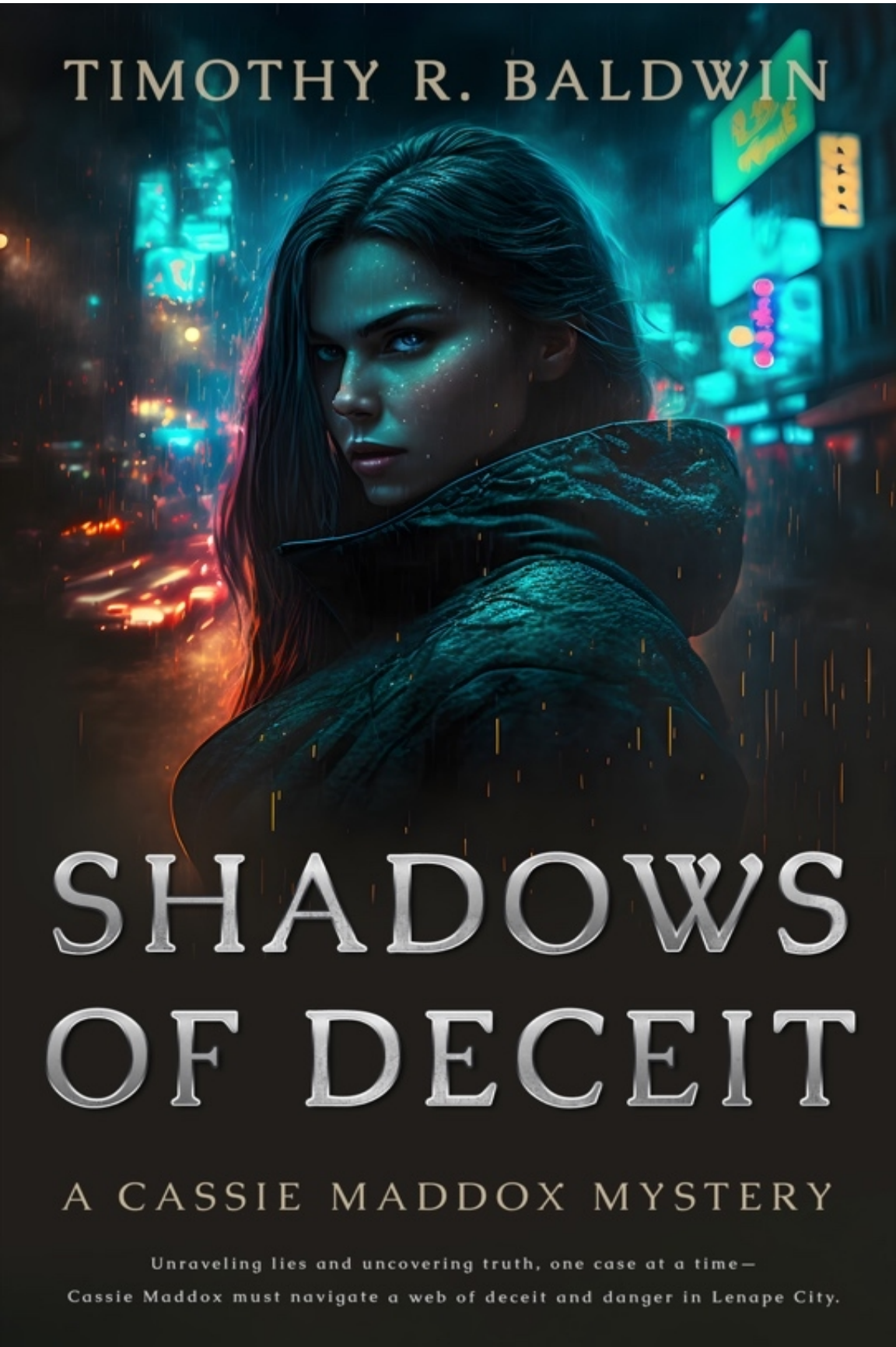


TIMOTHY R. BALDWIN



SHADOWS OF DECEIT

A CASSIE MADDUX MYSTERY

Unraveling lies and uncovering truth, one case at a time—
Cassie Maddux must navigate a web of deceit and danger in Lenape City.

Shadows of Deceit

A Cassie Maddox Mystery, Book 1

Timothy R. Baldwin



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Welcome to Lenape City

Lenape City has a memory. The streets remember secrets, the skyline bears witness to corruption, and the shadows have their own loyalties.

