

AUTHOR'S NOTE
Excerpt from SNAKE-EATER
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When I started telling people that I was working on a book with an evil roadrunner, one of two things happened. The vast majority of people said, “Like the cartoon?” and I would be left saying plaintively, “No, really, if you’ve met one, they’re like *dinosaurs*.”

The other group of people, who were mostly attendees of Bubonicon in Albuquerque, immediately started telling me stories of Horrible Things They Had Watched a Roadrunner Do. Lying in wait at birdbaths so they could leap up and grab sparrows. Murdering baby bunnies in graphic ways, usually in front of small children. If your only exposure to roadrunners is through Warner Bros., you may not be aware of this, but a roadrunner is somewhere between a velociraptor and a chicken with a shiv, and if this doesn’t sound alarming to you, you have probably never been attacked by a rooster. This is a two-foot-long bird that routinely kills rattlesnakes. They are a vital and beautiful part of the ecosystem, in much the same way that sidewinders and cactus with inch-long spines are vital and beautiful parts of the ecosystem.

Also they aren’t afraid of humans. They know they can outrun us. They are often rather curious about us, in fact. A number of people have befriended their local roadrunners after a fashion, though the only way to get them to a feeder would probably be to pack it with raw meat.

While most are harmless, the murderousness of *some* roadrunners is actually taken from real life, specifically a particularly nasty bird named Carmine who lived in the Sonoran Desert pavilion at the North Carolina Zoo and hated his keepers, killed other birds (including females of his own species), and was generally an absolute jackass despite an entire trained staff desperately trying to figure out how to make him happy. (These are people who built a tiny sex swing for their geriatric

elf owl so that he could mate without hurting himself. A more dedicated and creative bunch would be hard to find.) Carmine really did lie in wait and try to drive his beak into the back of the skull of anyone who came in to feed him, and it was hearing this anecdote from one of the keepers and eyeing the size of that beak that made me think, “Man, it would actually be pretty scary if one of those came for you . . .”

This book is one of those that I started and which then sat and percolated for over a decade. I always wanted to finish it, but it took a while for it to find a home. Possibly creepy roadrunners are a hard sell if you haven’t actually met a roadrunner in the flesh. Much gratitude to the crew at 47North for taking a chance on a very weird book, and on my agent Helen for not giving up on it!

If I was going to describe the platonic ideal of a Kingfisher horror novel, it would probably be a woman and her dog alone in a house full of creepy family secrets. That was the plot of my first horror novel, *The Twisted Ones*, and I often find books trying to bend in that direction and having to wrestle them back into line. It was a weird relief with *Snake-Eater* to just embrace it wholeheartedly.

I spent a large chunk of my childhood in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, surrounded by prickly pear and saguaro cactus. They were formative years and I imprinted on the landscape, a fact I didn’t realize until decades later when I came back for a visit and felt something unclench because the landscape looked *right* again. This was how the world was *supposed* to look.

There was no help for it. I had to move back to the desert. (The high desert, in Albuquerque in this case, because Arizona is very, very expensive. I do miss the saguaros still, but greatly prefer the weather.) Infinite and unending love to my husband, Kevin, who said, “Sure, let’s go,” and drove his beloved chickens from North Carolina to New Mexico, eager to embark on a new adventure. (Kevin, not the chickens. The chickens thought it was bullshit.)

Much of *Snake-Eater* was written while packing and wrangling the logistics of that move across the country, but the last pages were finished while sitting in my new office, looking out at the Sandia Mountains and rangeland full of thousands of cholla, and feeling that, like Selena, I'd finally come home.

T. Kingfisher