

Book Review: Atlee Pine series
By David Baldacci

I would imagine the majority of accomplished authors have written, or attempted to write, at least one series over the course of their careers. It's a great strategy for developing a readership and keeping them coming back for more. Create a protagonist who readers either relate to or wish they could emulate, and build out a series of stories centered on that character.

Best-selling author David Baldacci has developed about eight or nine series, but there's one that – in my opinion – stands out not only from all his others, but from most other series I've read. And that's the four-book Atlee Pine series (Long Road to Mercy, A Minute to Midnight, Daylight, and Mercy), published between 2018 and 2021, for several reasons.

Pine is an FBI agent; the lone agent assigned to a remote area in Arizona that includes the Grand Canyon. She's strong, independent, and a former MMA fighter to boot. But she's not infallible. She makes mistakes, and sometimes allows her emotions to cloud her judgment. In other words, she's human, which makes her easily relatable.

But what I believe sets this series apart from others is that the four books are not standalone stories. Sure, each book has a unique case that Pine has to solve, but underlying each story is a common thread that runs throughout the series. It's the driving force that makes, and sometimes nearly breaks, agent Pine.

That thread is introduced early in the first book, "Long Road to Mercy." Mercy is Pine's twin sister who was abducted during the night when the girls were 6-years old. Mercy was never seen nor heard from again, and the kidnapping led to the downfall of

Pine's family, her mother abandoning her during her teen years, and her father subsequently committing suicide. But 30 years later, Pine is driven by unanswered questions: Is Mercy alive or dead? And why was Pine spared? In the interim, she's tasked with solving a death and disappearance at the Grand Canyon that has national security implications.

In the second book, "A Minute to Midnight," Pine's unresolved hostility over her sister's kidnapping nearly brings her down. Her supervisor recommends she take time to deal with these demons before it destroys her career. Pine sets out for her rural hometown in Georgia with her assistant, Carol Blum, in tow. But her plan to unravel the 30-year-old mystery is temporarily shelved by a series of murders plaguing her small hometown.

As the third book in the series, "Daylight", unfolds, agent Pine has finally uncovered the identity of the person who kidnapped her twin sister. But her investigation into that abduction clashes with a high-level case directed by a former colleague and current military investigator. The two agents find a connection between their cases, and together they work toward a mutual resolve.

In the fourth and final installment in the series, "Mercy," Pine learns not only the reason behind her twin sister's abduction, but also the story behind her parents' secret lives. The truth, however, comes with a price that could prove the most costly to Pine yet as she seeks a conclusion to her 30-year nightmare.

Each book's storyline is complex and multi-layered, as are most of Baldacci's novels, and contain several I-didn't-see-that-coming moments. But it's the sub-plot in each, the recurring theme that drives agent Pine onward, that ties the series together and reads like a TV mini series.

In fact, according to imdb.com, Amazon Studios and executive producer Aeysha Carr are developing an as-yet untitled drama series based on the four books. Whether or not the TV series comes to fruition remains to be seen.

Regardless, I highly recommend this series. Atlee Pine is a relatable and, in many ways, unforgettable character. I rate it 4.5 out of 5 stars, and if you engage in the series, read each book closely followed by the next to maximize the experience.

As always, your feedback and thoughts are welcome.