At the heart of it all is Cassie Maddox—a rookie private investigator with a sealed juvenile record, a reluctant badge of legacy, and a stubborn moral compass. By day, she runs background checks out of her mother’s attic. By night, she follows trails no one else dares, with nothing but a secondhand camera, a burning need for justice, and a few too many people underestimating her.

Shadows of Deceit introduces readers to a noir-tinged cityscape where the truth is always buried beneath layers of power, privilege, and well-tailored lies.

Coming Soon to the Series

Book 2: Dynasty of Deceit

Book 3: Behind the Ivy

Book 4: The Tarnished Band

Assignment



Light snowflakes whisk over the windshield of my mid-90s Cadillac DeVille as it hits another pothole, jolting me and the camera next to me. I cringe. Six months into moonlighting as a PI while I support myself as a paralegal proves difficult.

Still, this is the most exciting case yet! Gregory Hunter is a cheating husband.

Up ahead, Mr. Hunter careens in a late 90s Toyota Sedan straight into Lenape City, a town large enough to get lost in but not so large the locals wouldn't notice when a newcomer moves into town.

Several car lengths ahead, the Toyota hooks a right on Broadway. Its driver, Gregory Hunter, has done this more than once since I started following him this afternoon when he left his offices at Lenape Savings and Loans, a few miles from the home he shares in the suburbs with his wife, Trudy Hunter.

Maybe he's on to me, or perhaps he's just paranoid. It's too early in my investigation, but I've followed him long enough to understand his driving habits. I hit my right signal and ease into the turn, wincing as the passenger side wheel grinds against the wheel well, and my unsecured camera shifts in the front passenger seat.

My father, the great Detective Dylan Maddox, gave me this twenty-year-old white Cadillac DeVille car. "Cassie," he said when he tossed me the keys on my twentieth birthday. "You'll need a car if you're going to work at that law firm. You remember Ol' Bess. She's a real looker."

That was five years ago, and one of his many not-so-subtle hints that he wouldn't forget about my now sealed juvenile record, which comprises a series of petty thefts, one breaking and entering, and a night of joyriding with this old Cadillac when I was fifteen. All this embarrassed him and won me a reputation with the Lenape City Police Department.

As the Cadillac straightens onto Broadway, I rest my hand on the camera to keep it from sliding further. Gently used and recently purchased, this is a necessary expense, especially if I want to catch Mr. Hunter "in the act," as Mrs. Hunter called it when she hired me.

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I sat across from her at an obscure diner. Trudy Hunter leaned in, eyeing me coyly. "You know, Cassie, that's what you PI types do? Catch cheating husbands in the act." A stray lock of graying hair fell over her right eye. She swiped at it, waiting for my reply.

I shifted in my seat as I put down my mug. "Mrs. Hunter, I want you to understand I've only been at this for six months. There are plenty of others who have far more experience—"

Trudy waved a hand as she cut me off. "I know that, dear. But the others are too well-known and too expensive. My husband won't recognize you."

I took a sip from my mug before responding. "Okay. But I'm not likely to capture photos of your husband bare-assed and rolling in the sack with some hot secretary. This isn't the

movies."

Trudy laughed. "I understand. You'll follow him and take photos. That's what you do. Capture photos of cheating husbands with their mistresses."

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If my dad had been present, he'd have laughed and told her to bugger off. But she kept her doe-eyed gaze locked on me. I could've refused, but I needed the cash, the experience, and the reference if I ever planned to go solo. Until then, my current employer, Sampson & Sampson, sponsored my license while I worked under their lead investigator. I've done plenty of investigative work, including background checks, interviews, and research. I gained limited surveillance experience, assisting a lead investigator as we followed a disgruntled ex-employee suspected of damaging property in revenge for his termination.

Conducting surveillance on a spouse suspected of infidelity is new for me. Still, it was only a matter of time before something like this would come up. That was all the excuse I needed to spend a few hundred bucks on a better zoom lens for my camera and a couple of optical attachments for my phone. When I agreed to take on the case, Trudy squealed with delight, like I'd surprised her with an early Christmas present.

