



## Trell

*Dick Lehr*

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**Trell** Dick Lehr

**From the co-author of *Black Mass* comes a gripping YA novel inspired by the true story of a young man's false imprisonment for murder -- and those who fought to free him.**

On a hot summer night in the late 1980s, in the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury, a twelve-year-old African-American girl was sitting on a mailbox talking with her friends when she became the innocent victim of gang-related gunfire. Amid public outcry, an immediate manhunt was on to catch the murderer, and a young African-American man was quickly apprehended, charged, and -- wrongly -- convicted of the crime. Dick Lehr, a former reporter for the *Boston Globe*'s famous Spotlight Team who investigated this case for the newspaper, now turns the story into *Trell*, a page-turning novel about the daughter of an imprisoned man who persuades a reporter and a lawyer to help her prove her father's innocence. What pieces of evidence might have been overlooked? Can they manage to get to the truth before a dangerous character from the neighborhood gets to them?

## Trell Details

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Author : Dick Lehr

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Mystery, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Crime

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## From Reader Review Trell for online ebook

### **Sarah says**

I received a free copy of Trell from the publisher through LibraryThing in exchange for an honest review -- thank you!

What a compelling and timely book!

I wasn't surprised to find that Dick Lehr was the author of Black Mass. There's something cinematic in the way that he writes, and I think that Trell would also lend itself perfectly to a screen adaptation.

So, the writing is great. I love the characters -- and the lack of romance in YA is a refreshing plus, too. It's clear that the author's done a heck of a lot of research on the subject.

And finally, with issues of racism with respect to the criminal justice system and police responses... this is unfortunately a book that is very relevant to today's world.

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### **Amber says**

*Find more reviews like this at The Literary Phoenix.*

*I received a copy of this book free of charge in exchange for an honest review. Thank you to NetGalley and Candlewick Press for this opportunity. All opinions are strictly my own.*

### **Romero Taylor is a wrongfully accused man.**

He knows this, his wife knows this, and his daughter Van Trell Taylor knows this. Everyone knows this, but nobody is speaking up about it. Why not? Because the crime he is accused of is horrific: a twelve-year-old girl was shot. Furthermore, someone is keeping people quite.

Van Trell is going to get down to the truth and get justice for her daddy.

### **This book is trying to tell an important story, but it's doing it wrong.**

This book is based on an actual case that author Dick Tell worked on when he was a correspondent for the Boston Globe. The reporter character in the book - Clemens, a broken man - is inspired by himself. This story about police intimidation and POC crime is, I think, trying to enlighten the public about the prejudice in law enforcement the way The Hate U Give does... only, it's not working.

First of all, in turning this into a YA novel, it's been dumbed down. A lot. We spend loads of time having legal and journalism terms explained to us. Clemens likes to use slang which nobody understands, then he spends a paragraph explaining. A friendship is created between two characters that had been enemies as a means to an end, the lawyer and the reporter go to a waterpark together to support Trell. The dialect we see in the dialogue really bothers me, as the POC characters all speak with that sort of stereotypical accents and drop words, almost like they're less educated. I was a kid in the 90s, living in rural New Hampshire. We're a

little north of Boston, maybe that was common in the Boston boroughs, but Trell goes to a prestigious private school and should be more eloquent.

### **The characters are sort of horribly unrealistic.**

First of all, there's Van Trell. It took me halfway through the first chapter to realize Trell was a girl. Then, as mentioned above, her dialect seemed completely unrealistic to her level of education. She also has an infuriating magnetism where people are being disagreeable, then Trell appears from the shadows and gives them puppy eyes - now not only are they happy to help, but everyone is best friends. WHY.

Then there's Clemens. Of all the voices, his should be the most solid, since he's the author, right? Wrong? In a matter of pages this guy goes to being an ultimate grump mourning the loss of his son to an upbeat excited fatherly type who brings a box of donuts to the first meeting and always has a smile. It just didn't work.

Paul and Trell's mother ("Shey-Shey" to just about everyone but the prison guard) are flat. Trell's father, the convicted Romero Taylor, isn't much better. Nora had potential, but slid into obscurity after the first 20% or so of the book.

