

# **Seen Better Days: The Portrayal of Journalists in Carl Hiaasen Novels**

By Cortney Fielding

Neurotic, haunted, unbalanced, self destructive: Carl Hiaasen's<sup>1</sup> reporters aren't the picture of mental health.

The lead characters in four quirky South Florida-based mystery novels penned by the long-time Miami Herald reporter aren't particularly pleasant. They don't make life easy for themselves or those around them. Instead, they sabotage their careers, taunt editors and live isolated existences with few friends.

But set against humid backdrops where crime and corruption run rampant, these imperfect men are also seekers of truth and justice, willing to aid others to their own detriment.

They are good guys - and better reporters.

While the characters live in different worlds and battle different demons, Hiaasen uses similarities within their personalities and story lines to paint a consistent image of a lonely and imperfect, but honest and capable journalist whose conscience compels him to do the right thing. Above all, Hiaasen's reporters have a respect for their trade that won't let them walk away from its ideals when they walk out of the newsroom.

### Stars Who Burn Out – Or Explode

“Tell me why you quit the newspaper.”

“Because I made a mistake.”

“Everybody makes mistakes.”

“Not in that business.”<sup>2</sup>

When the novels open, four once-respected members of their profession have all fallen from grace and are all grappling with what their lives have become.

When Brian Keyes is introduced in *Tourist Season*,<sup>3</sup> he has left a stable reporting career at Miami’s biggest daily newspaper, the *Miami Sun*, and become a fledging private detective “working for a bunch of sleazoid lawyers and bail bondsmen.”<sup>4</sup>

While once he spent his days covering South Florida’s police, courts and crooked politicians,<sup>5</sup> he now covers its cheating husbands for wives looking to score big in divorce settlements. Although he doesn’t like to admit it, “he’d gotten damn good at staking out nooner motels with his 300 millimeter Nikon.”<sup>6</sup>

By all accounts, Keyes had been a solid reporter. Editors never questioned his ability.

But they did question his stomach.<sup>7</sup>

Two incidents retold in the novel’s opening chapters reveal that his own sensitivity led to his downfall.

The first occurred after Keyes covered a fully-loaded 727 airplane that exploded in Florida Bay. He rented an outboard and filed a “superb story, full of gripping detail,” but he was so horrified by what he’d seen, “they damn near had to hospitalize him afterward.”<sup>8</sup> Keyes spent

six months hallucinating that “burned arms and legs were reaching out for him underneath the bedroom furniture.”<sup>9</sup>

The second concerned Keyes’ last day at the paper. Six-year-old Callie Davenport had been kidnapped from her nursery school by a sprinkler repairman and murdered. Her body was found in the Everglades Christmas Eve. Keyes had been assigned to interview the family, and once again, he came back with a heartbreaking story for the front page Christmas Day.<sup>10</sup> It was filled with touching quotes.

“All I want, sobbed the little girl’s father, is ten minutes alone with the guy who did this. Ten minutes and a claw hammer.” A neighbor drove Callie’s mother to the morgue to identify her. “I wanted to lay down beside her,” Mrs. Davenport said.<sup>11</sup>

But after turning in the story, Keyes walked into his editor’s office and promptly resigned. Only one reporter at the paper, Keyes’ nemesis Skip Wiley, knew the truth. “That young man, Wiley said, watching him go, “is too easily horrified to be a good reporter.”<sup>12</sup>

In *Basketcase*,<sup>13</sup> Jack Tagger was a lead reporter on the *Union-Register*’s prestigious investigations team before his temper and disdain for the new world of corporate journalism got the best of him. When the family-owned *Register* is bought out by the large media conglomerate Maggad Feist Publishing Group, Tagger uses the first stockholders meeting to tell off the company’s chairman and CEO, Race Maggad III. “The remarks were brief but shockingly coarse, causing young polo-playing Race Maggad III to lose his composure in front of five hundred edgy investors.”<sup>14</sup>

When the novel opens, Tagger is now a pathetic, middle-aged *Register* obituary writer with a death obsession that keeps him awake nights.<sup>15</sup> “Certainly, this is no life to be

esteemed,”<sup>16</sup> he recognizes. The section is a training ground for interns and fresh out of college rookies. He hasn’t been on the front page in more than three years and spends his days plotting his return to the spotlight.<sup>17</sup>

In *Native Tongue*, Winder is a miserable former reporter whose new job as a public relations flak for the South Florida animal theme park Amazing Kingdom “takes nothing from him, except his pride.”<sup>18</sup> While he is described as having been a talented investigative reporter in the newsroom, Winder’s fear of resembling his sleazy, land-developer father - a man responsible for turning half the Everglades into condos - put an end to his newspaper career and keeps him on a roller coaster of impulsive behavior.