If my father knew I'd accepted this job and spent a few hundred bucks on new equipment, he'd have a fit, which was one of many reasons I wouldn't let him in on my little business. He'd micromanage and criticize everything, even the things that weren't his business. I obtained my PI license a little over six months ago. I moonlighted as an independent investigator out of the finished attic of my mom's house, paying her what I could afford until I got the investigative service off the ground. Dad joked that he'd join me when he retired.

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Shadows of Deceit

Gregory Hunter takes a left two blocks ahead. He nearly escapes, but I keep up with him. I turn left at the next street, hoping to spot him on a cross street. He drives erratically through the industrial part of the city. Still, I have seen nothing that suggests he's cheating. Maybe he is a liar, especially since this 6 p.m. outing takes him miles away from his usual route between home and work.

I doubt he's having an affair. But it's only my second day tailing him, and I haven't yet received a full background check from my best friend, Rafi Alvi.

I glance down one cross street, then another until I catch sight of the rusty rear of an old Toyota bouncing over every pothole in its path. If I turn now, he'll surely see me, and that's the last thing I want. I take the next turn, relieved that the road is smooth and my ancient car won't rattle and give me away.

My phone rings through the car speakers, thanks to Rafi, who installed a Bluetooth system for me. I activate the talk mode.

"Cassie Maddox, Private Investigative Services," I say with forced cheerfulness.

"Cassie, it's your mom," Julia Maddox says as if I wouldn't recognize her voice.

I swallow back the disappointment. "Hey, Mom. Busy right now."

"How busy can you be, Cass? You just got off work, didn't you?" Julia asks.

"No, Mom, I'm working right now," I say. "I have this case and—"

"Since you're out," Julia interrupts me. "Can you pick up some cheese and a fruit platter? I'm running around like a madwoman trying to get ready for —"

"Sure, mom," I say, cutting her off.

"Thanks, hon," Mom says. "What time do you think you'll be home?"

I turn down another street where boutique shops and ancient architecture clash with a stray warehouse better suited two blocks away in the industrial district. I spot Hunter's car parked outside the Genesee Country Club.

"Sorry, Mom! Gotta go."

I hang up just as she adds more items to the grocery list. In a sense, my mom is right. I am not currently conducting research for Sampson & Sampson. But that's only because she doesn't see Cassie Maddox, Private Investigator, as a proper job. That is one thing my parents agree upon. I sigh as I bring the Cadillac to a slow roll, searching for a parking space big enough to dock the old boat.

The Genesee Country Club is on one of Lenape City's main streets, in the heart of downtown, right on the edge of the historic district. At three stories high, the Romanesque building competes with City Hall as the tallest building in a town that is no larger than twenty-two square miles, with each square mile occupied by some three thousand people. It's not so big that the neighborhood busybody couldn't keep tabs on the out-of-towner.

I spot a parking space and squeeze in, facing the Genesee Country Club. I grab my camera and focus on the country club, zooming in on the familiar marble steps. In high school, I worked here as a server under my uncle, Alfred Maddox. I cut ties with him after he insisted he could get me on a scholarship in one of my first-pick schools. Like my dad, Uncle Alfred is well-connected, but it didn't sit well with me when I got accepted into Dartmouth. Soon thereafter, I dropped out. My uncle insisted my rejection of his offer was a personal affront to his character, and we haven't spoken since. Seeing no activity

on the Genesee's steps, I set my camera down and scan the neighboring buildings.

Boutique shops and restaurants border the country club. Since I didn't see Gregory Hunter step into the country club, I can't conclude that this excursion into the city has anything to do with my uncle's business. Grabbing my phone and camera, I get out of the car, slinging the camera over my shoulder. It's time to hunker down for a stake-out in this historic town, and I know just the place.

Spotify Playlist

1. “Bad Guy” - Billie Eilish

For the layers of deception and manipulation Cassie uncovers throughout her investigation.

2. “Seven Nation Army” - The White Stripes

A powerful anthem for Cassie’s determination as she digs deeper into the conspiracy.

3. “Creep” - Radiohead

Reflects Cassie’s moments of self-doubt and her struggle to prove herself.

4. “Believer” - Imagine Dragons

Symbolizing Cassie’s resilience and refusal to back down despite the danger.

5. “Somebody’s Watching Me” - Rockwell

For the constant surveillance and the feeling that Cassie is being followed or monitored.

6. “Smooth Criminal” - Michael Jackson

Perfectly matches the clever and calculated schemes of Thomas Pence and Chuck Albright.

