



THORN CITY

A NOVEL



PAMELA STATZ

"As Ellen sipped her cocktail and watched the girls argue over who deserved the last hushpuppy, she wondered at how much could change in a single day. The party last night; that awful George Green and his wife, Sue; Patrick and Sheila; the specter of Victor Smith...Yet all of it led here, to this moment. A trio enjoying the simple pleasures of a midnight picnic."

– Pamela Statz, "Thorn City"



THORN CITY

BY PAMELA STATZ

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***For Immediate Release****Contact: Claire Curry, Ooligan Press
claire.curry@ooliganpress.pdx.edu***PAMELA STATZ BLENDS HUMOR AND SUSPENSE IN
PORTLAND-BASED DEBUT THRILLER, "THORN CITY"**

[PORTLAND, ORE., Dec. 14, 2023] Ooligan Press is thrilled to announce the release of "Thorn City," a dark and humorous thriller by debut author Pamela Statz.

Dressed to kill and ready to make rent, best friends Lisa and Jamie work as "paid to party" girls at the Rose City Ripe for Disruption gala, a gathering of Portland's elite. Their evening is derailed when Lisa stumbles across Ellen, a ruthless politician and Lisa's estranged mother. And to make matters worse, Lisa's boyfriend, Patrick, crashes the party to meet his new boss, Portland's food cart drug kingpin. Lisa makes a fateful choice that traps her, Jamie, and Patrick in Ellen's web. In this gripping thriller, Lisa must reconcile a painful past and perilous present.

"Delightful and heartfelt, "Thorn City" whisked me through the streets of Portland and twist after twist of a perfectly plotted thriller! This debut delivers a satisfying meal better than any Michelin-starred food truck." — **ELLE MARR**,
Amazon Charts bestselling author of "The Family Bones" and "The Alone Time"

"Thorn City" is a story of drama and humor, strong female friendships, an unpacking of social issues, and engrosses readers in a fast-paced, compelling mystery. Additionally, it creates vivid characters and highlights Portland's predominant landmarks. As Lisa and her friends fumble through the busy streets of Portland's nightlife they also work to unravel the earth-shattering secrets that haunt them, grapple with the trauma of their past, and find a way to navigate whatever Portland throws at them. "Thorn City" explores the inner workings of friendship, family, and city living in an entertaining, yet thoughtful way.

Pamela Statz grew up in Wisconsin and attended UW Madison earning degrees in Journalism and History. Pamela has worked in media and advertising for Lucasfilm, *WIRED*, Nike, and Wieden+Kennedy. She currently splits her time between Portland and Manzanita, Oregon, with her husband Justin Graham and their giant dog Hooper. "Thorn City" is her first novel.

Ooligan Press is a student-run publishing press rooted in the Pacific Northwest dedicated to cultivating the next generation of publishing professionals. We prioritize literary equity and inclusion.



ABOUT THE BOOK

**Suspected murder, eclectic food trucks, and artisanal cocaine:
just another day in Thorn City.**

It's the night of the Rose City Ripe for Disruption gala—a gathering of Portland's elite. Dressed to kill in sparkling minidresses, best friends Lisa and Jamie attend as “paid to party” girls. They plan an evening of fake flirtations, karaoke playlists, and of course, grazing the catering.

Past and present collide when Lisa stumbles across Ellen, a ruthless politician who also happens to be Lisa's estranged mother. Awkward . . . When Lisa was sixteen, Ellen had her kidnapped and taken to the Lost Lake Academy—a notorious boarding school for troubled youth.

To make matters worse, Lisa's boyfriend Patrick crashes the party to meet his new boss—Portland's food cart drug kingpin.

These unfortunate encounters spur Lisa into making a fateful choice that traps her, Jamie, and Patrick in Ellen's web.

As earth-shattering secrets are revealed, will they survive Ellen's schemes or be sacrificed to her blind ambition?