The incident that ends his career begins when Winder uncovers the fact that his father has bribed a county commissioner in exchange for a favorable vote on a zoning variance.<sup>19</sup> But after Winder digs through his father’s cancelled checks, his editor pulls him off the story, saying it created an ethical dilemma. Winder then rams the editor’s head through a word processor.<sup>20</sup>

Tom Krome is a tough-talking natural investigative reporter wasting away in the features department of a mid-level South Florida newspaper in *Lucky You*.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the other Hiaasen protagonists, Krome’s descent has more to do with the industry than his own actions. Krome merely had “the misfortune to have been peaking in his career as an investigative reporter at a time when most newspapers no longer wished to pay for those particular skills.”<sup>22</sup> So when his paper goes under, he is left with little choice but to take a new job at a mid-level South Florida paper, reporting on “breaking fluff.”<sup>23</sup>

### Isolated People with Unstable Romantic Lives

Journalists in popular culture have always suffered the stigma of being incapable to hold down normal relationships with friends and lovers. Hiaasen's protagonists are no exceptions.

Never-married Brian Keyes lives a lonely existence.<sup>24</sup> The friendships he once had all dissolved after he left the newspaper for private detective work. Like many of the other *Sun* reporters, he never cultivated relationships outside work: "There were nights when a phone call from any sociable non-felon would have been a welcome surprise on the old beeper."<sup>25</sup>

Now that he was no longer at the *Sun*, he spent his nights alone, missing the camaraderie of the newsroom: "It ruled your whole damn life, the newspaper, and even if it made vulgar bastards out of everybody, at least those bastards were there in the empty times."<sup>26</sup>

His romantic life is in equally dire straits. Before the novel begins, Keyes has already lost the love of his life, a bubbly aerobics instructor, to a man who is hell-bent on destroying Miami. Keyes spends most of the novel pining for her. The fact that she has chosen a murderer over himself because the other man is exciting while Keyes "refuses to participate [in life]" is lost on him until the book's closing chapters.<sup>27</sup>

Death-obsessed Tagger is also a lifelong bachelor, although he's had unsuccessful long-term relationships with three women.<sup>28</sup> When *Basketcase* opens, the latest has dumped him because she couldn't stand his neurotic behavior, including his death-obsession.<sup>29</sup>

At the time they put me on the obits I was forty four, the same age as Fitzgerald when he died. I couldn't get it out of my head, couldn't sleep, couldn't stop talking about it-and I wasn't even a Gatsby fan. At first Anne tried to help but eventually decided it was no use. Then she left.<sup>30</sup>

He too, has few friends and, like Keyes, attributes his dismal social and romantic life to his profession. After being relegated to the obituary section, the only person at the paper who will speak to him is Juan, a sports reporter from Cuba, and his only friendship outside the paper is with the teenage daughter of his ex-girlfriend.<sup>31</sup>

As he tells his editor, Emma, in a rare moment of intimacy:

It's a brutal occupation we've chosen, Emma. Once upon a time I was tolerable company. I had my charming moments. I was not immune to empathy. Believe it or not, I could sustain healthy relationships with friends, co-workers, lovers. But not anymore.<sup>32</sup>

When *Native Tongue* begins, Winder is shacking up with a phone-sex operator who charges him \$4.95 per minute to speak with her because she only has a business line.<sup>33</sup> She leaves him after he is fired from his Amazing Kingdom job, claiming *his* life was too tumultuous and too much a distraction now that she is focusing on a sideline career writing and selling phone sex scripts.<sup>34</sup>

In *Lucky You*, Tom Krome is married to a woman he hasn't seen and has been trying to divorce for four years. The couple dated just five weeks before marrying and had little in common other than sex: "Overdoing it spared them from having to listen to each other chatter on about their respective careers, in which neither partner held much interest."<sup>35</sup> After six months of marriage, Krome realized the marriage was doomed and asked for a divorce. When she refused, he disappeared, leaving his wife a note that read, "if you won't leave me, I'll find someone else who will."<sup>36</sup>

Krome's wife blamed his unsettled personality for their relationship woes. She compares marriage to a plateau: "Tom's not a plateau type personality. He's got to be either going up, or going down. Climbing or falling."<sup>37</sup>

### **Can't Resist a Good Story**

In Hiaasen's novels, being a journalist means more than simply collecting a pay check and flashing a press pass. It means chasing a story whenever and wherever it may be found, even when it's not in the current job description.

Tagger's only job as an obituary writer is to write about subjects' lives, not investigate their deaths, a fact which his editors frequently remind him of.<sup>38</sup> In the opening chapters of the novel, Tagger goes to interview for a standard obit piece a young widow, Cleo Reo, after musician husband drowns in a Bahamas diving accident.