7. “Rolling in the Deep” - Adele

Cassie’s emotional turmoil as she uncovers personal betrayals and navigates strained relationships.

8. “Boulevard of Broken Dreams” - Green Day

Represents Cassie’s isolated journey as she steps into dangerous territory on her own.

9. “Power” - Kanye West

Captures the greed and corruption driving Shenandoah Partners and The Peterson Group.

10. “Control” - Halsey

Reflects Cassie’s inner conflict and determination to take charge of her destiny.

11. “Ain’t No Rest for the Wicked” - Cage the Elephant

Highlights the relentless pursuit of money and power among the conspirators.

12. “Run the World (Girls)” - Beyoncé

Celebrates Cassie’s strength, resourcefulness, and ability to navigate a male-dominated world.

Optional Bonus Tracks

- **“The Chain” - Fleetwood Mac** (For the theme of fractured loyalties.)
- **“Dirty Little Secret” - The All-American Rejects** (Hinting at Alfred Maddox’s potential schemes.)
- **“You Don’t Own Me” - Grace feat. G-Eazy** (Cassie’s independence and fight for agency.)

Book Club Guide

Introduction

Shadows of Deceit by Timothy R. Baldwin is a gripping mystery-thriller about private investigator Cassie Maddox, who becomes entangled in a dangerous web of corruption, financial crime, and betrayal in Lenape City. As she navigates her investigation, Cassie faces strained family relationships, personal risks, and moral dilemmas that test her resolve and ingenuity.

Discussion Questions

Themes and Plot

1. What did you think of the central mystery surrounding Shenandoah Partners and The Peterson Group? Did the twists surprise you?
2. How does the theme of family loyalty versus personal ambition play out in Cassie's relationship with her father and uncle?
3. The story tackles themes of corruption and power. How did the portrayal of corporate greed resonate with current events or real-world scandals?

Characters

1. Cassie is portrayed as both resourceful and vulnerable. How did her character development shape your connection to her?
2. Detective Dylan Maddox plays a complex role in the story. How do his actions influence Cassie's choices?

3. What are your thoughts on the antagonists, especially Thomas Pence and Chuck Albright? Were they convincing as villains?

Writing and Structure

1. How did the author use pacing and tension to keep you engaged? Were there any moments where you couldn't put the book down?
2. What role did the setting of Lenape City play in establishing the story's atmosphere?
3. Did the alternating moments of lightheartedness (e.g., Cassie's interactions with Lila) and intense danger enhance your experience of the story?

Moral Dilemmas and Choices

1. Cassie often debates the ethics of withholding information, especially from her father and Trudy Hunter. Do you agree with her choices?
 2. The story hints at a larger conspiracy involving Alfred Maddox. How do you interpret Cassie's decision to pursue this lead in future investigations?
 3. How would you have handled Cassie's final choice to align herself with her father and Gregory Hunter despite her initial misgivings?
-

Activities and Extras

1. Soundtrack Challenge

Discuss the *Shadows of Deceit* Spotify playlist. Which songs resonated most with the story or specific characters? Would you add any tracks?

2. Role Play: The Next Lead

Imagine you're Cassie at the end of the book. What would be your first move in uncovering Alfred Maddox's potential involvement in the college admissions scandal?

3. Favorite Scene Discussion

Share your favorite scene and why it stood out. Was it a tense confrontation, a lighthearted moment with Lila, or a key revelation?

Recommended Pairings

If you enjoyed *Shadows of Deceit*, consider reading:

1. **The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo by Stieg Larsson:** A dark, investigative thriller with complex family dynamics.
 2. **Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty:** A layered exploration of secrets and moral dilemmas.
 3. **The Firm by John Grisham:** A legal thriller focused on corporate corruption and personal stakes.
 4. **Any of these excellent thrillers from Indies United Publishing House** <https://www.indiesunited.net/thrillers>
-

Final Thoughts

What do you think Cassie Maddox's future holds? Would you want to read a sequel, and if so, what loose ends or characters would you want explored further?

Cocktail Pairing for *Shadows of Deceit*



"The Lenape Noir"

Inspired by the dark, mysterious, and gritty tone of *Shadows of Deceit*, this cocktail balances intrigue and boldness with a hint of sweetness to reflect Cassie's sharp wit and occasional lighthearted moments with Lila.

