



Photo by Matt Bennett

# JEFF LANIER

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## PRAISE

"Jeff Lanier brilliantly evokes the energy and excitement of the New York art world in this Cold War thriller with an artistic twist. Along the way he gives us fascinating insights into Abstract Expressionism and the power of art to communicate values and ideas."

- Ross King, New York Times Bestselling and Award-Winning Author of *The Judgement of Paris*, *Brunelleschi's Dome*, *Michelangelo* and *The Pope's Ceiling*

"A must-be-read-to-be-believed book, *For the Minds and Wills of Men* is a fun romp for readers of all stripes."

- Jennifer Dasal, Author and Podcaster of *ArtCurious: Stories of the Unexpected, Slightly Odd, and Strangely Wonderful in Art History*

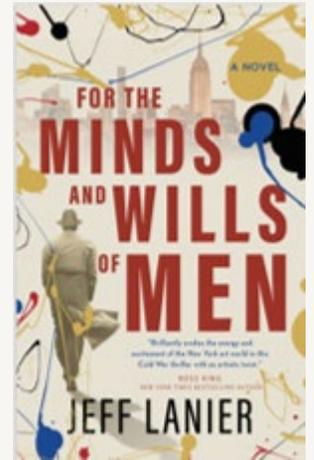
"This is an exceedingly intelligent and unpredictable story, one that astutely combines a love of art with an exciting tale of intrigue. A mesmerizing spy thriller, thoughtful and dramatic."

- Kirkus Review

## BOOK

### FOR THE MINDS AND WILLS OF MEN

Manhattan, 1953. Fear of communist subversion and espionage are tearing America apart. Abstract expressionism is on the verge of exploding, making New York the cultural epicenter of the world. While recovering a stolen Jackson Pollock for a wealthy client, art insurer Will Oxley falls for the client's daughter, Liz Bower, who leads him deep into the rebellious and seductive world of the abstract expressionist painters, their Village bar haunts and East Hampton binges. But when Will learns the painting—and Liz—may be hiding communist secrets better left hidden, he finds himself torn between exposing the girl he loves or risking his life by trusting her instead. Realizing nothing is as it seems, Will is caught between communist espionage, secret government programs, and the grip of cold war fear, suspicion, and betrayal where trust is all he has left ....



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- First two chapters of *For the Minds and Wills of Men*

# FOR THE MINDS AND WILLS OF MEN

## Synopsis

For the Minds and Wills of Men, is a cold war thriller set in New York in 1953. With post-World War II Manhattan and the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings as background, the novel explores the abstract expressionist art movement and the real story of art as a key player in mid-century American politics - through the search for a stolen Jackson Pollock.

WILL OXLEY, an insurance investigator who specializes in art is perplexed by his newest case. A Jackson Pollock painting was taken from a gallery, a painting that most, including Will, don't consider art. Will begins his search at his client's art gallery and learns the thieves drilled out the lock of the storage entry door and went straight to one crate. Every other painting was left alone. Even stranger, Will's black-market network tells him the painting hasn't resurfaced; not a whisper has been heard.

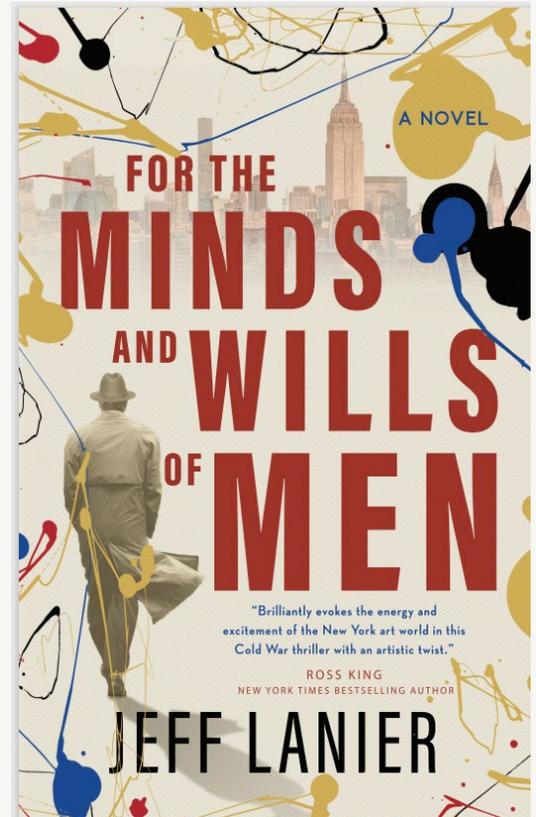
Meanwhile, IRA FENTON, a member of an anti-communist private investigative group funded by Hoover's FBI, breaks into the artists union searching for proof of communist activity and begins a smear campaign against two hundred modern artists. While investigating, WILL falls for the painting owner's daughter, LIZ BOWER, an art supporter and head of the family foundation, who introduces him to the world of the New York abstract expressionist painters. The two fall for each other while spending time with the painters in their East Village bars, 10th street studios, and trips to the East Hamptons.

