

The First Two Pages: *Heir of Evil*

By J. H. Bográn (Pretur)

The opening of a sequel in a series is a challenge, for it must complete several goals: bring fans back into the familiar world, enamor the new reader, and leave all, the old and the new, thirsty for the next installment.

On the other hand, I'm a firm believer that a best entry in a series must also be a superb stand-alone. That self-imposed ruling came into play when I wrote *Heir of Evil*, the sequel to my debut novel *Treasure Hunt*, now both part of The Falcon Chronicles series.

How did I achieve all of the above goals? Well, I figured that the best way to follow my rules would be by breaking another one.

An aside note is that *Heir of Evil* was first published in Spanish back in 2007, and the English edition came out this year.

And without further ado, here's the opening paragraph:

Berlin, April 28, 1945

Blondi raised its head, posed the saddened brown eyes on her master for the last time, then died. She had been a faithful, noble and elegant German shepherd who had delighted her master's guests with the tricks for which she had been trained. The air in the courtyard of the damaged Chancellery became impregnated with a strong smell of almonds. The eyes of the man, kneeling next to the shepherd, were sad, melancholic. Despite having sent to death hordes of men, women and children, it was watching his dog dying that troubled him. Adolf Hitler distrusted the efficiency of the cyanide pills issued to all the

tenants of the bunker. He chose this purpose for his pet to quiet his doubts. It was better that Blondi died by his own hand. In his mind, he had the firm conviction that the dog would have preferred a send-off at the hands of her master instead of those damn Russians.

Do you see what I did there? What rule did I break?

The one rule that had been instilled in me since the early days of learning the craft: *Never kill a dog on page one.*

Fans of the John Wick film franchise are aware of the consequences one might suffer for killing a dog. (Let's face it, the stolen Mustang played second-fiddle to the puppy.)

I'm a rebel. I'm a native Spanish speaker who happens to pen novels in English. I'm not the first author to break the mold of writing in another language, and I'm sure I'm not the first one to break the no-dog-killing rule either. However, I'm here to tell you it was a conscious choice and I had very good reasons for it. I'll elaborate on some of them.

Everybody hates Hitler and Nazis. They are the epitome of evil in the twentieth century, so how else could I make a reader hate him even more? First of all, I didn't make it up. He murdered Blondie to test the poison pills before using them on himself.

I have a hook into a historic event through the means of prologue set in 1945. The first book in the series opens with a prologue as well, one set in 1978.

I'm a confessed fan of Clive Cussler. All his adventures start with a prologue that sets up a mystery.

The prologue serves another important function beyond being stylistic or formulaic: It makes each book a singular adventure, one that can be read as a stand-alone. As a reader I became particularly grateful for that because I read the first twenty Dirk Pitt adventures completely out of order. In the opposite side of the spectrum is Ian Fleming, who although I think was a great writer and immortalized James Bond as the most popular secret agent in history, after a few books in the series you start to notice that the beginning of a novel sort of tied things up from the previous one. You need to read them in order to make sense of them, otherwise, like me, you'd be forced to go back to previously read books to try and make sense of what's happening.

At the risk of quoting a former U.S. President, I did it because I could. The trick seemed to work because it hooked the early readers and the two editors that worked on it. The book enjoyed good reviews on its first release in Spanish and I hope that readers are kind now that it's available in English.

"Heir of Evil is the ultimate high concept thriller, brilliantly conceived," claimed Jon Land when he blurb he wrote for it. So who am I to contradict a bestselling author, right? For my next magic trick, and the one that kicks the whole

concept of the novel, is the passage where Hitler gets a bit of news that may change the course of the war.

Seeing Hitler enter, the doctor sat up and raised his right arm with the dignified salute of proud Nazi Germany.

“Heil Hitler!”

“Any news, Hoffman?” the leader asked as he indicated the others to leave the room.

“Yes, sir,” replied the doctor.

The doctor waited to have the complete attention of his interlocutor.

Hitler stopped before going around the desk, raised his head and fixed his eyes on the doctor's eyes.

“Fraulein Braun is pregnant. She has about nine weeks.”

Hearing this, the Führer sketched a slight smile. Hoffman could see a glint in his eyes, which the doctor thought was the light at the end of the tunnel. He did not know the real reasons for Hitler's joy, so he assumed it was for future fatherhood. The old doctor was wrong.

When I first thought of the idea of a Hitler's grandchild being offered a new version of the Third Reich, I knew the first thing I had to do was tweak history a bit by getting Eva Braun pregnant. Never mind the Fuhrer, he'd done his job, implanted his seed, literally and figuratively. Let him die in Berlin instead of running away to Argentina or whatever other conspiracy theories have concocted since then. She was the link I needed, so she was the person I had to smuggle her out of sieged Berlin and into a safe harbor.

In modern day we go to a pharmacy and get a pregnancy test, and boom, a few minutes later we know. Back in the '40s, people didn't have that luxury. Part of my research included medical confirmation of a pregnancy. It was fun, and I had

the opportunity to question my wife's ob-gyn. Lucky for me, we were waiting for our third child and I accompanied her in the monthly check-ups. Back then, only doctors were able to confirm a pregnancy with a palm exam, thus the first fictional character to appear in the novel is the doctor who confirms Eva Brown's state.

After the discovery, we sort of return to the history as publicly accepted where Hitler swallowed the pills, then shot his temple. I always wondered about why the two measures, so I also came up with an explanation for it, but I'm sorry to say that's beyond the two-page mark allowed here.

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José H. Bográn is an international author of novels, short stories and scripts for television and film. He's the son of a journalist, but ironically prefers to write fiction rather than facts. His genre of choice is thrillers, but he likes to throw in a twist of romance into the mix. As a freelance writer, he has several articles published in a wide range of topics. Has also provided English/Spanish translation services as well as simultaneous for events and professional meetings and currently teaches Academic Writing, Public Speaking and English as a Second Language at a local university. He's a member of The Crime Writers Association, The Author's Guild, the Short Fiction Writers Guild and the International Thriller Writers where he also serves as the Thriller Roundtable Coordinator and contributor editor their official e-zine The Big Thrill. He lives in Honduras with his wife, three sons, and a Lucky dog.