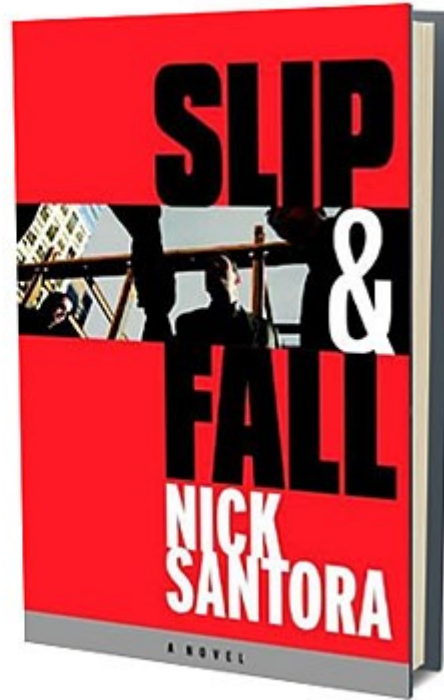


NY Mag Online
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7/13/07 @ 5:26 PM

Nick Santora Talks Legal Thrillers and 'Beauty and the Geek'



Courtesy of Borders/State Street Press

Just six years ago, Nick Santora quit his job as a Columbia-educated New York lawyer to try screenwriting in Hollywood. It worked (especially after he wrote a *Sopranos* episode), and he eventually became a lead writer on *Prison Break*. Then he turned, improbably, to reality TV, co-creating *Beauty and the Geek*. And now he's a crime writer, with his novel *Slip and Fall*, about a personal-injury lawyer in Bensonhurst (not coincidentally, Santora's old job), making an appearance on the *Wall Street Journal's* best-seller list. It's also the inaugural title in Borders' publishing wing. Back in New York for a reading tomorrow at 2 p.m. at the Columbus Circle Borders, Santora spoke with *Vulture* about his many career twists.

So, with everything else you're doing, why'd you go and write a book?

It was just more of a challenge than a creative thing. Tell your own story without any studio notes, network notes, notes from other writers and producers, all the things that I'm used to — which, by the way, are very often wonderful and contribute greatly to the success of the product.

Sure. Are all lawyers frustrated writers? The answer to that is an unequivocal yes. I can't tell you, since I broke into this business, how many e-mails I get from former colleagues trying to write a *Law & Order* script.

Maybe the show can do for frustrated lawyers what it's done for struggling actors in New York. Well, I got a *Law & Order* job when I was living in L.A. If I had gotten it before I moved out, I would never have moved.

So you still wish you were here? L.A. is an unfairly maligned community, but I love New York. I got off the red-eye this morning and headed out through Queens. I miss the old homes, the steel railings in front of the brick houses; you just don't see that in L.A. The problem is, when I'm here, I just wind up locking myself up in my old bedroom and working on another project. I literally go into my childhood bedroom [on Long Island] and work.

How do you feel about having the first book ever published by Borders? Humble and frankly embarrassed — I mean overwhelmed by an embarrassment of riches that something like this would happen. My agent had gone to some houses, and I don't know what houses or how many, but I know we had been passed on. But how many houses passed on Grisham? All I know is that Borders gave me a shot.

After writing for scripted shows you went off and co-created *Beauty and the Geek*. Aren't you working for the enemy now? To be honest, there are times I thought to myself, *Was it a mistake?* But I wanted to put out a reality show that was different than other ones. They're competing for money, and they're actually helping each other. Geeks are rooting for other geeks. It is a feel-good, positive, affirming show. Do I like reality TV? I think 99 percent of it is garbage, and the American public has started to filter out the crap. Where it hurts writers is during the summer. Those reruns never happen anymore. I haven't gotten a residual check as a writer in almost three years.

So if the Writers Guild strikes, partly over their assertion that reality shows are scripted, you'd join them? I'm of the opinion that reality is not written, and that flies in the face of my guild. But I'm a union guy. My guild says strike, I strike.

More important, though, how did you come up with the idea for *Beauty and the Geek*? Look at me and my wife and you'll see where the idea comes from.

—*Boris Kachka*

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