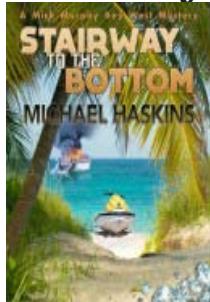


# INTERNATIONAL THRILL WRITERS

## **Stairway to the Bottom by Michael Haskins**



By [Austin Camacho](#)

Some of my favorite mystery novels star an investigator dragged into a case he originally had no interest in. That's just what happens to investigative journalist Mick Murphy in STAIRWAY TO THE BOTTOM, the latest novel from Michael Haskins. And from there it gets weird.

The book opens with a hit man changing his mind about his decision to be in the witness protection program. He makes his escape on a Jet Ski. Russian agents left over from the Cold War believe the man on the run may also be an agent that fled with \$20 million in diamonds just as the Berlin Wall was coming down. As it turns out, our hero Mick Murphy was the last person to see the hit man alive. When the Russians send an agent to Key West, Florida to interrogate Murphy, well, that's when the adventure really takes off.

Murphy is an old school reporter who sometimes takes things lightly and, as his author points out, that often gets him into trouble.

"He enjoys himself," Haskins says. "He likes to sail and drink and hangout with his friends. He's old fashioned in that he believes everyone is entitled to justice and that also gets him into situations. He lives with his devils from the past, things he believes—rightly or wrongly—that he is responsible for, and dreams torture him because of this."

Like all of the Mick Murphy books set in Key West, STAIRWAY TO THE BOTTOM gets its name from a song title (In this case, a Kris Kristofferson tune.) Haskins admires the tight, terse writing required for song lyrics.

"A good song is a story cut down to the bare essentials," he says. "I hear a good song and think of all that is missing that makes the song true. Kind of like Hemingway saying its okay to leave things out of a story. If I could tell a story in a few lines, I'd be a country songwriter in Nashville!"

Although Haskins hasn't put Murphy into a song yet, he has appeared in short stories in ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

"I try to write a short story after finishing a novel so I keep working. It keeps me focused and sometimes turns into a novel."

Murphy's first two outings were set on the West Coast. STAIRWAY TO THE BOTTOM is the third after he moved to Florida. The setting is like a character itself in these novels, and Haskins says Murphy will probably be detecting in Key West for a long time. Planning a long series, he keeps the stories fresh by pulling the story lines out of the news.

"My first two Key West mysteries deal with drug smuggling and the troubles in Mexico with the cartels. Since we don't have those problems in Key West, I had to import the situation. Once I find away to do that, and it's believable, the story takes off."

Sales of this novel may take off quickly because it is so accessible. STAIRWAY TO THE BOTTOM is released as an e-book original. His earlier works have been both e-books and trade paperbacks. Haskins had some momentum and realized that if STAIRWAY TO THE BOTTOM were published traditionally it would not come out until sometime in 2013. He just didn't want to wait. As it is, the sixth Mick Murphy novel—CAR WASH BLUES—will be out in Aug. 2012. It deals with the cartels in Tijuana, a city he is very familiar with, as you'd know if you read his second novel, TIJUANA WEEKEND.

"I had spent many summers there, made many friends and grew to love it." Haskins says. "I don't mean the tourist sections, I mean the "el Rio" where the Mexicans played and drank and ate and danced without too many gringos. I was fortunate to be accepted by people that today are still my friends."

But that return to Tijuana is months away. If you like traditional mysteries set in the tropics and the laid-back island life, you'll want to download STAIRWAY TO THE BOTTOM by Michael Haskins, and get to know Mick Murphy.

"He's a little screwed up," Haskins says, "which makes him fit into the Keys perfectly."