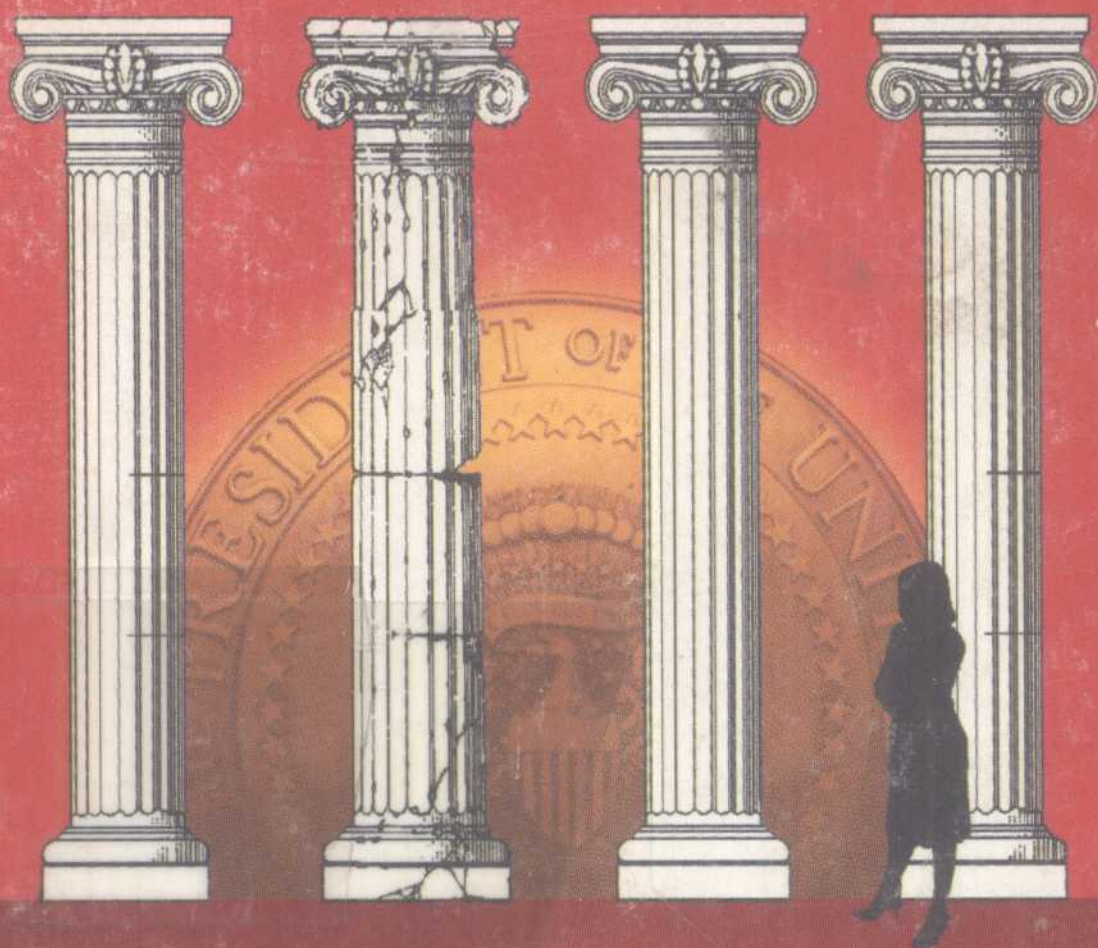


**"A FAST-PACED THRILLER—
ACTION, ADVENTURE,
ROMANCE, EVEN A
MORALITY TALE."**

—*Newark Star-Ledger*

**"A GRIPPING
THRILLER...SECRETIVE
VELVET-GLOVED
VILLAINY...UNSTOPPABLE
EXCITEMENT."**

—*Richmond Times-Dispatch*



**"STAKES SO HIGH, NO ONE
CAN BE TRUSTED."**

—*Poisoned Pen*

FEAR IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

- ☐ **PRECIPICE by Tom Savage.** The house is named Cliffhanger, a bit of heaven perched high on a hill in a Caribbean paradise. It is the home of the perfect family—until bright and beautiful Diana arrives, the ideal secretary-au pair. Now suddenly, everyone in this house is on the edge of a hell where nothing is what it seems, and no one is who they pretend to be. (183339—\$5.99)
- ☐ **THICKER THAN WATER by Linda Barlow and William G. Tapply.** A precocious teenager's abduction leads to a seductive voyage of danger and self-discovery as he and his family must at last confront the very essence of evil. (406028—\$5.99)
- ☐ **JUST BEFORE DAWN by Donna Ball.** When Carol Dennison received the call after midnight, she knew without a doubt that the voice pleading for help was her teenage daughter's. Though the police had written her off as a runaway teen, Kelly's mother, Carol, had always suspected far worse. Now one parent's most fervent prayer has been answered. And her greatest nightmare is about to begin. (187342—\$5.99)
- ☐ **EXPOSURE by Donna Ball.** Jessamine Cray, Philadelphia's most poised and glamorous TV talk show host is being stalked. The police think she's faking the campaign of terror out of a twisted hunger for public sympathy. But her tormentor is using her own darkly buried secrets as a cunning weapon to destroy Jess's peace of mind—before destroying her. (187334—\$5.99)
- ☐ **GAME RUNNING by Bruce Jones.** A stranger comes to your door, claiming he once knew you. You invite him in, and he drugs you. You wake the next morning to find your home has been stripped clean and your wife has been kidnapped. Your life has suddenly spiraled out of control. (184068—\$5.99)

*Prices slightly higher in Canada

Buy them at your local bookstore or use this convenient coupon for ordering.

PENGUIN USA

P.O. Box 999 — Dept. #17109

Bergenfield, New Jersey 07621

Please send me the books I have checked above.

I am enclosing \$_____ (please add \$2.00 to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order (no cash or C.O.D.'s) or charge by Mastercard or VISA (with a \$15.00 minimum). Prices and numbers are subject to change without notice.

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

For faster service when ordering by credit card call **1-800-253-6476**

Allow a minimum of 4-6 weeks for delivery. This offer is subject to change without notice.

EERIE SUSPENSE

