

St. Cloud writer finds inspiration from town's past

Swanee Ballman's book is a suspense thriller.

The cover picture is a collage of dark, murky monsters emerging from a moonlit swamp.

Tamarind, it says. *A Novel.*

Read the back cover, and the story becomes even more intriguing:

"Inspired by actual events in a small Florida town."

On the town

KEILANI BEST

Now, let's mention that

Ballman lives in St. Cloud. Flip the

book over to the front cover and notice a picture of the St. Cloud water tower in the background. On top of that tower sits a cross.

Starting to sound familiar? About a decade ago, St. Cloud was the focus of much attention as emotions boiled about the cross that stood on the top of the St. Cloud water tower. It had been placed on the tower years before as

a Christmas decoration.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit

against the city of St. Cloud and won. The cross was eventually removed.

"I was inspired by that cross coming down. I was impressed by the unity of the town," Ballman said.

Tamarind, which took seven years to complete, focuses on what Ballman sees as the spiritual side of conflict.

Angels and demons duke it out to change the attitudes and personalities of the people in the fictional town of *Tamarind*, which has a cross on its tower. In order for the angels to win, the townspeople must stay true to their beliefs. In order for the demons to win, the cross must come down.

Ballman says the novel has universal appeal.



Ballman

"This is a story of a conflict between good and evil, and some people may say this is a 'religious book,'" she said. "It is a thriller. This is not a book that I would classify as Christian."

Still, there is a strong moral message that Ballman wants readers to understand.

"There are reasons that bad things happen. There are underlying forces. People can cause these things to come into their lives by their actions," she said. "There are reasons that bad things happen to good people, and there are ways to turn them around."

Gabriel Vaughn of Maitland, who represents Legacy Publishing, understood this message.

After several rejection letters, Ballman came to Vaughn with the hope that he would help get her message across.

"It was a very fast-paced, engaging story," he said. "As I got into the story, Ballman was able to create the moods and attitudes of the people. She turned it into a fast-paced thriller, and I wanted to know how the story ended."

Ballman continues her writing

Artist Andy Davenport of St. Cloud did the cover art for Swanee Ballman's novel *Tamarind*.

Plans call for Tim Reaves, an actor who also lives in St. Cloud, to do an audio version, and a Spanish edition of *Tamarind* is in the works, too.

Ballman says she is hard at work on another fiction manuscript, "The 8th Continent." Ballman, who has written two other books as well as articles for magazines, wouldn't give away any details about the story.



COURTESY OF SWANEE BALLMAN

For now, autographed copies of *Tamarind* can be purchased on the Web (www.legacy-publishing.com). Copies, at \$11.95, should

soon be available in Central Florida bookstores, Vaughn said.

There are similarities between St. Cloud and the fictional *Tamarind*, from their lakefronts to the rich farming and cattle history.

Ballman said that is not deliberate but just a factor of her environment.

"Everything you see around you can be part of a book," she said.

"I took it to a conference recently, and people were looking over asking about the characters, saying, 'Did you write this about our town?'"

Ballman hopes to generate strong emotion from her readers.

"I'd like to share the creativity that God has given me," she said. "It can bless them. It can entertain them. It can encourage them. When I stop doing that, that's when I want to put my pen down."

To submit items to *On the Town* or *Entertainment Note*, contact Keilani Best at *The Osceola Sentinel*, 804 W. Emmett St., Kissimmee 34741, call (407) 933-5951, or fax (407) 931-5959.