

## Kwei Quartey's Next Mystery

By Lisa Loving  
Of *The Skanner News*

**K**wei Quartey is a surgeon and mystery author whose sleuth, Ghanaian police inspector Darko Dawson, this year solved his second big mystery in "Children of the Street." Quartey's debut novel, a mystery also featuring Dawson, was "The Wife of the Gods." Born and raised in Ghana himself, the son of an African American mother and a Ghanaian father who were both university professors, Quartey says he wanted to be a writer from childhood. Here *The Skanner News* spoke with the author about his novels, his home country, and writing.

**The Skanner News:** Your background is so interesting – one foot on the African continent and one foot in America, like the President.

**Quartey:** I think you're right, and I think even maybe more so than the president because my childhood was spent on both continents — on the American continent and the African continent, in Ghana specifically.

**TSN:** Here at the Skanner News we get a lot of books by African and African American authors but very few are published by mainstream publishing houses. So what was your journey in getting this published by Random House – it's your second novel?

**Quartey:** Yes, the first was "Wife of the Gods." It's been a long journey. I guess I should go all the way back to childhood, when I started writing novellas and short stories. I was very much stimulated by the number of books in my house. My parents were both university lecturers in Ghana, and I was educated by the number of both fiction books and non-fiction books in the house. So I always wanted to write, and the mystery genre has always been my favorite. I had a number of characters – one James Bond-ish type guy, I always had a group of kids who went around solving mysteries. So it really started then and really persisted all the way through my teens. It took a back seat to medicine, which I studied and got my MD at Howard University.

So it wasn't until after I got out of med school that my writing was rekindled. And that's when I started sending out stuff to multiple agents and getting back rejection

letters – of which there were probably hundreds.

For a while I was writing stuff based in Los Angeles, some thrillers, and nothing was really gelling. And it just happened that at the turn of the millennium, around 2000, I was in Paris and just for a couple days and I was in hotel rooms, and I came across this program on French TV which dealt with a local detective in Ivory Coast who's trying to solve a mystery in a village. And what he was doing was using the superstitions and beliefs in magical powers of the local people, trying to trick them into confessing or stating what they had seen as witnesses. I was really intrigued, having grown up in Ghana since I was 18 or so I was aware of some of these beliefs. I thought – if I could write that kind of story, and make it a murder mystery, and set it in Ghana.

And that's when the first idea came for "The Wife of the Gods."

**TSN:** So the girls are indentured because of things their families did years ago?

**Quartey:** Sometimes even generations ago. The idea is to get the protection of the gods, and to give these children over. So in that setting mixing it up with these magical beliefs and why bad things happen to good people, which is a question that more Africans ask than, say, Americans ask is, say, why did this happen to me? Not so much how?

So that book deals with that aspect.

And the second book, "Children of the Streets," is a little bit more of an urban modern 21st century story that deals maybe a little less with tradition but certainly there is one aspect that is cov-

I want to put Ghana on the crime fiction map

-Kwei Quartey



ered, and that is proverbs. Anybody who reads this book sees that proverbs become an important part of the story. African proverbs specifically.

**TSN:** And then you have another book coming out next year.

**Quartey:** I'm hoping it will be next year,

## Dedicated



PHOTO BY BERNIE FOSTER

This imposing memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was dedicated Oct. 16. The ceremony, on the national mall in Washington DC, featured speeches from President Obama, members of the King family, civil rights pioneer Rep. John Lewis and others. Vendors sold photographs edited to place the president and Dr. King together in the Oval Office.

if I can persuade Random House to work that fast on it. I'm working on a novel that I'm tentatively calling "Men of the Rig," and this deals with the brave new world of oil exploration which is underway in Ghana, which is producing oil since December, 2010, and of course the issue is, is this really going to create a new Ghana, or is it going to be much the same story as gold exploration, which does not enrich the lives of even the people in those gold-mining towns, so in other words, do it like Norway, which knows how to handle its oil production, or do like Nigeria, which is a mess, basically.

**TSN:** Who are your inspirations?

**Quartey:** I think the first inspiration is certainly Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation, Sherlock Holmes, because he's really the prototype, along with Allen Poe's creations as well, of testing, looking for small things that give something away. His character

actually is based on Arthur Conan Doyle's character the Professor, Dr. Joseph Bell, who could always tell a lot about a person by observing what he wears or how he walks or what mud was on his shoes or something like that. So testing, or observation, is a central point in my books. My hero Darko Dawson, has in that regard, an ability called synesthesia in which he is able to perceive certain senses by another sense. For example when he hears a voice he can actually feel it – either wet, or dry and prickly – and this gives him the ability sometimes to catch people out in a lie.

He also is keen observer of people and their behavior. So Sherlock Holmes comes through in that way. And I think even subliminally Sherlock Holmes comes through because, as many people know, he had an addiction to cocaine, and Darko Dawson's addiction is marijuana.

Read the rest of this story online at [www.theskanner.com](http://www.theskanner.com)



### COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## SEATTLE OCTOBER 2011

### BULLETIN BOARD



If you have an event you want to share with the community, email it two weeks in advance to *The Skanner* at [info@theskanner.com](mailto:info@theskanner.com)

#### Friday October 21

**FREAKY FALL FESTIVAL:** Join us for this annual evening of treats and a few tricks. Come in costume and enjoy carnival style games, crafts, a jumpy toy and much more. \$3 per person. 6

p.m. – 8 p.m. Ravenna-Eckstein Community Center, 6535 Ravenna Ave. NE.

#### Saturday October 22

##### THE SPOOKY SPRINT

Kids ages 6 – 12 are invited to come in costume and participate in the 8th annual Spooky Sprint. A one-mile or two-mile fun run at Maguson Park. (South of the swim beach). A special tot sprint ages 3-5 will kick-off the event. Cost is \$15.00. Please call 206-684-7026 for more information.

#### Sunday October 23

##### EXPLORE EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY CROATIAFEST

Join in folk dance lessons and a dance party, learn the art of Croatian cuisine and wine tasting and purchase your favorite ethnic crafts and products. Noon – 8 p.m. in the Seattle Center Exhibition Hall.

#### Friday October 28

**HAUNTED TEEN FLASHLIGHT PRIZE AND CANDY HUNT** Magnuson Park's annual Haunted Flashlight Prize and Candy Hunt for teens ages 11-14 will take place at 7:30 p.m. – 9 p.m. in Hanger 30, 6344 NE 74th St. The hunt is free. Please call 206-684-7026 for more information.

#### Saturday October 29

##### PUMPKIN PUSH 5K TO CARE FOR SEATTLE'S HOMELESS

Help our community gather to carve out a place for Seattle's most vulnerable, all while having a great time celebrating healthy, fun Halloween. Seward Park. For more information call 206-548-3266.