Ingredients:

- 2 oz bourbon (symbolizing the strong foundation of Cassie's determination)
- 1 oz black cherry liqueur (a nod to the shadowy secrets of Lenape City)
- ½ oz fresh lemon juice (for Cassie's sharp, investigative edge)
- ½ oz simple syrup (to balance the bitterness with a touch of sweetness)
- 2 dashes of aromatic bitters (representing the complexities of betrayal and family ties)
- Garnish: Luxardo cherry and a twist of lemon

Instructions:

1. Fill a shaker with ice and combine bourbon, black cherry liqueur, lemon juice, simple syrup, and bitters.
2. Shake well until chilled.

3. Strain into a rocks glass over a large ice cube.
4. Garnish with a Luxardo cherry skewered with a lemon twist.



"The Phantom Beat"

This vibrant cocktail matches the energy of Phantom Beats, the nightclub where Cassie and Lila share moments of joy and levity amidst the tension of the investigation.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ oz vodka (Lila's bold and carefree spirit)
- 1 oz blue curaçao (a playful

nod to the neon lights of Phantom Beats)

- ½ oz pineapple juice (for a tropical twist, reflecting the warmth of friendship)
- ½ oz lime juice (adding a zesty edge to Cassie's analytical mind)
- Splash of club soda (for a bubbly, celebratory touch)
- Garnish: Edible glitter rim or a neon swizzle stick

Instructions:

1. Rim a highball glass with edible glitter for a fun, glowing effect.
2. Fill the glass with ice and pour in vodka, blue curaçao, pineapple juice, and lime juice.
3. Stir gently, then top with a splash of club soda.
4. Garnish with a neon swizzle stick or a slice of pineapple.



Mocktail Option: "Shayan's Secret"

A non-alcoholic alternative inspired by the mysterious Shayan Easton and

her stolen flash drive. This drink hides its complexity behind a smooth, refreshing exterior.

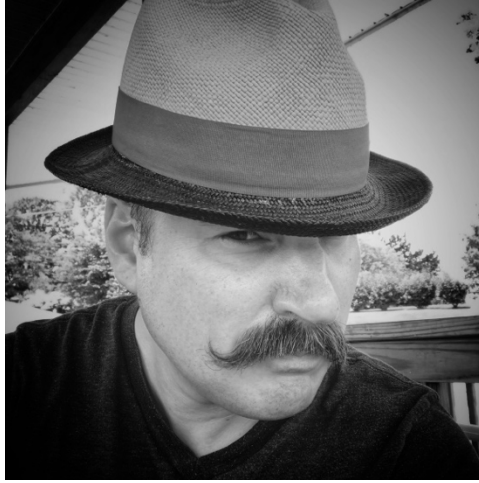
Ingredients:

- 2 oz pomegranate juice (for the deep, hidden layers of the story)
- 1 oz fresh orange juice (adding warmth and brightness to the mix)
- ½ oz grenadine (representing the hints of danger and suspense)
- Splash of sparkling water (for a light, crisp finish)
- Garnish: Pomegranate seeds

Instructions:

1. Combine pomegranate juice, orange juice, and grenadine in a shaker with ice.
2. Shake well and strain into a coupe glass.
3. Top with sparkling water and garnish with a few floating pomegranate seeds.

About the Author



Tim, a seasoned educator with over 15 years of teaching experience across multiple grade levels in English and Drama, has established himself as a dedicated writer with a diverse academic background. He holds a B.S. in Theatre from Towson University, an M.A.T. from Notre Dame of Maryland University, and an M.A. in Creative Writing and Literature from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Originally from Syracuse, New York, Tim currently resides in Maryland, where he imparts his passion for English, Creative Writing, Film, and Theatre to high school students. His journey into writing began earnestly in 2014, spurred by the encouragement of his own students.

Tim's love for storytelling stems from his upbringing, where his mother's dedication to reading to him and his siblings laid the foundation for his literary pursuits. Tim embarked on his writing endeavors, influenced by authors such as C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Piers Anthony, and others in the mystery,

thriller, and fantasy genres.

Since his debut publication in 2019, Tim has rapidly expanded his literary footprint, amassing a wealth of published works. Beyond writing, Tim enjoys indulging in his diverse interests, including reading, teaching, camping, savoring cigars, shooting, and attending live music concerts.

Loved the story? Share the love!

Your review on your favorite book platform makes a big difference. For indie authors and publishers like me, every kind word helps new readers discover our stories. Thank you for being part of the journey!

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