### **Not a fan of this book.**

It just... frustrated me. Lehr's got this great opportunity to talk about BLM and wrongful conviction and instead he turns it into a children's book that doesn't do the story justice. He doesn't capture the voice of a 14 y/o female POC at all. It's all too easy and too unrealistic to really be captivating.

If I hadn't received this as a free ARC, I would have put it down, honestly. You know the ending and you just don't care about the journey. It's filled with "are you serious?" moments and "I'm pretty sure that's not how it would go" moments. This may have been a better story if it was aimed at adults and maybe told by #OwnVoices or at least by the author's character since he included himself. But it doesn't work. I don't think it's offensive, but it doesn't work.

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### **Erin says**

Ugh, I go back and forth on this. Because the idea is really great, of a teenage girl who fights all of the odds to get her wrongfully convicted father out of jail. Plus, this is based on a true story that Lehr worked on and was inspired by. So, great. I'm sure that Mr. Lehr is a strong journalist devoted to his craft and doing his part to shed light on wrongs and make things a little better.

I just think that the writing isn't very strong. Very telling versus showing, and one event after another event after another event. Overall, it's not a bad book, I can probably book talk it to kids, but it's a little dry.

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### **Jay! says**

This was SO wonderful. By the end, I was crying. Lehr did an amazing job of adapting a real case to YA fiction and I am so happy it exists

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### **Annalee says**

This book was very well written and it told me that I should probably not be reading criminal mysteries because I always figure them out halfway through the book (it sucks). I loved the characters and the setting but once I figured out the mystery it got pretty boring. I enjoyed it and all, but it just didn't catch me the way that I want to be caught in mystery/crime novels.

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### **Alison Hardtmann says**

*Trell* tells the story of a fourteen-year-old girl who lives in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston with her mother. Her father has been in prison since she was an infant, wrongly convicted of the drive-by murder of a young girl. Trell has seen her father only once a week during visiting hours. When a lawyer agrees to take on her father's appeal, Trell helps out at the law office, filing papers and learning about the legal system. As she learns more and more about her father's case, she has to confront the reasons he was convicted and find more help, in this case, a jaded reporter, to get the publicity needed to draw attention to her father's wrongful conviction.

I'm not a YA reader, but this book held my attention and I didn't feel as though the author, a former journalist with *The Boston Globe*'s famous Spotlight team, overly simplified things. Dick Lehr is telling a complex story here, one that addresses the crack epidemic of the 1980s, police malfeasance, why communities of color mistrust the police, what it's like to be an outsider, the experience of a child who has a parent in prison, along with the central story. Despite the central story being about gangs, drug dealing and cops, the novel was refreshingly centered on women, from the lawyer doing the work to win an appeal for Trell's father, Trell's mother who is strong and does a lot to help with the case while supporting her and Trell, to Trell herself, plucky but scared. Lehr based this book on actual events that reported on so there's a depth to the characters and events that comes from reality. I liked that he allowed Trell to be an independent character while not downplaying the danger involved in investigating the case.

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### **Whispering Stories says**

Book Reviewed by Stacey on [www.whisperingstories.com](http://www.whisperingstories.com)

Fourteen-year-old Van Trell Taylor (Trell) has been brought up by her mum Shey, on one of Boston's roughest estates. She sees her father, Romero Taylor, every Saturday at the state prison where he has been for the last twelve years after he was convicted for shooting dead a young teenage girl called Ruby Graham, who was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Romero had always protested his innocence and convinced a new lawyer, Nora Walsh to look at his case. Trell was convinced that her daddy was innocent too, so helped Nora file an appeal for a retrial. However, a judge dismissed the chance for a second trial. With no-where else to go with their appeal, they decided to have a journalist take a look at the case and see what he could uncover.

On the night of Ruby Graham's murder, a reporter for the Boston Globe, Clemens Bittner, was dealing with

his own grief, the death of his son. He was once a top journalist but the grief hit him hard and now he does the night-shift and avoids people. Trell needs Clemens to help her. She knows he's the best reporter and that he will get to the truth. With enough badgering, he agrees to take a look.