Despite years of sitting behind a desk, Tagger's investigative skills have not dulled. During the interview he first notices Cleo's toes curling and uncurling. "Either it's some kind of yoga routine, or Cleo Reo is nervous."<sup>39</sup> Seconds later, he picks up that Cleo is referring to her husband in the past tense, when new widows usually still refer to their husbands in the present.

After the interview, he wants to dig deeper. He pleads with his editor to let him investigate.

When she refuses, he won't let it go and threatens to cash in his amassed sick days and leave her grossly understaffed. "Tomorrow you will receive a letter from a prominent board-certified health care provider, attesting to the seriousness of my condition, namely chronic colorectal diverticulosis."<sup>40</sup> He's on a plane to the Bahamas the next day.

As a publicity writer for Amazing Kingdom animal park, Winder has no duties in *Native Tongue* beyond writing upbeat press releases and ensuring that each “was carefully purged of all intriguing details.”<sup>41</sup>

When two of the park’s “blue tongued voles” are suspiciously stolen in broad daylight, Winder is assigned to write a press release decrying the crime as a random incident before any real investigation can be done. But Winder can’t help himself from sniffing around. He soon discovers nothing at as it appears at the park. Old instincts take over.

He felt suddenly clear headed, chipper, even optimistic. Maybe it was the [cold] medicine flushing his head or maybe it was something else.  
Like having a real honest-to-God story for a change.  
A story getting good and hot.  
Just like the old days.<sup>42</sup>

When his boss warns him to keep churning out light press releases and stop digging up trouble, he persists, and loses his job. Still, Winder won’t stop investigating the park. “You can fire me, but I won’t go away,”<sup>43</sup> he tells his boss, before setting off to crack open the scandal that ultimately implicates the Amazing Kingdom’s owner as a murderer, gangster and cheat.<sup>44</sup>

The opening chapters of *Lucky You* find Krome in a small Florida town filled with scammers and religious fanatics. His editor, Sinclair, has sent him there to report on the state’s newest lottery winner, JoLayne Lucks.<sup>45</sup> But when Lucks comes to him bloody and bruised and tells him a pair of scheming white supremacists stole the ticket, Krome itches to track them down and uncover the story.

His editor, however, doesn’t buy the woman’s tale, believing she never had the ticket at all. Besides, his beat is features now, not investigations.<sup>46</sup>



Bored from months of reporting on “breaking fluff,” Krome insists on one week to follow the trail. When Sinclair refuses, he tells his editor he will leave the newspaper and get the story on his own.

“I wish I could do it, but I can’t.”

“Then I suppose I’ll just have to quit.”

“That isn’t funny.”

“Finally, we agree.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Respect the Principles of Journalism**

Don’t become part of the story. It’s a cardinal rule of the trade.<sup>48</sup>

In the closing chapters of *Tourist Season*, the reader learns the truth about the Callie Davenport story, which ends Brian Keyes’ career. Keyes recounts the night he was sent out on assignment. He made it only as far as the Davenport family’s door, before his stomach gave out.

In a nice voice Mrs. Davenport asked me what I wanted. At first I couldn’t say a damn thing and then I told her I was an insurance adjuster and I was looking for the Smiths’ house and I must have gotten the wrong address. I drove back to my apartment and made up the whole story, all those swell quotes. That’s what the *Sun* printed.<sup>49</sup>

No one at the *Miami Sun* knew about the transgression. And they never would have found out. After the story ran, the Davenports called to thank Keyes for respecting their privacy that day. They clearly didn’t think he had done anything wrong.<sup>50</sup> But Keyes knew better. He had crossed ethical boundaries clearly laid out in the journalists’ code. He had not only become part of the story, he had made it up.

He tells a new love interest at the end of the novel, “I had to quit the paper. I’d stepped over the line and there was no turning back.”<sup>51</sup>

In *Lucky You*, Tom Krome understood instantly that participating in a subject’s cross state trip to track down two thugs who stole her lottery ticket, and becoming romantically involved with her, meant he could no longer write about her mission:

...not if he still cared about the tenets of journalism, which he did. Honest reporters could always make a good stab at objectivity, or at least professional detachment. That was now impossible.<sup>52</sup>

This law of journalism is also fresh in Tagger’s mind as he tries to stay within the boundaries of the game in *Basketcase*. He is ever mindful of the line he shouldn’t be crossing as he gets involved with murderers and con artists in order to solve the mysterious death of a rock star. “A cardinal rule of journalism is to never become part of the story. I’m hopelessly up to my nuts in this one.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Action Hero Bravery**

Hiaasen’s reporters routinely morph into selfless action heroes. They shoot guns and face off with criminals as if it is all part of the job. In the course of pursuing a story, they will put their best interests aside in order to restore justice to their worlds. Often, a female is at the center of their newfound bravery.