- ☐ **THE ROSEWOOD CASKET** by Sharyn McCrumb. **National Bestseller!** Randall Stargill lies dying on his southern Appalachian farm, and his four sons have come home to build him a coffin from the cache of rosewood he long has hoarded for the special purpose. And at the same time, mountain wise-woman Nora Bonesteel, Randall's sweetheart of long ago, must bring to light a small box to be buried with Randall—a box containing human bones. "Suspenseful . . . spellbinding."—*Washington Post Book World* (184718—\$6.99)
- ☐ **SHE WALKS THESE HILLS** by Sharyn McCrumb. **An Agatha Award Winner.** Some believe that the ghost of Katie Wyler, kidnapped by Shawnee two hundred years ago, is once again roaming the hills in the Appalachian community of Dark Hollow, Tennessee. Even more frightening, a convicted murderer has escaped prison and is heading home. (184726—\$6.50)
- ☐ **THE HANGMAN'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER** by Sharyn McCrumb. The grisly case of murder was supposed to be "open and shut," but it bothered Sheriff Spencer Arrowood. He had the worried feeling that the bad things were far from over. "A haunting novel of suspense with a fresh new voice . . . Sharyn McCrumb is a born storyteller!"—Mary Higgins Clark (403703—\$6.50)

Price slightly higher in Canada

Buy them at your local bookstore or use this convenient coupon for ordering.

PENGUIN USA
P.O. Box 999 — Dept. #17109
Bergenfield, New Jersey 07621

Please send me the books I have checked above.

I am enclosing \$_____ (please add \$2.00 to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order (no cash or C.O.D.'s) or charge by Mastercard or VISA (with a \$15.00 minimum). Prices and numbers are subject to change without notice.

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

For faster service when ordering by credit card call 1-800-253-6476

Allow a minimum of 4-6 weeks for delivery. This offer is subject to change without notice.

PROVOCATIVE SUSPENSE NOVELS

- ☐ **A SOUL TO TAKE** by C.N. Bean. Homicide investigator Rita Tribble has seen many hideous crimes—but none like the eleven-year-old altar boy who was sexually abused, murdered, then embalmed. And worse, he is but the first victim of a serial slayer out to make Milwaukee a killing ground. Now Rita's own little boy has been targeted by the killer who seems to read her mind and mock her every move. (406648—\$5.50)
- ☐ **BRIGHT EYES** by Preston Pairo, III. Four years ago, Baltimore's sickest serial killer, known in the press as "Bright Eyes," savagely murdered the wife and son of Jimmy Griffin's best friend. Four years ago, "Grif" thought he blew away the city's worst nightmare on a rain-slick bridge. Suddenly Bright Eyes is back and Grif seeks to take the killer down before he snares his next prey. (407067—\$5.99)
- ☐ **THE RETURN** by Joe de Mers. Brian Sheridan is the charismatic leader of a Mid-western parish, currently on leave. But he is called back to service by his mentor to uncover the truth about a man claiming to be Jesus. At Brian's side is Marie Olivier, a passionate journalist determined to unmask this imposter, and a woman who tempts Brian with love. "A fast-paced thriller that kept me guessing and on the edge of my seat."—Phillip Margolin, bestselling author of *After Dark* (407296—\$6.99)

