



ANDREW ABOUNA

When thrill is the drill

Local mystery writer **Matt Coyle** continues his Rick Cahill series in 'Last Redemption'

BY SETH COMBS

After nearly 10 years and eight mystery novels, readers would think Matt Coyle would no longer describe his process as a "a bit of a mess," but he still thinks it's an apt description.

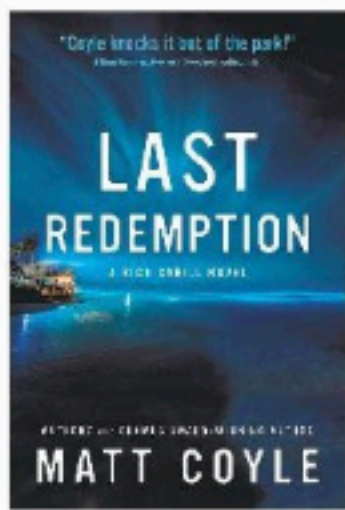
"It's more of a mess now," Coyle says, laughing. "We authors like to call it 'organic' so we sound like we know what we're doing."

Whatever he's doing, it's been working for him. He's won multiple industry awards for his signature Rick Cahill crime novels. The latest adventure, "Last Redemption" (out this week from Oceanview Publishing) sees Rick in an unlikely scenario: happy and optimistic about his future. But it doesn't last long as he is pulled into helping to solve a murder mystery while doing his best not to become a victim himself.

We spoke to the La Jolla author about "Last Redemption," the future of Rick Cahill, and why San Diego is the perfect setting for crime novels and mysteries.

Q. You once said you wanted to write crime novels after your dad gave you a copy of "The Simple Art of Murder" by fellow local Raymond Chandler. San Diego now has such a rich history of stellar mystery, thriller and crime novelists. What is it about the city that lends itself so well to this type of writing?

A. I think it's idyllic, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I always think about the beginning of the movie "Blue Velvet" — that underneath that perfect lawn, there's beetles teeming. There's darkness everywhere,



"Last Redemption" by Matt Coyle (Oceanview Publishing, 2021; 320 pages)

and ours is kind of hidden, but it's there.

Q. For readers who have not yet been introduced to Rick Cahill, can you let them know who he is and what he's all about?

A. He was a cop in Santa Barbara maybe about 18 years before "Last Redemption." He was accused of his wife's murder, arrested, released, but never exonerated. So he's always thought to be a guy who got away with murder. That is solved in a later book, but he's still got this dark cloud that follows him. So he's back in his hometown in San Diego working as a private investigator because he feels like there are people out there who can't go to the police for their problems. When he gets involved in a case, he's like a bulldog. He has to find the truth, but that gets him into trouble.

Q. How has Rick evolved over the course of eight

Warwick's presents Matt Coyle

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Warwick's, 7812 Girard Ave., La Jolla

Tickets: \$26.95; includes copy of "Last Redemption"

Online: warwicks.com

novels? When you think about the first book, "Yesterday's Echo," did you always have an idea that Rick would end up how readers find him in "Last Redemption," the eighth book?

A. No, I didn't have any idea. His life has been kind of a roller coaster. He's evolved and devolved. The major thing for him that really comes to fruition in this book is that every bad decision he's made, along with every physical injury he's had, begin to have consequences.

Q. Yes, the book sees Rick being diagnosed with CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), which would imply that his health will continue to deteriorate. Is Rick's diagnosis and the title of the book a sign that you see an end in sight for his adventures?

A. Yeah, the title does seem to point that way, but I'm not sure about that. There are other things that I want to do and should do. I've been writing this character for 20 years, and I can't imagine not writing him, but it's coming to a time where I have to try something different. But where Rick ends up, I haven't exactly figured that out yet.

Q. Still, a lot of thriller and crime novelists would

just write the same character repeatedly with no discernible trauma. It seems you're unafraid to age your signature character, making him someone who is, in fact, vulnerable and aging.

A. All of the physical violence he's experienced, even as a kid playing sports, comes to a head in this book. To be true to what I wanted to do and the character himself, I had to show that, yes, everything matters. That's where the character has to go, and maybe that's not the best idea, because I've definitely shortened his lifespan.

Q. "Last Redemption" sees Rick engaged and at least attempting to settle down and take safer jobs. That doesn't last very long, of course, so why does he keep doing this to himself?

A. There's times where I really feel for him and I get emotionally involved with what I'm writing. I feel for him. Personally, I wish him a better life, but professionally, I'm going to keep putting him through the grinder. From the first page of this book, it's revealed that his fiancée is pregnant and Rick never thought he'd be a father. So he's in the best spot he's been in throughout all the books. I give him five pages to be as happy as he's ever been before he has to go through it again.

Q. So, you see Rick going on a little bit longer. What's next for him?

A. I just turned in book nine two days ago. The title is "Doomed Legacy," and all I'll say is that Rick can't continue to escape the consequences of his life and actions.

Combs is a freelance writer