To help his old mentor at the *Miami Sun*, Keyes selflessly agrees to hunt down a dangerous *Sun* columnist, Skip Wiley, and his militia, bringing him back quietly before the paper’s reputation can be damaged.<sup>54</sup> He risks his death from both man and nature when, with no outdoor experience, he rents a canoe and takes off alone in the Everglades to confront the killers in the same place their victims had been killed.

It was an adventurous feeling...He was no great outdoorsman, but this discomfort was born out of unfamiliarity, not fear... Since moving to Florida, Keyes had heard the hoary stories of panthers, poisonous snakes and killer alligators, and though he dismissed most of it as cracker mythology, Keyes did not savor such a chance encounter. Wiley, if indeed he was out there, would be beast enough.<sup>55</sup>

After confronting Wiley and escaping with his life, Keyes again throws it on the line to protect a young beauty queen, Kara Lynn, whom the militia is planning on attacking. Armed with a scrawny physique and only an old Browning nine millimeter for protection, Keyes insists on guarding Kara Lynn.<sup>56</sup> In a moment of intimacy, Keyes admits to Kara Lynn that he's scared: "Things were changing. All of a sudden the stakes couldn't be higher. The harrowing parameters of his nightmare had become perceptible..."<sup>57</sup>

Later, Keyes serves the superhero role. When a crazed militia members kidnaps a Miami police officer he plans on murdering, Keyes defies the odds and tracks them to the remote jetty in North Key Largo. Keyes fires two rounds into the officer's captor, killing him instantly.<sup>58</sup>

When Wiley kidnaps Kara Lynn, Keyes single-handedly tracks them down to the remote island rigged with dynamite. Wiley plans on leaving her to die aboard a sailboat close enough to the dynamite to explode, until Keyes foils his plans like an action hero:

"Brian Keyes moved quickly out of the trees....He strode up to Skip Wiley, placed a foot on his chest, and kicked him flat on his back. A one man cavalry!"<sup>59</sup> Keyes saves the day, rescuing the young beauty queen and leaving the bad guy to die.<sup>60</sup>

In *Basketcase*, obituary writer Tagger continues to pursue the mysterious death of rock star Jimmy Stoma, even after he is almost shot to death in his own home by assailants who don't

want him snooping around.<sup>61</sup> As in *Tourist Season*, Tagger also risks his life in order to follow criminals into the Everglades after they kidnap his young female editor. Brandishing a weapon he'd never held before, Tagger is able to save the girl and spook the thugs enough that they crash their airboat and die in a fiery explosion.<sup>62</sup>

In *Lucky You*, Tom Krome fearlessly decides to stick with lottery winner JoLayne Lucks and chase down the criminals who have stolen her lottery ticket, although he has nothing to gain from the adventure and possibly his life to lose.<sup>63</sup> In one scene, Krome finds himself transitioning from reporter to commando when he fires a weapon for the first time in order to protect Lucks.<sup>64</sup>

Joe Winder also gets in some gun time in *Native Tongue*. When the crooked land-developing owner of Amazing Kingdom plans on mowing over a prime nature preserve in order to build a championship golf course community, Winder is furious. He borrows a foreign-made semiautomatic and heads to the construction site. When the construction workers refuse to listen to reason and stop working, Winder takes out the gun:

“Winder held the semiautomatic steady. He was surprised at how natural it felt. ‘Is this what it takes to have a civilized conversation with you shitheads?’”<sup>65</sup> After threatening the workers, they agree to assist him in trashing the bulldozers being used to tear through the land.<sup>66</sup>

### **They are Do-Gooders at Heart**

While Hiaasen's journalists exhibit macho behavior, they are also sensitive and hung-up on doing the right thing.

In *Tourist Season*, Brian Keyes is the only person who cares about a man thrown in jail for a string of murders he is wrongly accused of. When the man commits suicide in jail, Keyes confronts the public defender who did nothing to clear his client's name.

“Brian, don't tell me you actually gave a shit about that little greaseball,” the man says<sup>67</sup> Keyes then reaches across the table and spears the lawyer's tongue with a cocktail fork.<sup>68</sup> Keyes is left haunted by the suicide, and vows to clear the inmate's name despite the lack of cooperation from law enforcement and city government officials who want to put the case to bed. At that moment, he is the only person committed to serving justice. “I guess this leaves me the lone ranger,” he says.<sup>69</sup>

In *Lucky You*, the lottery winner is initially suspicious of Tom Krome's motivations for helping her track down the missing ticket. “I don't blame you for being suspicious of me,” he tells her:<sup>70</sup>

Look, if I were reporting this story instead of participating, the first thing I'd ask: How do you know that guy isn't after your lotto money, too? All I can say is, I'm not. The idea never crossed my mind, that's the truth. Which raises the question, what the hell is wrong with me? Why risk my neck for a woman I've only known for a week?<sup>71</sup>

