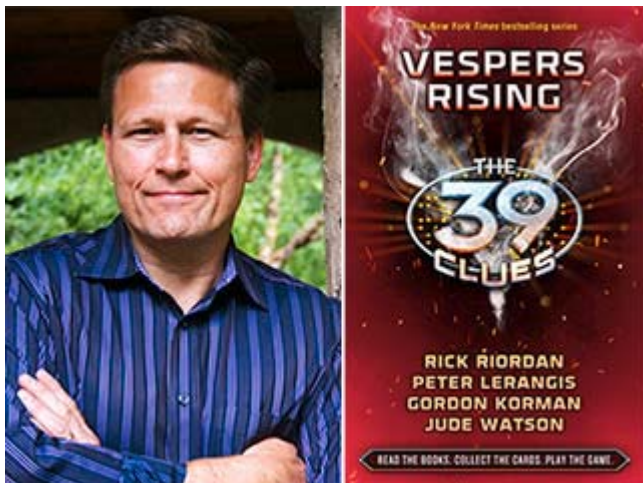


# '39 Clues' exclusive: New series from Scholastic will feature David Baldacci

By Catherine Fuentes—9/22/2010



Tomorrow morning Scholastic will officially announce the second series of its smash hit *39 Clues* franchise. (Movie rights first-10 book series, which has more than 8.5 million copies in print, have been snapped up DreamWorks, with Stephen Spielberg the possible director.) The new seven-book series, *The 39 Clues: Cahills Vs. Vespers*, kicks off on April 5, 2011 with *Vespers Rising*, written by Rick Riordan, Peter Lerangis, Gordon Korman and Jude Watson. In a surprise twist, Scholastic has hired David Baldacci will write the final book in the series, set to be released in March 2013.

In honor of the big announcement, Baldacci talked with us about how he got involved with the project and why he's excited to write his first book for children.

**ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: How did you get involved with *The 39 Clues* project?**

**DAVID BALDACCII:** I got a call over the summer from Scholastic, and actually first my agent and I talked to Scholastic and they said that they wanted me to write the last book in *The 39 Clues* series, and that's how I first found out about it. I didn't think long about it, it was actually a cool offer, and I thought that it'd be something different, something challenging, so I said that I'll do it.

**Had you read the first series prior to signing on?**

My kids had read some of them. My kids are a little bit older than the target audience, my daughter is going off to college next year and my son's in high school, but they had read some. I had not personally read them, I'll be frank there, but Scholastic sent them all down to me and I've been making my way through them to get a sense of what the stories are about and the characters and all of that.

**Have you written your part yet or are you still reading the manuscripts from the other authors in the series?**

I haven't gotten any of that yet. I guess they're going to send the synopses and the outlines to me. My book won't be published until March of '13, so I have a little bit of time. I haven't even started writing it yet.

**These books have a lot of history and geography involved with the plots. Have you started doing research yet, or are you just waiting to see where the other authors left off the story?**

I have to get a sense of where they left off, I have to build on everyone else. I'm the snow on top of the mountain and I have to wait until that mountain is built. Luckily for me, I've been a history buff my whole life and a lot of that stuff I'm already sort of familiar with. It'll be nice to dig into it and get into it again to be able to write the novel.

**Are there any elements from your own work, whether it's legal or political, that you're going to be ideally bringing to these?**

Probably so, because that's the stuff I write and I like it. And in the first books that I read there's a lot of murder and mayhem and violence, and I love that, so I won't have to tone that down so much. But I do think it'll allow me, and it's a battle of wits. 8-12 year old kids are really smart, clever, and they've read a lot of stuff, so you have to be on your game. So there will be action and things like that, but there will also have to be quite a bit of clues, red herrings and 'whodunnit' element to it, where I try to have twist and turns to keep it exciting, but you know what, in the books that I read, there's quite a bit of history and political figures in the novel, so maybe I'll notch it up and make it the same sort of thing, but make it more modern political involvement where the kids will learn even more. I think that's one of the things that these books try to do is teach kids as well as entertain them.

**The original *39 Clues* books had a big multimedia component. Is this something that you're excited to be a part of? Are you going to have a hand in designing the multimedia aspect of your story?**

I am excited to be a part of it. I don't know how much involvement I'll have in the multimedia part. I certainly have ideas about it. I'm big on the technical side and I feel that you have to be where the readers are, and certainly the younger

readers love the multimedia dimensions. They like the written word and they like pictures, and you could bring the whole thing together and really get a great product for them that they can have a lot of fun with. With my last adult book, we did the first writer's cut e-book, where I loaded it up with video, audio, outlines, alternate endings and a photo album on research I did for the novel and lots of extra stuff, kind of like a director's cut DVD. I felt that we had the technology since these e-book readers can do a lot more than just turn the page on a book, so let's utilize this technology, so I think it'll sort of be the same thing here. It's a lot of fun for the kids, and it allows them to see the story on many different levels.

**Has it been difficult in change of frame of mind from writing adult books to writing a book for children?**

It's definitely tough. You definitely have to keep in mind that you're writing to a different audience, not that I'm going to dumb this book down at all, I have too much respect for kids. When my kids were that age, they kept me hustling to try to keep up with them on many different levels. But at the same time, some things that I would write in an adult novel would go over the kids' heads because they don't have the experience an adult would have or the historical context, or things that they normally would not have experienced, I'll have to refrain from doing that. I think a good story is a good story, so as long as I keep in mind that the audience is traditionally younger than my audience would be, the story won't be so much different, but so long as it's a good story I think people will enjoy it.

**Are you going to be working alongside any of the other authors who will be writing the earlier books? Are you going to have much contact with them?**

If I'm writing along and have some questions with where any of the other authors were going with the story that I didn't feel like I got a full handle on, I might contact them and ask for some clarification, I don't anticipate that will be the case, but I feel that I will be able to do that if I need. I'm not going to be writing it with any of the other authors, they're stand alone projects, but if I have any questions, or issues, or want to run something by someone, I can certainly feel free to contact them.

**What are your thoughts on writing the final chapter of a multi author work?**

I hope I don't screw it up. There's lots of pressure. I got good advice from a writer a long time ago that the best thing any author can do is fear that they can't bring the magic again. Once a writer figures out that they know what they're doing, that's when they've lost their edge completely, because then you sort of write how you did it last time, you just change the names and have a little formula, you have your little cookie cutter and then you're dead in the water. For me, every project is brand new, it's like I'm writing my first project over and over again, and I try to bring that enthusiasm and freshness to each project. Not every writer does that, for some writer it's a paycheck, it's a job where they write some today and then they go play golf, which is what they really want to do. Me? I really love doing this stuff. I love putting these stories together, and I'm very excited about trying to write a really compelling story for *The 39 Clues*. For me it'll be my first novel all over again.

**Do you think you'll be writing more children's novels in the future?**

I've given thought to that even before *The 39 Clues* came up. I have a lot of things I'm interested in, and certainly being a father and raising two kids, you sort of have this compulsion that you want to write for that age. I think that this won't be the last time that my pen sort of goes in that direction.