Prices slightly higher in Canada

Buy them at your local bookstore or use this convenient coupon for ordering.

PENGUIN USA
P.O. Box 999 — Dept. #17109
Bergenfield, New Jersey 07621

Please send me the books I have checked above.

I am enclosing \$_____ (please add \$2.00 to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order (no cash or C.O.D.'s) or charge by Mastercard or VISA (with a \$15.00 minimum). Prices and numbers are subject to change without notice.

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

For faster service when ordering by credit card call 1-800-253-6476

Allow a minimum of 4-6 weeks for delivery. This offer is subject to change without notice.

**\$3.00 rebate on
Steinbock's new hardcover,
❖ THE INNER SANCTUM! ❖**

Available in July 1997

To get your \$3.00 rebate, mail:

Your original dated sales receipt for
THE INNER SANCTUM (hardcover)
with price circled

This rebate certificate

Write in book UPC number _____

To:

THE INNER SANCTUM REBATE

P.O. Box 1055

Grand Rapids, MN 55745-1055

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail Address: _____

This certificate (original or photocopy) must accompany your request. Void where prohibited, taxed, or restricted. One rebate per household. Allow 4-6 weeks for shipment of rebate in U.S. funds. Offer expires September 30, 1997. Mail received until October 15, 1997.


Signet


Dutton

Printed in the USA

此为试读, 需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

PRAISE FOR
The Vulture Fund

"Ultra-exciting . . . a powerful and multi-layered financial and political thriller. . . . It's only a matter of time before Frey achieves the same recognition as Cook and Grisham have obtained in their respective fields of medical and legal thrillers." —*Ed's Internet Book Review*

"A Wall Street and Washington shocker from the author of *The Takeover*."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Frey, dubbed the Grisham of financial thrillers, follows his *Takeover* debut with another hot story." —*Daily Variety*

"Following the success of his debut novel, *The Takeover*, Frey follows up with a second book that's every bit as good. . . . The action gets hotter and hotter and finishes with a stunning conclusion . . . mesmerizes readers."
—*Booklist*

"This story was spun for the movies."
—*Poisoned Pen*

**PRAISE FOR
STEPHEN W. FREY'S BESTSELLER**
The Takeover

"Better than *The Firm* . . . resembles Robert Ludlum when Ludlum was fresh and young . . . a grand first novel."

—*St. Petersburg Times*

"Grisham meets Ludlum on Wall Street . . . a fast-paced roller coaster of love and lust, murder and betrayal, politics and business."

—*USA Today*

"Offers insider's knowledge of the high-stakes world of investment banking."

—*Wall Street Journal*

"Entertaining and energetic . . . superbly taut . . . Frey keeps up the suspense right to the end."

—*Financial Times*

"Fast-action . . . the author's worst-case scenario of scary political ramifications could easily become tomorrow's news."

—Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Enormous wealth, murder, dirty tricks, political intrigue, colorful villains, relentless pacing . . . enjoy!"

—Publishers Weekly

"Money, sex, secrecy, conspiracy, killings . . . exciting."

—Mystery News

"Grishamesque skullduggery and intrigue."