When a pair of baby voles go missing in *Native Tongue*, Winder's boss insists on offering a reward for their safe return in the name of good publicity, even though he knows the voles are already dead. The reader is first clued in to Winder's sensitivity when he becomes “heartsick” by the sight of two baby rabbits with missing ears that were sent to the park by a man claiming they were the missing voles.<sup>72</sup> While Winder is portrayed as a tough talking, take-no-crap-from-anyone guy, the incident has him torn to pieces even hours later. “He should have seen it coming,

some greedy psychopath would mutilate some helpless bunny rabbits for ten thousand lousy fucking dollars.”<sup>73</sup>

Later in the novel, when Winder learns Amazing Kingdom is at fault for the death of a young scientist who was eaten by its killer whale, he becomes preoccupied with making sure the scientist’s widow collects a big settlement from the company. When it refuses to pay out, Winder uses his writing skills to send a press release out on the wire stating the park would pay out a multi-million dollar settlement.<sup>74</sup> Backed into a corner, they have to pay.

### **Final Thoughts**

Hiaasen paints an image of an imperfect journalist with redemptive qualities similar to the journalist characters before him. Although each character suffers from the typical laundry list of maladies, his capabilities and passion for journalism are never questioned. He is able to grow despite personal problems and past mistakes. And as is typical in journalism fiction, each novel ends with the redeemed journalist getting the girl.<sup>75</sup>

In *Tourist Season*, Brian Keyes is finally able to make piece with the mistake that ended his career after sharing the secret he has been hiding for so long with the beauty queen he saves.

In *Basketcase*, Jack Tagger’s finally proves Cleo Reo murdered her husband and is thrust back onto the front page of the newspaper for the first time in three years. He is a respected member of the profession once again. The young editor he once loathed is now his girlfriend.

Tom Krome becomes a hero when he hunts down the bad guys and retrieves JoLayne Luck’s lotto ticket in *Lucky You*. He is rewarded with her love, and vows never to write about their adventure.

Joe Winder finds love in the arms of a park employee and hints at returning to newspaper life in *Native Tongue*.

By the novels' end, these reporters are a little less lonely and imperfect than when they started.

## Appendix

### State of Journalism

Hiaasen uses his characters to write despairingly about the state of the American newspaper in *Lucky You* and *Basketcase*. These additions to the story line reflect Hiaasen's own feelings about the industry.

In *Lucky You* Tom Krome is a victim of downsizing. In the novel's opening pages, Hiaasen speaks directly to the reader about the trend.

*The downsizing trend that swept newspapers in the early 90s was aimed at sustaining the bloated profit margins in which the industry had wallowed for most of the century. A new soulless breed of corporate managers, unburdened by a passion for serious journalism, found an easy way to reduce the cost of publishing a daily newspaper. The first casualty was depth. Cutting the amount of space devoted to news instantly justified cutting the staff.*<sup>76</sup>

*At many papers, downsizing was the favored excuse for eliminating such luxuries as police desks, suburban editions, foreign bureaus, medical writers, environmental specialists, and of course investigative teams (which were always antagonizing civic titans and important advertisers). As the newspaper grew thinner and shallower, the men who published them worked harder to assume Wall Street that readers neither noticed or cared.*<sup>77</sup>

The "Wall Street" comments mirror those Hiaasen has made during various interviews and speeches, such as the one he gave after winning the Denver Press Club's 10th Annual Damon Runyon Award in 2004. His remarks were summarized by a reporter:

*Hiaasen deplored what he said is the growing trend of papers becoming more of a commodity to be traded on Wall Street than a source of in-depth reporting on local*

*issues. "It's a pastiche of colorful graphics," he said. "It's less and less copy, less and less news space."<sup>78</sup>*

In *Basketcase*, Jack Tagger is demoted after verbally assaulting his paper's newest "soulless corporate manager," Race Maggad III, after the *Union-Register* is bought out by Maggad-Feist.

*Maggad Feist is a publicly traded company that owns 27 daily papers across the country. The chairman and CEO, the young Race Maggad III, believes newspapers can prosper handsomely without practicing distinguished journalism, as distinguished journalism tends to cost money. Race Maggad believes the easiest way to boost a paper's profits is to cut back on the actual gathering of news.*

Later in the novel Tagger laments the fate of his paper:

*Up until a few years ago, I never had any doubts about newspaper work, never thought I'd made the wrong choice. I went into the business not because I was looking to get beat up or training to be a novelist, but because I wanted to be Bob Woodward or Seymour Hersh, kicking but on the front page.*

*But then the paper was sold, the news hole shrunk, the staff got downsized, I got pissed off--and when the opportunity presented itself, publicly humiliated our new CEO.<sup>79</sup>*