When Will learns the stolen painting may hide proof that Liz is a communist spy, he becomes confused and angry, realizing that he won't confront her about it because he loves her.

Emotionally torn, Will struggles with finding the painting and exposing whatever secrets about Liz it may hide, and protecting her at the same time. Will himself becomes a target for blacklisting and his job is threatened. But Will decides to trust his instincts and his love for Liz. Newly determined, he knows he must find the painting, clear his name, and protect the woman he loves. Yet he's not sure that trust will be enough.

Will is chased through the streets of Manhattan by government agents, blacklisted, and pursued deep into the bowels of the lower stacks of the New York library before ultimately finding the stolen Pollock and learning its secret.

[www.jeffdlanier.com](http://www.jeffdlanier.com)



## QUICK FACTS

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# Excerpts

WILL OXLEY had questioned his decision at times. Why not sell cars? Work for Chevrolet? Everyone bought cars after the war. That's where the money was. Chrome, billet grilles, and radios. Mercury. Lincoln. Studebaker. The Ford Crestline Victoria. But instead, he had started his one-man art division at All American Insurance to protect paintings.

He sat back on the vinyl seat as his cab sped toward the Third Avenue elevated, the last iron relic of the steam-powered trains that threaded through Manhattan like a soot-stained ribbon, winding through the Bowery and up Third Avenue to Harlem. He hadn't expected a stolen painting from the Stable Gallery. Unlike the galleries selling Monets and Picassos on Sixth Avenue, where sales had doubled since the war, the Stable Gallery was new and on the fringe, showing modern, avant-garde artists, nothing like his other clients. The green iron girders of the el loomed over the avenue as he passed under. The jostling of the cab only worsened as it ran along the cobblestone streets of the Village and did not let up until they reached the newly paved Second Avenue with its fourth-floor walk-ups built after Will had returned from the war, when the paintings began to mean something to him.

Will bounced on the seat as the cab careened up FDR Drive and along the murky-green East River. The stench of truck diesel mixed with fresh fish and sour trash floated in through the cracked window. Dockhands pushed dollies along the pier, the same pier he had waited on to board the battleship convoy to Liverpool. The memories were fresh, as if eight years hadn't passed. He had packed weeks in advance, eagerly waiting to receive his deployment date. Then there was the farewell dinner with his dad at the Lexington Diner, a year of basic training, the staging in England, and on to Omaha Beach as an infantry replacement—twenty-nine days after Normandy.

Today, on the dock, workers cleaned and restocked a freighter tied down by rope woven thicker than his leg. As FDR curved around the wharf, the newly developed Stuyvesant apartment complex towered before him; a thousand windows textured the buildings with uniformed consistency, punctuated here and there with tattered white curtains. Will's cab sped past the United Nations, which rose from the bedrock like a green glass curtain, then lurched



left and carried him into Midtown, past the Waldorf Astoria, MoMA, and the Stork Club, before tossing him out at the Stable Gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street.

Elaine Carter stood in front of the gray stone building. Her straight, coffee-black hair gave her an arresting appearance, framing a face some men would describe as unattractive, long with sunken eyes.

"Will Oxley!" she said as he stepped from the cab. "Thank God you've come. You're absolutely the best." Will had learned that Elaine shrewdly overcame her odd looks with profuse flattery.

She told everyone they were absolutely the best before turning to the next fabulous person. She dusted her hands on the back of her jeans, wrapped her arms around his chest, and gave him a hug with great animation.

When she released him, Will smiled at her. Slightly crooked, his smile turned the corner of his mouth up on the right side as if he were in the middle of a wink, often giving the impression the conversation was more intimate than he intended, yet he always gave the smile with sincerity. It made his square face, one that might otherwise get lost in the crowd, rather pleasant and memorable. His saddle-brown hair was cut short like most men's, and he wore a modest suit with a handkerchief in his back pocket.

# Excerpts

After a while, Elaine abandoned Will for other guests, so he grabbed another cup of wine and drifted to the back of the gallery where the large Pollock hung on display. If he stared long enough at the painting, maybe he would understand it. He lit a cigarette, took a long pull, and exhaled, the smoke floating around him as he stood before the painting.

He peered deep into the knotted web of black and white paint splattered across the canvas, some strands thick, others thin. In certain areas the black paint lay dull and flat, sunken deep into the canvas, while in others the blackness glimmered on top like it was still wet. Delicate touches of tan and gray and a hint of sea-blue whirled against a dusty pink background. A sense of controlled chaos emanated from the canvas as Will stared. Then as if from out of nowhere, a voice startled him from behind.

“What do you think of it?”