—Library Journal



SIGNET



ONYX

MASTERFUL SUSPENSE NOVELS

- ☐ **THE TAKEOVER** by Stephen W. Frey. *New York Times* Bestseller! Investment banker Andrew Falcon is spearheading the biggest hostile takeover in Wall Street history. But Falcon doesn't realize that he has stumbled onto the secret power of a shadowy organization known only as The Sevens. Now his struggle for survival begins as he tries to outwit his enemies. "Absolutely first-rate!"—James Patterson, author of *Kiss the Girls* (184785—\$6.99)
- ☐ **THE WORLD ON BLOOD** by Jonathan Nasaw. This stylish, super-charged novel of eroticism and suspense gives voice to the hidden side of passion. Not since Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* has the vampire myth been so boldly reimagined. "Sly, wicked . . . charged with suspense."—*San Francisco Chronicle* (186583—\$6.99)
- ☐ **MY SOUL TO KEEP** by Judith Hawkes. Twenty years ago, on a Tennessee mountainside in an abandoned quarry, something happened to nine-year-old Nan Lucas. Trying to start a new life after the collapse of her marriage, Nan returns to Tennessee with her young son, Stephen . . . and to shadowy childhood memories. "A haunting chiller."—*Anniston Star* (184149—\$6.99)
- ☐ **THE DARK BACKWARD** by Gregory Hall. Mary Reynolds had the perfect husband, but now he was suddenly, mysteriously gone. After grief became shock, Mary began to discover how much she did not know about the man who had made her so blissfully happy for so heartbreakingly short a span of time. And what she did not know could kill her. . . . "Dark, riveting, compelling, masterful."—Jeffery Deaver, author of *A Maiden's Grave* (188500—\$5.99)
- ☐ **THE CONDUCTOR** by Jerry Kennealy. When Mary Ariza, a beautiful, savvy lawyer, stops to help a man having a heart attack on the street, she unknowingly marks herself for death. Police Inspector Jack Kordic is thrust into the same nightmare when he discovers a headless, handless corpse floating in the icy Pacific. But what neither of them know is that they are in the path of The Conductor—an international assassin who must commit a crime of unthinkable proportions. (187474—\$5.99)
- ☐ **MATINEEE** by Sally Kemp. Monica Foyles keeps one secret escape: Wednesday afternoons at the movies—the scarier the film, the better. But Monica is about to learn that real fear is no fun. For in the dark shadows of the theater a young man is watching her, devising a scenario of his own. (407431—\$5.99)

Prices slightly higher in Canada

Buy them at your local bookstore or use this convenient coupon for ordering.

PENGUIN USA

P.O. Box 999 — Dept. #17109

Bergenfield, New Jersey 07621

Please send me the books I have checked above.

I am enclosing \$_____ (please add \$2.00 to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order (no cash or C.O.D.'s) or charge by Mastercard or VISA (with a \$15.00 minimum). Prices and numbers are subject to change without notice.

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
 Signature _____
 Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

For faster service when ordering by credit card call 1-800-253-6476

Allow a minimum of 4-6 weeks for delivery. This offer is subject to change without notice.

3712.45 / F893
STEPHEN W. FREY

THE VULTURE FUND



A SIGNET BOOK

SIGNET

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books USA Inc., 375 Hudson Street,

New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane,

London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood,

Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue,

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road,

Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:

Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

Published by Signet, an imprint of Dutton Signet,

a division of Penguin Books USA Inc. Previously appeared in a
Dutton edition.

First Signet Printing, May, 1997

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright © Stephen2, Inc., 1996

All rights reserved



REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA REGISTRADA

Printed in the United States of America

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE AT QUANTITY DISCOUNTS WHEN USED TO PROMOTE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES. FOR INFORMATION PLEASE WRITE TO PREMIUM MARKETING DIVISION, PENGUIN BOOKS USA INC., 375 HUDSON STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10014.

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

For my wife, Lil,
and our daughters, Christy and Ashley
Everyone deserves a miracle.
I was given three.

PROLOGUE

The woman leaned back against the large granite boulder and gazed up at the thousands of black, leafless branches above her. They formed millions of intricate geometric shapes—like cobwebs—against the dark gray winter clouds beyond. She shivered. It was late afternoon, and she was freezing, tired, and hungry. What a mistake this had been.

“Hey, I think I know where we are now.”

The woman glanced slowly away from the eerie shapes above and toward her husband of three weeks. He was squatting in the snow, hunched over a topographic map, gnawing on a candy bar. He didn't know where they were. He had uttered the same words at least once an hour since early this morning.

Three days ago they had somehow missed a marker on the Appalachian Trail and had been wandering through the backwoods of West Virginia since, completely lost. They might be a mile from the trail or they might be twenty miles from it. For three days they had climbed mountain after mountain, pausing only long enough at the bottom of each valley to sip water from the stream that inevitably lay at the base of each peak, before scaling the next one. She shook her head. “You don't have any idea where we are. How could I possibly have let you talk me into a hiking trip as our honeymoon? I could be lying on the beach on St. Thomas right now, being served pina

coladas by a nice man in a white dinner jacket. But no, I'm lost somewhere north of Sugar Grove, West Virginia, freezing my behind off."