In an interview with *Miami New Times*, Hiaasen admitted that the Race character was a "barely disguised caricature" of Tony Ridder, CEO of the *Herald's* parent company, Knight Ridder. In 2002, Ridder announced he was giving millions of dollars to company managers after slashing newsroom budgets and considerably reducing newsroom staff in order to reach profit margins of 25 percent, the same percentage Race is aiming for in *Basketcase*.<sup>80</sup>

*How could I not write about him? I grew up with this newspaper. I've put my life into it! It was the paper that landed on my doorstep every morning. So I have a right to be pissed, just like any reader. Anyone who can look you in the eye and tell you the Miami Herald of 2004 is as good as it was in 1984 is out of their skull. It's palpable, the difference is palpable.*

*But to be fair, I don't know what the options are. I don't blame the Herald. I blame Knight Ridder. There's plenty of good talent there, plenty of good editors, all the ingredients. But when you're not in charge of the money, when you're getting memos that say cut here, cut there, you're screwed. Short of quitting, what do you do? It's amazing what they still do given how the budget has shrunk, the staff has shrunk, the news hole has shrunk. But it's really silly pretending it's the same paper it used to be.<sup>81</sup>*



### **Comprehensive list of journalists in Hiaasen novels**

While this paper featured journalists in the protagonist role, many other journalists appear in Hiaasen novels. Below is a list of these characters.

#### ***Tourist Season***

**Ricky Bloodworth.** The Miami Sun's cub reporter. In the novel's opening pages, Bloodworth is described as "wearing that pale, obsessive look of ambition that was so familiar in big city newsrooms."<sup>82</sup>

More than just a reporter, Bloodworth aspires to be a "character." As a testament to his ridiculous nature, he is constantly looking for new accessories to aid in the process. "Panama hats, silken hats, black eye patch, saddle shoes, a Vandyke – nobody ever noticed." Bloodworth even "experimented with Turkish Cigarettes thinking it made him look debonair and ended up in the hospital."<sup>83</sup>

The most comical incarnation of Bloodworth's self-love is the hours on end he spends playing with his byline after a correspondent from the New York Times tells him the paper doesn't hire people named "Ricky."<sup>84</sup>

When the Sun's start columnist goes missing, the news editor, Cab Mulcahy, is forced to give Bloodworth a shot at his column against his better judgment. In the column, Bloodworth praises the police work that led to the arrest and suicide of a man both the editor and Keyes knew to be innocent of the murders Wiley was actually committing. Mulcahy describes the resulting column as "half baked, unfocused and banal."<sup>85</sup>

In the second half of the column, Bloodworth is caught secretly tape recording a police officer without permission.<sup>86</sup> When the officer kicks Bloodworth out of his office, he sneaks back in. Seeing a package on the officers desk he feels is evidence the cops have been purposely keeping from him, Bloodworth promptly runs to the bathroom and opens the package.<sup>87</sup> The "evidence" was actually a live bomb. While Bloodworth survives the explosion, he loses his fingertips and can no longer type.<sup>88</sup>

**Skip Wiley.** Skip Wiley is the *Miami Sun's* star columnist.<sup>89</sup> He has an ego the size of the city. "Wiley knew he was a star in the same way he knew he was brown eyed. It was just something else he could see in the mirror each morning, plain as day."<sup>90</sup>

At the *Miami Sun*, he receives more mail than any other reporter. The paper's publisher considers his columns to be the *Sun's* most illustrious product: "...what made the Miami Sun a good product were Skip Wiley, Ann Landers and Dagwood Bumstead."<sup>91</sup>

Fully aware of his golden boy status, Wiley allows his narcissism to reveal itself whenever anyone dares to change a comma or add a word into his columns. He calls his editor at least once a week demanding the firing "or public humiliation of some midlevel editor who dared to alter the column. These tirades usually lasted about thirty minutes."<sup>92</sup>

Like Bloodworth, Wiley is portrayed as being more concerned with sensationalism than accuracy. In the novel's opening pages, Wiley harshly accuses a man of murder in his column without any facts or reliable sources and makes up his own accusations of sexual torture (the man is later revealed to be innocent). When confronted by his editor, Wiley says he was only dramatizing the crime problem. "I did it to give em' goosebumps," he tells the editor.<sup>93</sup>

While Wiley has always been a loose cannon, his editor points out that in the past six months, his behavior has been more pronounced than usual: "You're fucking up on a regular basis. You miss deadlines, you libel people, you invent ludicrous facts and put them in the paper... We've had to print seven retractions in the last four months – that's a new record, by the way."

When Wiley suddenly disappears, Keyes is sent to find him. Keyes then discovers that Wiley has formed a militia and has been on a murderous rampage, believing he can single-handedly start a revolution in South Florida that will turn back the hands of time, scare all the snowbirds and tourists from the land and reclaim the Everglades.<sup>94</sup>

Wiley is killed by a dynamite explosion in the end of the novel.

