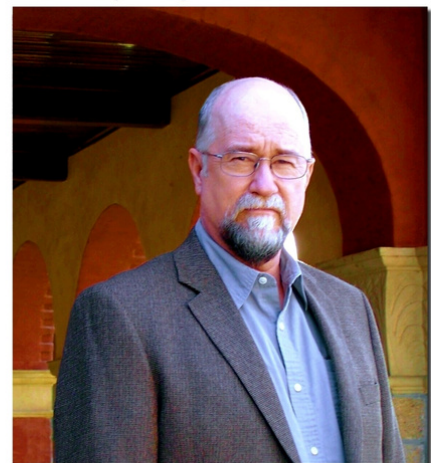
Format: Paperback, 208 pages

Other formats: Kindle

Price: \$16.95 paper / \$5.95 Kindle

ISBN: 978-1-947915-50-3 (paperback)
978-1-0878-7087-8 (Kindle)

Distributed by: Ingram



To contact J.R. Sanders:

email: jr@jrsanders.com

phone: 951-675-4917

Sample Interview Questions

What was your inspiration for Stardust Trail?

I wanted to write a traditional detective novel but give it a twist. One day I was listening to the music of Dave Stamey, one of the best Western singers/songwriters out there today. In the liner notes for one of his CDs he mentions the Gower Gulch cowboys of old Hollywood, very much a thing in the 1930s. That got me to thinking about setting my fictional private eye story in the world of those B-Western bit players, many of whom had been actual working cowboys and rodeo riders. A song called Cowboy Moon on that same CD has a particularly B-Western sound, sort of Dave's tribute to those Gene Autry/Roy Rogers singing cowboy pictures. I liked it so much I used the title for a song the Cady sisters perform in Stardust Trail's eponymous Republic film. Sort of my tribute to Dave's tribute.

What sort of research do you do for your novels?

I read anything I can lay hands on that deals with L.A. - particularly Hollywood - in the 30s. For Stardust Trail I looked for stuff that dealt particularly with Western films of that time - the Western stars, day players, biographies of John Wayne, histories of Republic Pictures, etc. I pore through civic and criminal histories of L.A., contemporary newspaper stories, old photos. I visit the locations - those that are still around - drive the terrain. Esoteric sources are helpful - road maps, matchbooks, criminal law texts. A particular favorite is Los Angeles: A Guide to the City and Its Environs, a WPA guide written in the mid-30s. It's an almanac of everything L.A. - businesses, tourist haunts, driving routes, the movie trade, nightlife. I spent - could still spend - hours just going through it at random and soaking up 1930s Los Angeles through my fingertips.

What prompted you to introduce John Wayne as a character in Stardust Trail? What challenges did that present?

With the Stagecoach subplot, I felt almost obligated to introduce John Wayne into the story in some way. And that in itself would be interesting, I thought, because at that point in his career he hadn't yet become the iconic figure we know but was still much more Duke Morrison than John Wayne. But I wanted his part to be organic, as opposed to a gratuitous "Hey, here's John Wayne" sort of walk-on. I'd originally had Nate growing up in Pasadena, but when it occurred to me that he and Duke would be about the same age, I decided to nudge Nate a little west to Glendale (where John Wayne actually did go to high school) and make them old classmates.

It's intimidating tackling a character as well known, with such a defined image and devout following, as John Wayne. I hope by portraying him at an earlier time in his public life I've given readers and Duke fans a different glimpse of him than they might expect, but one that's still true to the man we remember. I hope I've done him, and them, justice.

Was Elmer Sneezeweed ever really “kidnapped”?

The Autry Museum in L.A. has Elmer on display. Years ago, a placard next to him made mention that he'd once been stolen and held for ransom. It didn't say more, and I don't know more about it than that and am not even sure that I want to. I doubt it happened at all in the way I portray it, but I wish it had.

What places/characters/events in the novels are real?

Most of the places, some of the events, and none of the main characters. There was a Gotham Deli, Nate's go-to, though they weren't especially famous for their pastrami. Roasted chicken seemed to be more of a specialty. The Hackamore Club, on the other hand, did not exist, but it should have. Nate's home is based on an actual bungalow court not far from my house, but sixty miles from L.A. Stardust Trail's filming locations are real; you can still visit some of them today.

The gambling ships were very much a part of the era, although my Argo and its crew are fictional.

I have a lot of fun blending fact with imagination in the characters and settings. Herb Yates really did run Republic and Consolidated, and George Sherman really directed many of Republic's B-Westerns. L.A. reporter Aggie Underwood and District Attorney Buron Fitts are real; my cops and figures like Perry Mills and Phil Okel are fictional.

How does writing a novel differ from writing nonfiction?

I was naïve enough going in to think that fiction would be easier. You just make everything up, right? Turns out that's not the case at all. And writing fiction with a historical bent is doubly, maybe triply (is that even a word?) challenging. With nonfiction you have to do lots of research and fact-checking to get it right. With historical fiction there's still that, but with the added task of crafting a compelling, believable story, filling it with interesting, relatable characters who behave in logical – or at least credible – ways, and moving it along at a pace that keeps the reader turning pages rather than checking to see what's streaming on Netflix.

And period fiction requires you to know, or find out, some pretty eclectic and esoteric things. What did a meal cost in 1938? What brand of beer did the average Joe drink? How'd you drive from point A to point B in SoCal twenty years before there were any freeways? If I went on Jeopardy tomorrow and the category came up “Late 1930s America,” I think I'd be in pretty fair shape at this point.