BOOK HIGHLIGHTS

- **There is a blend of drama and humor.** “Thorn City” covers serious topics like drugs, crime, childhood trauma and fraught family relationships in an entertaining but thoughtful way.
- **A fast-paced, compelling mystery.** Readers will be hooked by the questions surrounding Lost Lake Academy and each character's past. The continuous twists and turns in the story will surprise readers and keep them engaged.
- **Strong female friendship** between Lisa and Jamie. They are strong female characters with dimension, goals, and challenges to overcome together.
- **Vivid characterization.** Despite having multiple characters to juggle, Statz does an excellent job developing each character into genuinely relatable people you want to root for, or who you enjoy hating.
- **Unpacks social issues.** Crime, drugs, gentrification, environmental awareness, oppressive schooling, and corruption are all relevant issues that this book covers and brings awareness to.
- **Highlights Portland landmarks.** Readers will enjoy recognizing the well-loved Portland locations featured in the story as the characters fumble around the city.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pamela Statz grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin, the twelfth of thirteen children. She attended UW Madison earning degrees in Journalism and History. With four duffel bags and her goldfish Lucrezia swimming in a mason jar, Pamela flew to the West Coast at the cusp of the dot-com boom and never left. She's worked in media and advertising in San Francisco and Portland for Lucasfilm, *WIRED*, Nike, and Wieden+Kennedy. She currently splits her time between Portland and Manzanita, Oregon, with her husband Justin Graham and their giant dog Hooper. "Thorn City" is her first novel.

Learn more at:

<https://www.pamelastatz.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/pamelastatz/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pstatz>

<https://www.linkedin.com/pamelastatz>

PRAISE

"Delightful and heartfelt, "Thorn City" whisked me through the streets of Portland and twist after twist of a perfectly plotted thriller! This debut delivers a satisfying meal better than any Michelin-starred food truck."

— Elle Marr, Amazon Charts bestselling author of "The Family Bones" and "The Alone Time"

"The rich backstories of these wealthy characters make them come alive. Come to the party for the secrets and gossip. Stay to see if they survive the mayhem."

— Cate Holahan, USA Today Bestselling Author of "The Widower's Wife"

"Pamela Statz simultaneously celebrates and gleefully skewers her hometown of Portland, Oregon, in a delightful, madcap thriller with enough punchlines and plot twists for half a dozen novels. "Thorn City's" larger-than-life cast—from ambitious, amoral city executives to sweet but wayward twenty-somethings, from a struggling ad man to a chameleon-like tattoo artist—keeps the comedy and tension unwaveringly high, against a backdrop of hipster food cart pods, boutique ad agencies and the hallowed corridors of City Hall itself. Portland truly is weird, and every page of this fast-paced, hilarious debut sparkles."

— Emily Raymond, bestselling co-author, with James Patterson, of "Expelled," "The Girl in the Castle" and "Tell Me Your Best Story"

"Statz delivers a sneaky and addictive gem by captivating readers in this cleverly written thriller. In "Thorn City," appearances are not what they seem. Those holding corrupt power will kill to keep their secrets safe and maintain status in Portland's high society."

— Erica Blaque, Author of "Among Wolves"

"With an insider's eye, Statz takes the reader through the nuanced underbelly of the City of Roses. This debut page-turner is a terrific addition to your crime fiction shelf."

— Suzy Vitello, Author of "Faultland" and "Bitterroot"

"Thorn City" captures exactly what's special about Portland, from the ubiquity of our food carts to the ever-present undercurrents of social and geological upheaval. Still, the characters and their struggles are universally relatable—and so realistically written that I wouldn't be surprised to run into them one day at a mayoral event, kebab stand or local emergency room!"

— Jennifer Hanlon Wilde, Author of "Finding the Vein"

"Pamela Statz has weaved an intriguing novel with a cast of characters to love and root for, and those to love to hate! A complete immersion into the Portland culture, "Thorn City," is a complex, and twisty ride that unveils its multiple layers of lies and secrets at a perfect pace, not letting go until the very last page. Bravo!"

— Mary Keliikoa, Author of award-winning "Hidden Pieces" and "Deadly Tides"

"A page-turning romp with Portland at its center, "Thorn City" is part who-dunnit/part coming-of-age saga with city politics, tech bro culture, economic disparities and drug dealing thrown in to round out the experience. A fast-moving, thoroughly enjoyable read."

