

Book Review: Hades - Gethers/Andrews is one cool cat

by Arthur Salm

Despite a preposterous, over-the-top resume that's impossible to take seriously - no one could do all those things, be all those people - Peter Gethers is not a fictional character. But Russell Andrews is. Sort of. And Peter Gethers is Russell Andrews. Sort of.

'HADES' - Russell Andrews is the author of five international thrillers, the most recent, 'Hades,' came out in March. CNS Photo.

This is confusing already, and would get even more confusing were I to try to weave together, into one seamless narrative, all the swatches of Peter Gethers' career. So: A brief, explanatory intro - coming up next, I swear - will be followed by quick hits on/quotes from Gethers, gathered recently over lunch at a Mexican restaurant with the chicken-mole-ordering man himself.

Russell Andrews is the author of five international thrillers, the most recent of which, "Hades" (Mysterious Press, 360 pages, \$25), came out in March. It is also the nom de plume of Peter Gethers, the author, under his own name, of tales of his globe-trotting adventures with his globe-trotting cat, Norton, in "The Cat Who Went to Paris," "A Cat Who'll Live Forever" and "A Cat Abroad," as well as the novels "The Dandy" and "Getting Blue."

In addition, Gethers is the founder, and was the publisher of Villard Books, a division of Random House; a TV writer and producer whose credits include "Kate & Allie"; a screenwriter who collaborated with Roman Polanski on "Frantic"; president of the new Random House Films; and a member of the original league, and thus a co-founder, of Rotisserie League Baseball, a wildly popular fantasy game using real-world baseball statistics.

So, in the spirit of things, Gethers/Andrews, at random:

Cat books: Gethers traveled with Norton because he'd never had a cat and didn't know you can't do that.

"My girlfriend gave me a cat. I'd been wanting a pet, but I couldn't get a dog because of my lifestyle. She was convinced I'd like a kitten. I didn't like cats, and I went ballistic. Then I held him, he meowed and purred, and I fell so desperately in love that I couldn't leave him, so I took him everywhere. My fantasy was to live in Paris and sit in a cafe with my dog. It turned out my cat would sit in a cafe chair.

"I was actually in Paris, to work with Polanski, when in the middle of the night my agent called and said I had to write a book. She had the title and everything: 'The Cat Who Went to Paris,' about a bon vivant who travels around the world with his cat. I had maybe half an hour of funny stories; I thought, what's the book? It turned out to be three books about me, writing things I wanted to say about everything. The cat is the perfect spice."

Thrillers: "I like to read them - they're an underappreciated form. 'The Brothers Karamazov' is a thriller. The older I get, the more I value storytelling. I had written two novels that were not thrillers, and the cat books, and finally I had learned enough to write something really difficult. I feel I can now write a legitimately good thriller, and that pleases me."

Writing for television: "I can write a TV script in a few days. Then, you sit with a group and revise it. Who gets the writing credit is fake; that's one of the reasons I don't do it any more. But it's no different mental process - I lock myself in a room and work."

Founding Villard: "Random House books wasn't doing that well, and they decided to start a more commercial imprint. I was a Young Turk, and they came to me and I said yeah. 'Torch Song Trilogy' was our first title. That's not exactly commercial, but it did well. Villard was the first company Random House had created in 50 years. I liked doing it a lot."

Rotisserie League Baseball: "I'm the only remaining original member in the original league. I'm not as obsessed as I was, but no matter where I am in the world, I cannot go to bed without checking to see how my boys did. Something is wrong in my life when work cuts into Rotisserie baseball."

Random House Films: "It's incredibly cool. We'll be working closely with Focus Features, finding and developing Random House books into movies, co-producing and financing two to three a year."

The first will be from John Burnham Schwartz's novel "Reservation Road," about a hit-and-run death, with Joaquin Phoenix, Mark Ruffalo and Jennifer Connelly; Terry George ("Hotel Rwanda") directs. "Four or five more are in serious development," Gethers said. "We'll be a real force in the movie world as well as the book world."

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