

Malibu **A** and **E**

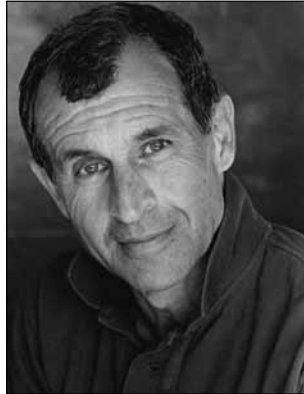
Malibuite's Serial Arson Thriller Is a Reminder of Local 'Red Flag' Fire Hazards

Writer Mike Davis, in his now infamous 1997 essay "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," described Malibu as "the wildfire capital of North America and, possibly, the world," adding that "from the beginning fire has defined Malibu in the American imagination."

Malibu resident Kurt Kamm's newest novel "Red Flag Warning" invites the reader to contemplate the disastrous implications of arson. For Malibu residents already familiar with the implications of a red flag weather forecast, it is a reminder to be prepared for disaster and to be vigilant.

Prior to writing fiction about about wildland firefighting, Kamm spent two years in wildland firefighter camps and female inmate fire camps of the Los Angeles County Fire Department researching firefighting techniques.

Kamm has also visited the CalFire Academy in



KURT KAMM

Ione, California, and interviewed firefighters, helicopter pilots, paramedics and traumatic stress counselors.

Kamm uses that knowledge effectively in his second novel, "Red Flag Warning," to tell a story of serial arson set in and around the Santa Monica Mountains.

Kamm, vice chair of the UCLA/Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center Foundation, and an avid supporter of the Wildland Firefighter Foundation, has been a Wall Street executive as well as a semi-professional bicycle

racer, but describes himself now as "a writer of firefighter novels." His first work of fiction, "One Foot in the Black," was published in 2007.

Life in Malibu has provided Kamm with firsthand experience of his subject matter. The Canyon Fire reportedly burned to his front door and destroyed the homes of several neighbors. Kamm says the lessons he learned from L.A. County Fire Department while writing his first novel helped him save his home.

"Red Flag Warning" provides a well-researched and in-depth look at the very real potential for arson to create a major disaster in the Santa Monica Mountains, despite a number of improbable plot twists and a cast of characters that includes a monologuing comic book villain called "NiteHeat."

Some of the characters and situations require the reader to make a considerable effort to sustain

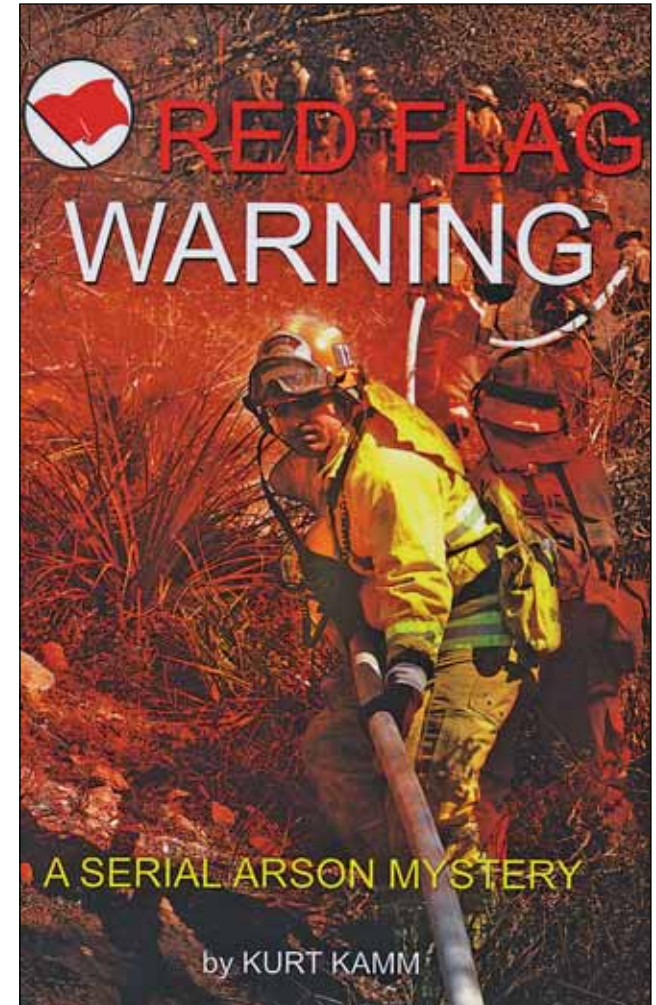
suspension of disbelief—such as a scene involving a satanic S-and-M cult—and a pervasive misogyny that one suspects may still be endemic in the firefighting and law enforcement field sounds a discordant note, but the firefighting and arson investigation procedures feel authentic and offer the reader a look at the mechanics of firefighting.

The author is at his best describing firefighter training and wildland firefighting. Kamm's depiction of the struggle to cope in terrain where fire is an unstoppable force of nature reads with verisimilitude and conviction.

A scene set in a residential area of Topanga Canyon effectively conveys the speed and force of wildfire.

The most compelling part of the novel for this reader involved not arson, but a harrowing fire training exercise involving live fire.

BY SUZANNE GULDIMANN



ARSON WATCH—"Red Flag Warning" is Malibu resident Kurt Kamm's second firefighting novel.