— Margaret Juhae Lee, Author of "Starry Field: A Memoir of Lost History"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. You portray a very particular picture of the Portland area, from the quirkiness, to the scary parts of the city. What experiences did you draw from in order to create such a picture of Portland? Would you say that all of your portrayals are realistic or did you embellish?
2. The dynamic between Lisa and her mother is complex and portrays the difficulties of mother-daughter relationships. What would you say your goal was in creating their dynamics in such a way?
3. You offer a few different perspectives of sex work within your novel, from Lisa and Jamie working parties, to being an escort, and how everyone around them views or judges sex work. How does this relate to your overarching themes? What would you say in regards to what you are hoping readers learn from discussing the different ideas and judgements of sex work within the book?
4. Politics seems to be another underlying theme that is discussed within the novel, often with business and social class alongside it, however, Lisa seems to be more interested in art over politics like her mother. Can you explain what you are hoping to achieve by showing the positives and negatives with the juxtapositions of politics and art.
5. How did your own experiences in Portland play into the locations mentioned in the novel? For example, was Jake's Famous Crawfish discovered through research, or was it a previous favorite haunt?
6. The Lost Lake Academy was a traumatic experience for the characters involved, told primarily in flashbacks. Did you ever consider integrating that half of the story even more, or why did you prefer to focus more on the present day, with the academy as a backdrop?
7. Originally you are from Wisconsin, not Portland. Are there any elements of the novel, such as characters or businesses, that are inspired by places outside of Portland?
8. What was the motivation to include a humorous note in a suspenseful thriller? What would you say this adds to the overall theme and tone?

9. What has been your journey with creative writing and fiction? What does your writing process look like?
10. What character was the most fun to write? Whom did you struggle with?
11. There are a lot of twists and turns that take place within your novel, were each of these planned or were there any that caught you by surprise?

LIST OF AUTHOR APPEARANCES

Q&A / INTERVIEW

1. What was your writing process like? Was the story originally going to go in a different direction?

I've started fiction projects in the past, but it wasn't until I signed up for Emily Chenoweth's 'How to Write a Novel in Eight Weeks' class at Portland's Literary Arts that I gained the skills and discipline to complete the first draft of a novel while also working full time. Eight years later I had a manuscript that I was ready to share with an editor. Key lessons: just sit down and write (funny how this actually works); don't research, you can add specifics later; write fast and then layer in more detail with each edit; and finally, writing prompts are magic. I'm also a big note taker. If I come up with a plot point or am inspired in any way, I jot it down in my phone immediately. If I don't, it disappears!

As far as the story's direction, the Lost Lake Academy, the mother-daughter conflict, and the food cart drug ring were all in my early outline. I didn't initially intend to kill anyone off, but the nice thing about most murders is they add loads of drama and it gives everyone something to do.

2. "Thorn City" arguably pokes fun at Portland. What do you want readers, both locals and otherwise, to take away from this interpretation of the city?

My personal experience with Portland is that it is a fun, messy, occasionally dangerous, incredibly creative city with many friendly and generous people. My goal was to make Portland a character, a place to love and hate, to empathize with and to cheer for. I included many real locations based on personal experience -- rushing a friend to Good Samaritan after an accident and sitting for hours in the waiting room as she was treated, standing in the hot sun for a table at Screen Door, attending extravagant work parties in sketchy parts of town, enjoying a martini at the University Club bar, and almost colliding with a bicyclist on a test ride at River City Bikes. Many locations are fictional, but they're all based somewhat on reality. I hope readers enjoy what they learn about Portland, blemishes and all.

3. "Thorn City" has a large cast of characters. Who was your favorite character to write? Why?

Sue was definitely a favorite character to write. She plays a minor role but makes a deep impression. I empathize with her rage and appreciate her sense of humor. Writing George was cathartic. Without getting into too many details, I've worked with a lot of George's during my career in digital media and advertising. Many were delightful. Some less so. It was fun unpacking my experiences in a fictional character. Lisa, Jamie, and Patrick's friendship is the heart of the story. They've survived so much together and I hope I convey a real love and loyalty between them.

4. “Thorn City” is your debut novel. Do you have any plans or ideas for your next novel?

I’m currently working on three projects. I’m almost finished with a sequel to “Thorn City”. The second is a gothic tale that touches on my midwestern farm roots, my years living in San Francisco, and spans about eight decades, so it’s quite a departure from the fast pace of “Thorn City”. I’m also collaborating on a murder mystery series with my sister that takes place in a fictional town on the Puget Sound. It’s been really fun and motivating writing with her as we check in weekly and set goals.

5. What advice would you give to aspiring thriller writers?

Take a class, or join a writing group, and don’t be afraid to share your writing early and often with friends, family, and writing buddies. It’s scary and occasionally disheartening but I consider it a form of quality assurance. Am I hitting the right notes? Giving away too much too early? Are readers surprised when the big secret is revealed? If not, go back and edit, edit, edit. I have many generous friends and family who read “Thorn City” multiple times and their feedback was invaluable. I was also fortunate to work with great editors, one that I hired to review my first draft, and the talented editors at Ooligan Press. The first read of their editorial letters was so painful, but so true. I took their advice, made the changes, and am really proud of where the book is today.

