



A Conversation with Edgar and Anthony Award  
winner and *New York Times* bestselling author  
Chris Pavone

## **The Accident**

A Novel

(Crown, March 11, 2014)

**Q) Your debut novel, *The Expats*, was widely praised, both in the national media (*New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Entertainment Weekly*) and by some of the biggest names in the industry (John Grisham, Patricia Cornwell, and more), was optioned for film, sold in 18 countries, and debuted on the *Times* bestseller list! You've worked in publishing almost your entire career; were you prepared for that kind of reception for your first book?**

A) I was completely prepared for absolutely no one to buy, read, or review *The Expats*. If there's one thing that's seems hard for a publisher to do, it's to launch a debut novel successfully. Why would anyone buy it? But if publishers don't take flyers on first-timers, sooner or later there won't be any novels at all. I'm amazed and immensely grateful that my vulnerable little boat wasn't completely lost in the sea of the hundred-thousand-plus new books published every year.

**Q) You were inspired to write *The Expats* while living abroad in Luxembourg. Your current home, New York, features prominently in *The Accident*, but parts of the novel are also set in Europe—Copenhagen, Paris, Zurich. Was this new novel also inspired by your travels?**

A) Yes, my travels have definitely inspired my writing. And it's not just the traveling: My first book was based on my experiences as an expat stay-at-home parent, suddenly without the self-definition of a career, trying to invent a new version of me, while the new one is drawn from my two decades in publishing. But *The Accident* is definitely not *about* book publishing, just as *The Expats* wasn't about Luxembourg. *The Accident* is about ambition, and the permanent weight of decisions made in youth, and the ways we become people we didn't intend to become. Plus—as with *The Expats*—spies and crimes and a great deal of duplicity.

**Q) The world of book publishing figures prominently in *The Accident*. Was it fun to dissect the many aspects of the business? Any details with which you took creative license?**

A) I have great admiration for book-publishing people, who've all chosen careers that are dedicated to helping other people—authors—achieve creative dreams, and to entertaining and enlightening readers, and to do all this for very little money or recognition; there's not really such a thing as a rich or famous book editor. So *The Accident* isn't a satire, and I have no ax to grind. I do admit to taking a bit of license in a few minor particulars, mostly to avoid an excess of exposition, and to keep my cast of characters down to a reasonable number.

**Q) I imagine it must be hard NOT to draw on personal experiences, having worked with many authors, editors, agents, and publicists in your line of work. Are any of the characters in the book based on real people?**

A) Yes, but I won't say who. I hope that for some readers, part of the fun of *The Accident* will be guessing.

**Q) The protagonist in *The Expats*, Kate Moore, makes a small cameo in *The Accident*, while Hayden Gray, a peripheral character in your debut, features prominently here. Why?**

A) I absolutely loved everything about *The Wire*, and in particular the way the seasons related to one other: different narratives populated by mostly different characters set in different milieus, but all within the same interconnected world. I think this is a brilliant way of telling fresh stories with satisfying connections, from the same viewpoint, while avoiding the pitfalls of sequels and prequels and the constrictions of a traditional series. I'm trying to do something similar with these books.

**Q) *The Accident* also features some colorful new characters, including literary agent Isabel Reed, editor Jeffrey Fielder, sub-rights director Camilla Glyndon-Browning, and media mogul Charlie Wolfe. Did you personally identify with one of these characters more than the others? Who was the most fun to write? Who was the most challenging?**

A) I identify with all these characters; I prefer to spend the bulk of my time with people I like, whether in the real world or in my imagination. The hardest for me to write was the protagonist, Isabel Reed, who in many ways is a person defined by tragedy; I'm not. The most fun were the colorful minor characters—Camilla the scheming British sexpot, Brad the middle-aged-stoner publisher, and especially Stan the megalomaniacal film producer with a tenuous tether to reality (he has his own plane but doesn't think he's rich; he's terrified of animals but owns a ranch). I was sad when people like this needed to be killed off.

I will admit that I do loathe some of the incidental characters; I think I invent them to have an outlet for my loathing, so I don't wander around the streets of New York yelling obscenities at strangers. I'll also admit that there's a character in *The Accident* who's extremely autobiographical, but that won't be made clear until a future book.

**Q) *The Expats* was not only a *New York Times* bestseller but also the winner of the Edgar Award for Best First Novel. What did you learn from your experience writing and publishing your debut that you took with you when penning your second novel?**

A) I really didn't know what I was doing with *The Expats*. Which meant I engaged in some very frustrating, unenjoyable activities, such as adding 200 pages and then deleting 201 pages, which took the better part of a year. For *The Accident*, I didn't waste that year. And I was much more clear from the get-go about what type of book I was writing, and what experience I wanted the reader to have. I think the result is that *The Accident* is more of a page-turner, more immediate in its urgency, and more thrilling of a thriller.

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