



Shadow of a Distant Morning

William Topek

Kansas City, 1935. Private detective Devlin Caine receives a telegram from his estranged older brother, a Baltimore banker who's been framed for embezzlement. At his brother's request, Caine comes to Baltimore, expecting nothing more than to offer a little useful advice. But in short order, he finds himself deeply involved in an elaborate confidence scheme.

Never try to con a con, but Caine finds himself forced into doing just that. And he may just have the experience and know-how to take on a veteran master of the long con. But can he handle three different government agencies, his former boss, and a violent Chicago mobster who also appear on the scene?

Working in a strange city and employing cons on top of cons, Caine struggles to save not only his brother's career, but possibly his own hide.

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Discussion Questions

1. How was the protagonist's character developed over the course of the book? Through his actions? His speech? His thoughts? A mixture of two or all three?
2. In what ways, if any, was this historical setting reminiscent of contemporary times?
3. Why does Devlin Caine go to such lengths to aid his brother in this story? Familial obligation, a desire to strengthen family bonds, a chance to prove himself, or something else entirely?
4. Since Caine does not take risks recklessly, what are some of the ways he tries to protect himself and his family during his escapades?
5. Confidence men, described in this book as working in the "soft" rackets, are a very different type of criminal. In what ways are they less or more dangerous than conventional criminals?
6. What is the attraction between Devlin Caine and Penny Sills, or are they just working together for their own purposes?
7. How does Devlin Caine's assistant Jennings compare to Caine himself? In what ways are they similar or different, and what are some of their separate strengths that help Caine accomplish his goals?
8. As with any good confidence story, there are a number of reveals. Which did you feel as a reader was the most important and/or enjoyable?
9. Why did the author choose Edgar Allen Poe as the statue Caine visits throughout the story? What might Poe represent to Devlin Caine?
10. Was there a single quote or action that you felt summed up Devlin Caine's character in this book?

Additional questions for readers who have read the previous Devlin Caine novel, *Shadow of a Distant Morning*:

1. How was the feel and tone of *A Shared Confidence* different from the previous Devlin Caine adventure?
2. Did you find the characters of Devlin Caine and Jennings to be consistent from the previous novel to this one?
3. How was *Shadow of a Distant Morning* represented, referred to, or alluded to in this novel, and for what purpose?
4. Which of the two stories did you find more satisfying as a reader and why?

William Topek is originally from the Midwest, but has lived and worked throughout the United States and overseas. His widely varied career has included serving on active duty in the U.S. Air Force, teaching in a foreign middle school, and conducting regulatory seminars and security training as an employee of the federal government. He is a graduate of the University of Kansas and received his MBA from Willamette University in Oregon. His interests include film, fiction, history and the art of storytelling.



Interview with William Topek

Q: How does *A Shared Confidence* differ from the first Devlin Caine novel, *Shadow of a Distant Morning*?

A: I think *A Shared Confidence* has a much lighter tone than the last novel. I wrote *Shadow* as a classic noir private eye story, gritty and even depressing in parts. Since I had no desire to keep rewriting the same novel over and over, I wanted to put my detective in a different type of story, and a novel about confidence schemes seemed to fit the bill. *Confidence* also has a strong family element in it which I think works well, and you learn more about Caine's background.

Q: What was it like trying to bring back the same character in a different story?

A: I enjoyed it, slipping back into Caine's skin and attacking an entirely different problem from his perspective. I worried about maintaining consistency with the character from one story to another, but once I got into it, it came rather naturally for the most part.

Q: Where did you get the inspiration for *A Shared Confidence*?

A: Everyone likes a good con story and I'm no exception. Audiences are used to trying to spot facades and deceptions in most stories, and con stories are the most extreme form of that. I think the 1973 film *The Sting* is the pinnacle of con movies, and I even paid homage to it in this book. In the movie, Paul Newman plays a character named Gandorf who uses the alias Shaw. Robert Redford plays a character named Hooker who uses the alias Kelly. In the course of this book, I had Devlin Caine use the alias Kelly Shaw.

Q: Were there any other characters from the first novel that you brought back for this book?

A: Caine's secretary Gail makes a brief appearance, as does his favorite bartender, Mickey Lonnigan. But the biggest recurring role, apart from Caine himself, is his associate, Jennings. I've had great response to this character and I find him appealing as well. In many ways, Jennings is more unflappable, more easygoing, and even "cooler" than Caine, yet still admires and looks up to his boss. For his part, Caine has no problem acknowledging Jennings' superiority in certain matters, and seems to enjoy mentoring him. I find that relationship interesting.

Q: What was the most difficult part of writing *A Shared Confidence*?

A: Coming up with the ending. In a story like this, there has to be some big surprises and especially at the end. When you try to write an ending no one can see coming, go for the most unexpected reveals, you risk a great deal. Some may find your resolution a let down or others may find it unrealistic. From the feedback I've received so far, I was fortunate to escape those extremes this time.

Q: Will there be more Devlin Caine adventures?

A: I have very general notions for another three or four books. I promised myself I'd take a break from Caine after this novel and write something different. However, I've been flooded with story ideas for the next Caine adventure and am currently working on it. Hopefully, *Four Days From Dawn* will be out sometime this year.

Q: Anything you can tell us anything about that one?

A: At this point, only that it will be different from the first two novels. I am aiming for more of an adventure story with this one, and most of the action takes place in another country.