6. There are so many different personalities from such different backgrounds in “Thorn City”; how did you carry out your character research?

When I first moved to Portland, I was sitting at a bar with a friend. We were swapping stories about our backgrounds, and she shared that her parents had her kidnapped and sent to a boarding school for troubled teens. She was there for over two years. I was stunned and horrified by what she told me about her time at the school. That conversation is what really triggered the book. Lisa, Patrick and Jamie are fictional characters but their experiences at the Lost Lake Academy are grounded in truth. I started with their bios: what were their parents like, their rooms at home, their friends and siblings, how did they end up at the Academy, how they would deal with reentering the ‘real world’ after the trauma they experienced – and the story just grew from there. The fun part was creating a cast of villains that would wreak havoc on my young heroes' lives. I was inspired by vivid personalities I encountered while employed at Lucasfilm, WIRED, Wieden+Kennedy, and Nike, in addition to friends and frenemies.

7. Who did you write “Thorn City” for, and what do you hope they take away from your story?

I wrote it because it’s the kind of novel that I enjoy reading: a thriller with characters you love and love to hate, and a bit of humor. I hope readers take away that there are multiple sides to

every story, the power of choosing your own family, and I hope that it sheds a tiny light on the therapeutic boarding school industry. I also hope that readers look at Portland with a new and more positive perspective rarely shown in the media over the last several years.

8. Are you planning to write any more stories in the “Thorn City” universe?

I’m almost finished with a sequel to “Thorn City”. It picks up about eight months after the first book ends and brings back all the heroes and villains from book one, as well as a few new characters who bring chaos and destruction to Lisa, Jamie and Patrick’s lives. Don’t worry, Sue saves them all.

9. How long was “Thorn City” percolating in your mind before you wrote it, and what motifs in the book were you grappling with for the longest? How did they eventually make it onto the page?

I started writing the book about ten years ago. I had a cast of characters in mind, a few set pieces and spent a lot of time (years!) figuring out how it would all fit together. As far as motifs I struggled with, there were two main ones. I wanted the book to be humorous but also very respectful to Lisa, Jamie and Patrick’s experience at the Lost Lake Academy. The Academy is fictional but much of what I depict is based on first hand accounts from individuals who generously shared their experiences attending therapeutic boarding schools. Another detail I struggled with was how far should Lisa and George’s initial encounter go. Lisa has been accused repeatedly by her teachers, peers, friends and family of being socially deviant. If you’re told something enough times, eventually you may come to believe it too. Lisa is my hero, and though I did want to place her in a very compromising situation, I also wanted her to be able to mend her relationships.

10. Would you hint to us why the book is titled “Thorn City”?

Portland’s official nickname is the City of Roses. In the book, people with power and prestige are morally corrupt, and those with no power who are living on the edge are morally sound. Ellen is a model citizen, but she’s a terrible mother who puts her only child through a traumatic ordeal. George is a respected and successful advertising exec, but he’s also a philanderer and a coke fiend. Lisa, Jamie and Patrick have had problems with drug and alcohol abuse, petty theft and shoplifting, but they are the moral center of the story who are just struggling to rebuild their lives after the abuse they suffered at the Academy. The book is about contradictions and I think the title expresses that nicely.

ABOUT THE PRESS

Ooligan Press is an award-winning not-for-profit general trade press with national distribution. Founded in 2001, Ooligan Press is affiliated with Portland State University and staffed by students pursuing master's degrees in an apprenticeship program under the guidance of publishing professionals. Graduate students gain unique hands-on experience as they lead the publishing process, from acquiring manuscripts and designing covers to marketing and selling books. Located in the Pacific Northwest—a region recognized for its unique and innovative sensibilities—Ooligan Press aspires to publish works that reflect the diverse stories and experiences of everyone who calls this corner of America their home.

OUR MISSION

Ooligan Press is a student-run trade press rooted in the Pacific Northwest dedicated to cultivating the next generation of publishing professionals. We prioritize literary equity and inclusion. Ooligan strives to publish culturally relevant titles from our local, marginalized voices in order to make literature accessible and redefine who has a place within its pages.