"And a nice little behind it is." He smiled at her.

"Yeah, well, you're not going to see any more of it as long as we're out here in the middle of nowhere. I've had enough tent sex in the last three weeks to last me a lifetime." She rubbed her aching knees.

The man watched her hands work for a moment, then refocused on the map. "Give me just a bit longer to get my bearings; then we'll start moving again. I'm going to have us back on the trail by this evening. Promise."

The woman groaned. She didn't want to find the trail. She wanted to find a nice hot tub and lie in it for two or three hours.

"Just a few more minutes," the man said, more to himself than to her.

The woman turned and began climbing carefully up the side of a huge boulder. She was athletic, and in a few seconds she had scaled the thirty-foot outcrop. It was a remarkable view of the Appalachian Mountains from the precipice, and had they not been lost, she would have enjoyed it immensely. They had ample food supplies and were in no real danger, but suddenly she wanted to get back to civilization.

Far below and to the north the woman noticed a gaping wound in the side of a large hill. "Must be an old coal mine," she remarked to herself. Five days ago the old man behind the counter at the grocery store in Sugar Grove had told them that mining was about the only thing that kept the people in this area employed anymore. Even that revenue stream was drying up now. She wished she could turn back time to the day they had gone into that store for supplies. She would have insisted that they rent the nearest car

available, drive directly to the closest airport, and fly to the Caribbean.

The woman removed a small pair of high-powered binoculars from her jacket and brought them to her eyes. Tucked beneath the hillside next to the mine were several large buildings that appeared to be abandoned and in varying states of disrepair and decay. Her breath rose before the binoculars. Just as she was about to replace the field glasses into her jacket pocket, she noticed several figures moving together alongside one of the buildings. Her spirits rose instantly. They had somehow stumbled onto civilization or at least people who would know how to get back to it. In a few hours they would be out of these damn woods and on their way to warmer latitudes.

The woman adjusted the focus of the glasses and watched intently as the figures moved past the buildings far below. Suddenly she pulled the glasses away from her face, then quickly back to her eyes one more time. Each of the figures appeared to be holding a gun. And not some run-of-the-mill hunting rifle. She had been around guns all her life—her father was an avid hunter—and those were not hunting rifles. She could not be certain from this distance, but they seemed to be assault weapons. “Jesus!”

“Did you say something, sweetheart?” the man called from below.

The woman replaced the binoculars in her coat and moved back down the rock quickly. She jumped the last several feet into the six-inch-deep snow. Her husband rose from his squatting position as she neared.

“It looks like—” But she did not finish the sentence.

The bullet entered the man’s head from the back and exited just above his right eye. His skullcap exploded immediately, and fragments of brain matter, blood, and bone shot thirty feet into the air, spraying the trees and the snow with a fine red mist. As she

watched in horror, what little remained of his face toppled forward with the rest of his body into the fresh white powder. The woman attempted to scream, but nothing came to her lips. It was as if her throat had suddenly become locked in the jaws of a steely vise.

Almost immediately another bullet sliced through the cold air, its high-pitched whine creating a sickening echo among the trees. The bullet barely grazed her right arm, but its tremendous force still knocked her backward into the snow. A searing pain burst through her body.

“Oh, my God.” She scrambled to her feet and, holding her right hand in her left, began to run away from the spot where her husband had fallen. Whoever had pulled the trigger had not hit her husband by accident. Or her. The odds were too long that a second shot would hit her as well. They had been standing at least fifteen feet apart. This was not a case of mistaken identity, not a case of an intoxicated hunter somehow mistaking them for deer. The shots were meant to kill them. But why?

The mountainside suddenly fell away sharply beneath her boots, and she tumbled down the slope. Tears streamed down her cheeks even as she fell. God, her husband’s face had been there one second, smiling at her, and then it had exploded before her eyes the next. Now they were after her. She could feel them behind her. She sensed their pursuit. And she was leaving obvious tracks in the snow for them to follow.

A tree trunk stopped her fall abruptly as she slammed into its wide base. The impact knocked the breath from her lungs, but she barely noticed the pain. Survival adrenaline pumped through her body, effectively anesthetizing her.

For several moments she lay on her side next to the tree, deathly still, clutching her useless arm to her