

## AUGUST SNOW

By Stephen Mack Jones

An ex-cop comes home to Detroit and finds himself embroiled in the investigation of a local business magnate's death.

August Snow, whose name gives this volume its title, had been framed and drummed out of the force after uncovering corruption at the highest levels of the city. A successful suit for wrongful termination makes him a wealthy man, and he returns to his decaying neighborhood, Detroit's Mexicantown, where he grew up with his Mexican mother and African-American father. As a cop, August had uncovered embezzlement at the bank presided over by the much-despised businesswoman Eleanor Paget. When she dies, an apparent suicide, a day after asking him to work for her, his investigation into her death sets him up to tangle with all manner of local thugs and, possibly, international crooks who turn banks into their own private money-laundering operations. Let's get the flaws out of the way. The author, a poet, playwright, and first-time novelist, tends to overdo both the noir fatalism and the tough-guy stuff (especially when it comes to detailing Snow's arsenal). An important supporting character is made to pay for a past sin in a way that feels very judgmental. There's a shade too much cyberage paranoia. And the book climaxes with two—count 'em—sieges when one would do. But it's easy to overlook those flaws considering what this book gets right: a hugely likable hero who uses his wealth to bring his neighborhood back to life; a feel for the vitality and pride in run-down urban neighborhoods as good as George Pelecanos on Washington, D.C.; appealing supporting characters who

give life to the book's theme of the solace to be found in communities.  
It adds up to a very pleasurable read.

This mostly terrific debut holds out the promise that we are at the  
beginning of an excellent new series.

## August Snow

Legendary Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein wants to make a TV show out of a Metro Detroiter's debut crime novel.

The book "August Snow," is by Stephen Mack Jones, 62, a Lansing native who lives in Farmington Hills. It's a story of a black Latino ex-Detroit cop who testified against a crooked mayor and corrupt police honchos and is adjusting to a Motor City that's both gentrifying and decaying.

Since its February release, the book has nabbed critical raves from the Wall Street Journal, Chicago Tribune and the Boston Globe. Perhaps the most important review came from Weinstein, the film producer and studio executive who co-founded Miramax and serves as co-chairman of The Weinstein Co. with his brother Bob. The Weinsteins have produced numerous Oscar-winning films and Tony-winning plays.

Harvey Weinstein described Jones' book as "the most literary crime novel that I've read in years" in an article in the Hollywood Reporter this week. The book's plot is "a quintessential setup, like a black Raymond Chandler" story, referring to the iconic crime fiction writer, Weinstein said. The Hollywood power broker said he quickly sought out Jones to secure the rights to make the book into a television show. The TV rights for "August Snow" by Stephen Mack Jones

The TV rights for "August Snow" by Stephen Mack Jones have been optioned by Harvey Weinstein. (Photo: John Greilick / Detroit News)

"We have an agreement," Jones said Thursday. The author said he expects the deal to be finalized in the next three weeks. The two talked on the phone about a month ago, Jones said, when he was being courted by four other film and television production companies.

“It was surreal,” Jones said of the conversation with Weinstein. “Here I am sitting at my dining room table talking to the guy who helped make ‘Lion’ and ‘Lord of the Rings’ and so many other great (films). It was odd at first, I felt like he was trying to sell me on his work. It took all I could to not say ‘Dude, I love your work.’ ”

The deal gives Weinstein Co. the exclusive rights to explore the television options of the book.

The book is the completion of another chapter in Jones’ writing career. The Lansing native came to Detroit in the 1980s to work in advertising and lived on the northwest side. He worked in downtown Detroit for more than a decade, he said.

“I worked downtown when it was essentially the Renaissance Center and not much else,” Jones said. During his advertising days, he wrote two plays, one that ended up on off-Broadway, “Back in the World,” and “The American Boys,” which was staged in Chicago. Both plays concerned the lives of African-American veterans of the Vietnam War.

Jones said he got laid off from his advertising job around “12 to 15” years ago and cobbled together freelance work. At one point, he worked as a salesman at a Toys R Us. The father of one son and two step-daughters, Jones in 2012 won a Kresge Fellowship for the Literary Arts, a \$25,000, no-strings-attached award given to Metro Detroit artists.

He began writing “August Snow” about two and a half years ago. The book is imbued with a longtime Detroiter’s fascination with the changing city.

“A lot of people who have been here 20, 30, 40, 50 years view Detroit as the best ‘fr-enemy’ you can ever have,” Jones said. “It’s a little odd for them to see people coming from Los Angeles, Seattle, Denmark and just start digging in. A lot of people are concerned about inclusion. It’s not an us-versus-them thing. It’s a ‘I like you and I want to work with you’ thing.”

Jones said the crime novel is also a tribute to his father, who was a skilled tradesman at the Lansing Oldsmobile plant, and his mother, who at age 93 still reads “two books a week.”

“In a lot of ways, it’s kind of a tribute to the lessons that my father taught me and my mother taught me, about the real things that make up a man,” he said of the action-packed novel. “The real challenges that a man deals with and how to face them with strength and aplomb and grace.”

Jones said he hopes the potential TV show means he can write a series of August Snow novels.