How does Nate Ross compare to classic private detective figures like Phillip Marlowe and Sam Spade?

Obviously, he's pursuing the same profession in the same time period (and in Marlowe's case, the same city), but I think the similarities end there. I doubt Nate would like Sam Spade or Marlowe, and I'm pretty sure they wouldn't like him. He'd find Marlowe's basic nobility and rigid personal code a little stifling, and though he might admire Spade's loyalty to a partner, he wouldn't much like his alley-cat morals. By the same token, Nate would be too much of a Boy Scout for Spade, and too much of a wild card for Marlowe.

Would you call the Nate Ross novels mystery, noir, or...?

They're private eye tales in the hardboiled tradition and definitely have noir elements but may not be dark enough to suit the noir purist. I wouldn't classify them as mysteries, simply in that there's no deep, intricate "whodunit" to be solved by armchair sleuths; they're really more "whydunits." With Stardust Trail, there's also a classic Western story running throughout, complete with robbers and dogged lawmen and horseback chases and shootouts. Dead-Bang Fall is more noirish, I guess. I'm more inclined to call them simply "crime fiction," and let the reader decide.

Compare/contrast Western/detective fiction and films.

In their classic forms, they're pretty similar. Both at heart are good guys vs. bad guys stories where the bad guys have the power and control and are using it to cause misery to some undeserving folk, and it's up to a lone hero to stand against them and set things right. That's an oversimplification, of course. But it's interesting that classic Westerns like The Magnificent Seven and Clint Eastwood's "man with no name" spaghetti Westerns are direct descendants of Akira Kurosawa's samurai films, and that Kurosawa was inspired by Dashiell Hammett's detective novels like Red Harvest (itself having elements of Hammett's own Western story, "Corkscrew").

What's the appeal of noir?

That's a question as old as noir itself, and tricky to answer when even experts and aficionados can't agree on exactly what constitutes "noir," either in fiction or film. There's a sort of rough consensus, but moving out from the center the edges get hazy. I'd say it boils down to a person/persons faced with a problem/problems that lead them on an increasingly dark, bleak, perilous journey from which there's no entirely happy return. We haven't all rubbed shoulders with murderers, or been beaten up in alleys or shot at, but we've all found ourselves in difficult, even desperate, situations that were none too good to begin with and only got worse in spite of – sometimes because of – our best efforts and intentions. So we empathize as we follow the characters of these stories into the dark pit and share a feeling of triumph if and when they climb back out again, even though they're bound to come out dirty and damaged.

As a history writer, how accurately do you feel the West was portrayed in those classic Western films of yesteryear? How important is accuracy when it comes to the fictionalized American West?

In the typical films of Stardust Trail's era, not very accurately. That's not to condemn the filmmakers of the 1930s and 1940s; Western fiction – both written and visual – has always been a bit uneven historically. Ned Buntline and Buffalo Bill Cody mythologized the Wild West era, even while living in. It was no different in the 1930s, and it's not much different today. There's historically accurate fiction, and fanciful fiction. I think there is, and has always been, room for both the real and the romanticized. Ideally the reader/viewer would understand the distinction, or at least that there is one. But there'll always be those who just want a good, entertaining tale.

Westerns were huge in the 30s, 40s and 50s. Will they ever be that big again?

Sadly, I think the sun's long set on the Western's day as entertainment juggernaut. Part of the mass appeal back then was that there were people still around who'd lived in the era portrayed, or at least whose parents or grandparents had. There was a personal connection to the stories that doesn't much exist today. Politics and political correctness certainly play a part. So do finances – Westerns are expensive to shoot, and action film audiences today lean more toward superheroes and space epics with over-the-top CGI action. CGI in a Western generally looks like CGI, which sort of defeats the purpose.

That's not to say that the Western is irrelevant or obsolete. Critics seem to pronounce it dead every few years; I was amazed to read in a biography of silent movie star William S. Hart that when he asked Thomas Ince to back him in his very first Western film, Ince told him the Western's popularity had come and gone. This was in 1914. But to this day, the tough old Western refuses to die. There are some great modern Westerns out there, and more in the works, and if there wasn't an audience, nobody would be making them. And when the sun goes down, it always rises again, so who's to say what's in store for the Western down the road?

How did your interest in writing originate?

I honestly can't recall; I've been a scribbler since before I can remember. As a child I drove my parents and siblings nuts writing and performing little plays that I insisted they watch, or even act in. I wrote my first "book" at around age seven – card stock held together with first aid tape. It was as bad as you'd imagine. English was always my best and favorite subject in school, with history running a close second. It was clear pretty early on I wasn't going to be a mathematician.

Do you have any advice for new or prospective writers?

Is it a cliché to say, “Don’t quit your day job”? Maybe, but take it from me, don’t. But if you have the need to write (and having the need is a whole different thing than having the desire) then don’t delay. Don’t say “I’ll write someday, when I have the time.” You’ll only have the time when you make the time, and “someday” will come and go before you know it. Start now.

If you weren’t a writer what else would you like to have done?

I’d like to have been an astronaut. An odd ambition, since I don’t like flying.

Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

Thanks for reading. Thanks for giving me a reason to keep doing what I love.

Do you remember the first book you read?

I wish I did. I don’t.

What does "J.R." stand for?

John Richard.