



## Dead Man's Bridge: A Jake Cantrell Mystery

**Robert J. Mrazek**

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*Ex-military man Jake Cantrell is the sardonic observer-investigator around whom this flawless mystery revolves.*

This fast-paced, character-driven novel features an ex-military man as he attempts to catch a killer, and discover who's blackmailing his alma mater's president, during homecoming weekend. Robert Mrazek's *Dead Man's Bridge* is a taut mystery thriller.

Jake Cantrell races against the clock—and the killer—to complete both tasks in less than forty-eight hours. His boss wants him fired, the local sheriff is a bully, his Afghanistan rescue dog is ailing, and he's still mourning the loss of the girl who dumped him years ago.

Cantrell is a deeply sympathetic character: he's a man struggling intently to make sense of what his life has become, and he's cognizant that he's using alcohol to fill up the empty spaces. He doesn't suffer fools gladly. The love that he feels for his dog, Bug, is one of his strongest and most important relationships: "There was no chance of her taking off ... she would wait for me forever."

Cantrell, narrating in the first person, is a sardonic observer. He wryly notes that a woman student is majoring in "prewed"; he is also the one to realize that the body found hanging beneath the suspension footbridge at the Fall Creek Gorge is not a suicide as his superiors initially believed.

The story is populated with diverse characters, including Kelly, the sultry waitress at a tavern overlooking the falls, who wants nothing more than to care for Cantrell; Ben, his old ROTC instructor, who now warms a bar stool at that bar; and Jordan Litchfield, the president of St. Andrews College (and a former football colleague) who holds a potential career-ending secret.

The story clicks along at a very earnest pace, taking place in various locales in and around upstate New York. Descriptions are exquisite and visceral, and upper-crust academia and seedy motels share equal billing. The writing is flawless; dollops of humor are wickedly accurate. The plot rises above the usual mystery fare, and the villains aren't readily or easily identified until close to the story's end.

Jake Cantrell is a misunderstood antihero whose actions are deliberate and results-oriented; if this also ticks off those in charge, well, that's even better.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (July/August 2017)

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