**Cab Mulcahy.** Mulcahy is the long-time managing editor of the *Miami Sun*.

He cares more for the paper than anything else in life:<sup>95</sup> "Mulcahy was one of those rare editors who gone into newspapers for all the right reasons, with all the right instincts and all the right sensibilities. He was a wonderful fluke- fair but not weak, tough but not heartless, aggressive but circumspect."<sup>96</sup>

Mulcahy been shot multiple times in the line of duty and couldn't be shaken. His attitude earns him both the respect and love of his staff. "He was a composed, distinguished looking presence among the young neurotics who put out the daily newspaper."<sup>97</sup>

It's Mulcahy who first asks Keyes to quietly hunt down Skip Wiley before he ruins the *Sun's* reputation. While Mulcahy maintains a cool demeanor, "the Wiley situation was tearing him up."<sup>98</sup>

**Cardoza.** Cardoza is the publisher of the *Miami Sun*. He is described as a "boundless entrepreneur with little understanding of journalism" who "loved the variety of making money."<sup>99</sup> Cardoza is a big fan of Skip Wiley because his columns bring in money. When Skip goes missing, Cardoza insists that Cab bring back his columns before sales go down.

### *SkinTight*

**Reynaldo Flemm.** Flemm is a broadcast journalist who stars in a sensational program called *In Your Face!* He is described as being "nationally famous for getting beaten up on camera, usually by the very hoodlums he was trying to interview. No matter what kind of elaborate disguises

Reynaldo Flemm would devise, he was always too vain to cover his face. Naturally the crooks would recognize him immediately and bash the living shit out of him.”<sup>100</sup>

Flemm equates Journalistic success with good looks. When he turns the television on and sees Mike Wallace on Letterman he becomes jealous and starts to fume: "You know how old that geezer is, I'm half his age." He can't understand that Wallace's journalistic accomplishments, not his appearance, make up his appeal.

**Christina Marks.** Marks is Flemm's producer and portrayed as the reason he is successful. She does all his research, writes all of his interview questions and scripts ahead of time so Flemm only has to read them off, and edits all his tapes. Unlike Flemm, Marks has a serious journalism background, going to the University of Missouri before taking her first job at ABC affiliate in St. Louis. She spent three years in Chicago until she met Flemm and he offered her an assistant producer job.<sup>101</sup>

### *Native Tongue*

**Maria Rodriguez.** Rodriguez is a local ABC affiliate reporter in South Florida who comes to the Amazing Kingdom to swim with the park's new dolphin and is attacked by it. She is described as being "an attractive young Latina woman wearing oversized sunglasses."<sup>102</sup>

### *Basketcase*

**Emma.** Emma is the editor of the obituary section. She is "young and owns a grinding ambition to ascend the newspaper's management ladder. She hopes for an office with a window, a position of genuine authority and stock options."<sup>103</sup> In the first half of the novel, Tagger feels she is unfit for newspaper work and constantly taunts her. It is revealed that working with Tagger has caused Emma to start taking Valium.

**Tim Buckminster.** Buckminster is the paper's 25-year old music critic whom Tagger despises. When the novel begins, Tim has begun calling himself T.O., although Tagger insists on calling him Timmy. He is portrayed as a "smarmy little shitweiser" who doesn't know much about music beyond the last few years.<sup>104</sup>

**McArthur Polk.** Polk is the elderly Union-Register publisher who has sold the paper to a large media conglomerate before the novel begins. Polk is horrified by the way Maggad-Feist has run his paper into the ground. Upon his deathbed, Polk asks Tagger to become the become his estate manager in order to keep the many outstanding shares of Maggad-Feist he was given in the buyout away from the paper's publisher, Race Maggad III.

**Juan Rodriguez.** Rodriguez is the Union-Resister's sports reporter and is Tagger's only remaining friend at the paper. Rodriguez and his sister came to Florida from Cuba on a shrimp boat as children. During the trip, Rodriguez killed two convicts trying to rape his sister. He is haunted by nightmares every night. At the end of the novel, he leaves to paper to write a book about his experiences.

**Evan.** Evan is the intern from an unnamed prestigious university working alongside Tagger in the Obituaries section. He is described as "gangly and cyanotic and fashionably disheveled." He has no intention of becoming a professional journalist after finishing college, but Tagger nonetheless is "fond of him."