Trell, with the help of Clemens, Nora and her mum realise that her father's case isn't straight-forward and it is going to take some digging to get to the truth, especially when it seems that someone is determined not to let the truth be outed.

Nothing But the Truth is a fictional story surrounding a real case back in 1988, the shooting of Tiffany Moore and the incarceration of Shawn Drumgold for her murder. Author Dick Lehr was a journalist for the Boston Globe when people began asking him to look at the case. He discovered evidence that the police has been rash to place the blame on Drumgold and in 2003 he walked free from prison acquitted of her murder.

You can certainly tell that the book has been written by a journalist. From the short chapters covering different aspects of the case to the way it has been worded is like a journalists report. This type of writing I enjoy.

Trell was a great character who was determined to stand up for her father and uncover the truth. She doesn't hold back on the fact that her father wasn't the nicest man, nor innocent of other crimes, but she knows that he didn't kill Ruby and will stop for nothing to prove that he wasn't the person who pulled the trigger.

Along the way you get to read about a corrupt government official whose only concern is getting to the top and the way the police were manipulated as well as witnesses threatened. The police needed to get the case wrapped up quickly as they needed to be seen taking a stand and it didn't matter to them that they might have the wrong person.

This is a powerful book told from the point of view of a young teenage girl. It was lovely to see a young black girl from a rough estate being portrayed as a well educated and well mannered young lady with sheer determination to put right a wrong. The book isn't all about police bashing, it's about uncovering the truth and discovering why her father was chosen to be the one to take the blame.

This is a book not to be missed. It speaks volumes and will open your eyes to the world around you and will show what it sometimes takes to see justice done.

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### **Tisha says**

Fascinating book about a girl who helps investigate a murder her dad was convicted of 13 years earlier. It had interesting thoughts about politics, prison, newspaper reporting, the court system. I loved it. It's based off a true story.

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### **Richard Corbett says**

Clean and powerfully written with a wonderful heroin of Trell, who never gives up the fight for justice, this novel which is taken from a real case, is an inspiration to keep on fighting even though there seem to be impossible odds.

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### **Sarah Hannah says**

#### **BUT WHEN IS THE MOVIE COMING OUT**

Really, this is great. Well researched and well crafted, with a fully realized Boston setting. I really love that even though it was a white guy and a black girl working together, there was no white savior trope--Trell really runs the show and drives the action, and she does an incredible amount of work while still being believably young and giving the adult man his heroic moments as appropriate. It's also always nice when an adult man and a younger girl can have a really positive relationship that has nothing creepy about it. Also, YA without even a hint of romance! And a black girl who goes to private school! And she's my age--in that she was born a few months before me in 1988, so this book takes place when *I* was a teen. Win win win.

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### **Evh Smith says**

Trell is a novel that hooked me from the beginning, mostly because the book is set in the 80's, is a true story, but it still represents things that are happening today. In the story, a young girl, Van Trell or Trell for short, grows up visiting her father in prison every weekend. Ruby Graham was a little girl sitting on a mailbox one summer, and was murdered by gunfire intended for gang members. The man who was convicted of the crime, Trell's father, is innocent. Now, the daughter and wife form a team along with a newly barreled lawyer, and a news reporter who'd fallen out of the groove. The team worked to uncover the man's innocence, his daughter being the highlight. She often runs into trouble venturing off alone to uncover the conspiracy which landed her father in prison serving a life sentence, without the possibility of parole; and almost gets killed doing it. Towards the end of the story, it becomes apparent what is going to happen, but the plot twist the author takes to get there keeps you on the edge of your seat.

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### **Shannon (Mrsreadsbooks) says**

This book is based on a true crime that occurred in Roxbury, MA where a 12 year old African American girl named Darlene Moore, was sitting on a mailbox and got caught in the crossfire of gang violence. It became a very difficult case and a man was wrongly convicted of the crime and was imprisoned for about 14 years before he was released.. His release was due in part to the investigation by the author of this book, who previously had worked as a reporter for the Boston Globe. So this book obviously is closely related to the events that happened in real life, although the author does change names and some small details. The book is told from the perspective of the wrongly convicted man's teenage daughter, which I found to be quite an interesting approach. The author also writes himself into the story, using a different name which was also an interesting approach and something I have previously not read. The pacing of this story also moves along at quite a quick pace.