### *Lucky You*

**Sinclair.** Sinclair is the assistant deputy managing editor of features and style at the Register. He is described as "relying on the fact that no one outside the business understood the insignificance of the position. At small papers like the Register, it is one of the least nerve wracking and lowest-profile jobs and he couldn't be happier." He is Tom Krome's editor, and likes to avoid Krome as much as possible because Krome makes him nervous. In the second half of the novel, Sinclair sets off to look for his missing reporter and ends up losing his mind. He becomes a religious fanatic who stops speaking and only mutters old headlines he once wrote.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Hiaasen was born and raised in South Florida. He graduated from the University Of Florida School Of Journalism in 1971 and began his career writing quirky public interest features for *Cocoa Today*. In 1976, he joined The Herald and worked as a general assignment reporter, magazine writer and award-winning investigative reporter before starting his column in 1985. In 1981, he co-authored his first novel, *Powder Burn*, with Bill Montalbano. Like most of his work to come, the novel was set in a scandal driven South Florida atmosphere.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season* (New York: Warner, 1987) Pg. 222.

<sup>3</sup> When the president of the Miami Chamber of Commerce is found dead inside a suitcase with his legs sawn off and a rubber alligator stuffed down his throat, news and police locals prefer to believe it's simply another typical South Florida crime. But when letters from a terrorist group, *Las Noches de Diciembre*, link the man's death to the disappearances of a visiting Shriner and a Canadian tourist, former newsman (now private eye) Brian Keyes intuits that someone is out to kill Florida's tourism trade. His investigation leads him to an old journalism crony, Skip Wiley, obsessed with fury against the state's irresponsible development policies.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*. Pg. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 371

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Pg 18.

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Tagger is a down-on-his-luck journalist relegated to the obit beat at a smalltown Florida daily. While researching a death notice, Jack stumbles by accident upon an actual news story: former rocker Jimmy Stoma has drowned while diving in the Bahamas, and his widow, wannabe star Cleo Rio, can't convince Jack that his death was accidental. The mystery offers Jack a way out of his job-related death fixation. When the mystery turns more and more violent, Tagger must stop the deaths and figure out who's behind them.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase* (New York: Warner, 2003) Pg. 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 39.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Native Tongue* (New York: Warner, 2004) Pg. 36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 196.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 196.

<sup>21</sup> JoLayne Lucks has one of two winning lottery tickets each worth a cool \$14 million. She plans to spend it rescuing a local plot of swampland from a strip mall developer. The holders of the other winning ticket, however, are Bode Gazer and his sidekick, Chubb, who want the whole \$28 million. Afire with paramilitary fervor, Bode and Chubb need the cash to bankroll the start-up of the White Clarion Aryans before NATO takes over America with a handicapped parking sticker scam. They steal JoLayne's ticket, but before they can cash it she mounts a hot pursuit with the help of local journalist Tom Krome.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You* (New York: Warner, 1998) Pg. 25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*. Pg. 210.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 356.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 219.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 356.

<sup>28</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase*. Pg. 61.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 89.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 142.

<sup>33</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Native Tongue*. Pg. 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 215.

<sup>35</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You*. Pg. 77

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 285.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 78.

<sup>38</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase*. Pg. 60.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 111.

<sup>41</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Native Tongue*. Pg. 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 198.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You*. Pg. 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 79.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 82.

<sup>48</sup> Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics: Act Independently – Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.

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<sup>49</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*. Pg. 372.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 376.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 276.

<sup>52</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You*. Pg. 276.

<sup>53</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase*. Pg. 318.

<sup>54</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*. Pg. 50.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 93.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 211.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 261.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 331.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 368.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 378.

<sup>61</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase*. Pg. 161.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 364.

<sup>63</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You*. Pg. 345.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Native Tongue*. Pg. 247.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*. Pg. 73.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 75.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You*. Pg. 292.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Native Tongue*. Pg. 59.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 198.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 59.

<sup>75</sup> See Howard Good, *Acquainted with the Night* (London: Scarecrow, 1986).

<sup>76</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Lucky You*. Pg. 25.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> [http://www.blacktie-colorado.com/premiere\\_events/details.cfm?id=891](http://www.blacktie-colorado.com/premiere_events/details.cfm?id=891)

<sup>79</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase*. Pg. 183.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 185.

<sup>81</sup> [http://www.miaminewtimes.com/issues/2004-11-11/news/kulchur\\_full.html](http://www.miaminewtimes.com/issues/2004-11-11/news/kulchur_full.html)

<sup>82</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*. Pg. 7.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 8.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 126.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 76.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 236.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 239.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 249.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 9.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 26.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 241.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 265.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Pg. 24.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. Pg. 104.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Pg. 268.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Pg. 190.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. Pg. 23.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Pg. 190.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Pg. 240.

<sup>100</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Skin Tight*. Pg.33.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. Pg.181.

<sup>102</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Native Tongue*. Pg.186.

<sup>103</sup> Carl Hiaasen, *Basketcase*. Pg. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Carl Hiaasen *Skin Tight*. Pg.75.