This of course is a very interesting story, but I think it would have worked better if the author had just written the book as non-fiction. Trying to write fiction so close to an actual case, but changing names and details just doesn't always work well. I did enjoy the fact that the book is written from Trell's perspective, the daughter of the wrongly convicted man, instead of from the reporter's perspective. Overall, I did enjoy the book; it was an interesting story and it was told from an interesting perspective, but I think it would have

worked better if the author had written it as non-fiction.

Thank you to the publisher, Candlewick Press, for sending me an ARC of this book.

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### **Homeschoolmama says**

I won this ARC from Librarything. The book's description intrigued me because the setting is near my home town, and I also remember the actual case the story was based on. *Trell* is a story based on a real life crime—the murder of an African American 12 yr old girl named Darlene Moore, who was sitting on a mailbox in Roxbury MA and was caught in the crossfire between rival gangs. The case itself made headlines and took years to resolve. A man named Shaun Drumgold was wrongly convicted of the crime, but was set free some 14 years later, due to some media investigation by this author, Dick Lehr, who was a former Boston Globe reporter.

This novel is very much patterned after the crime, with just a few name changes. It was written for a YA audience and in the 1st person, from the point of view of a 14 yr old African American girl named Trell, the daughter of the wrongly convicted man. The idea to narrate the story from a young girl's perspective was good, but I noticed several inconsistencies. Lehr has the girl depict people and events in terms no 14 yr old would ever use, for example, she describes a few different characters' clothing by using the words "slacks" and "blouse". People my age don't even use those terms for women's clothing. I wonder if Lehr did any research in this area- it would have been helpful if he'd hung around some urban 14 yr olds. or read some transcripts from the early 1980's to get a more realistic sense of people's language use.

The pacing of the events was a bit fast as well. Lehr had characterized himself in the story as an old curmudgeon named Clemens Bittner, a reclusive reporter who wouldn't answer phone calls and worked the graveyard shift. It took all of two pages for Trell to befriend Clemens and for him to start confiding in the 14 yr old girl. Again, unrealistic.

I'm also not sure why Lehr wrote this story in the first place. I think it would have made more sense to write about the actual case and make it a true crime story instead of a fictionalized version. Lehr even used some names from the actual crime but switched them to different characters. So why fiction? Why not just keep the details the same? Maybe some legal issues, I don't know. Lehr does say in his author's note in the end that he wanted to make it appeal to a younger audience. I don't know if it will. I do think his writing is good, and I appreciated his good grammar (!) Overall, it was an interesting read, though I think it would have been better to keep the story real. I think I will check out Lehr's book about Whitey Bulger.

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### **Jazmen says**

This book lives up to all it claims to be. Gripping and thrilling, indeed it was.

I loved the juxtaposition of the past and the future. While the story is told in the now, It feels like you're right there with them every time they talked about what happened in the past. It was a story you felt, not just read.

Aside from the novel being pretty much unputdownable, the story was really current and ripe for its time, now.

Trell, short for Van Trell, her dad is in prison for killing a young girl. But, not for one second does Trell believe that her father is actually guilty--and neither does the Mom. This is what sets the pace for the story--and what keeps it going.

Every single part of the story is clearly well thought out, perfectly paced--and downright gripping. It was like watching a really good episode of your favorite crime show. I was glued to its page, and the proverbial edge of my seat.

Although I started to put the pieces together--there will still parts of it, they caught me off guard--in a good way.

This is my first time reading this author, and I can guarantee with a book like this--it will not be my last.

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### **Heather Taake says**

This book is amazing! I highly recommend to anyone who likes mystery, fast-paced action, writing, running, or family dramas. It has it all! I especially liked the journalistic spin on the story. So unique and thought-provoking. This book brings to light a lot of injustice and corruption. So so good.

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