Will turned, surprised to find a slender woman standing behind him. “I could take it or leave it, I guess,” he said. “It looks like a tangled mess of hair, though. I kind of want to comb it all out, you know?” He laughed. “Or we could shave it!”

He glanced at her for a reaction and saw that she was tightening the corners of her mouth, trying to hold back a smile. “Sorry,” he said with amusement and smiled, the right side of his face turning up in a pleasant wink. “I should take it more seriously.”

The woman let a slight smile turn. “I’d be lying if I didn’t admit I found your joke a bit amusing. It was certainly more clever than the patent answers I hear from this crowd. But you don’t like the painting?”

“The jury is still out, I guess. It’s a bit muddled. I’m trying to understand if there is any meaning to it. Do you see it?”

“I hope so. I own one, or did.” She gave him a sportive smile and turned toward the painting. “He lays the canvas on the floor and throws paint on it with a thick brush or a stick. He paints on the floor to get closer to the work. They’re all trying to get closer to their work. It’s what their pictures are about. During and after the war, after the two bombs, they couldn’t make sense of painting flowers and nudes, so they turned inward, focusing on their experience with painting. Just them and their paintings.”

Will turned to the painting and imagined a balding Pollock standing over the canvas, splattering paint, in a jean jacket with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth like a garage mechanic.

Will stepped forward so his eyes were inches from the canvas, close enough to see the crisscross hash marks of the raw fabric underneath. On the surface of the painting, pressed into the paint and color, was the distinct impression of a work boot. Will could see the ridges of the sole. He could envision Pollock stepping into the painting, reaching to throw a viscous strand of paint.

Will turned back, and the woman offered her hand, looking directly into his eyes. “I’m Liz Bower. Frank’s daughter.”

Will shook her hand, feeling caught off guard. She was less of a socialite than he had expected. She had a well-educated demeanor, maybe Ivy League, someone who belonged in a leather chair at the Knickerbocker Club. Not because she was boyish. In fact, she held her paper cup with a feminine hand, but she held it with a confidence he hadn’t expected.

Her long, brown hair was pinned back into a simple knot at the nape of her neck. A strand stuck out of the back as if she took no time to dress for the exhibit, preoccupied with more than looking pretty, though she’d accomplished that too. She wore a black sheath dress cut straight at the sides, but she seemed indifferent to her attire, a thoughtless yet perfect routine. To Will, the dress appeared to be a kind of uniform, the same black sheath dress for all engagements.

Her hand relaxed, and Will reluctantly let it slip from his fingers.

“Elaine said you’re the art detective.”



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## Biography

Jeff Lanier earned bachelor's degrees in History and Art History at The University of Texas, Austin with a focus on the History of American Culture through Art and Literature. He has a master's from Rice University, is a member of the American Society of Aesthetics, and currently lives in Houston with his wife and three children.

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**“Lanier intelligently limns not only the American obsession with Communist infiltration in the wake of World War II, but also the emergence of abstract expressionism in the U.S.”**

– *Kirkus Review*

**“A captivating tour through the art world of postwar New York City, blended with an enthralling whodunit that leaves you guessing until the end.”**

– *Glasstire Magazine*

**“Entertaining ... enlightening ... filled with memorable characters both historical and fictional.”**

– *Lone Star Literary Life*

**“Terrific ... Sweeps readers into 1950s New York City avant-guard art world ... For the Minds and Wills of Men is of the highest order.”**

– *Ann Weisgarber, Award-Winning Author of The Glovemaker and The Promise*

**“A rare delight indeed ... a thrilling novel where art meets espionage. *For the Minds and Wills of Men* is a superb read highly recommended.”**

– *Reader's Favorite*

**Bachelor's degrees in History and Art History at The University of Texas, Austin with a focus on the History of American Culture through Art and Literature, a master's from Rice University.**

Jeff has studied art and architecture in Europe, has worked at Sotheby's Art Auction in New York in Hollywood & Rock'n Roll memorabilia, renovated historic theatres, and sold insurance in China.

When not working, Jeff prefers to drink coffee and study art while sitting on a bench in his yard, cook outside on the grill, and occasionally go for a run.

# Sample Q&A

## 1. What inspired you to write this book?

I have always been fascinated with the abstract expressionist painters of the 1950s. They have the iconic ‘emotionally torn, alcohol driven’ ethos to them, a rawness that I find compelling. At the same time, the McCarthy period of the 1950s fascinates me, the juxtaposition of an idyllic America with white picket fences and washer machines against the internal suspicion and fear of anti-communism. So that’s where I started. I knew I wanted to write a book that had those two elements, and I made the decision to write what I was compelled to explore. For entertainment value, I threw in the stolen painting as a way to explore abstract expressionism. It was only during my research did I find the facts about the CIA which was a gift and a great ‘real-life’ story.

## 2. What did you learn when writing the book?

I learned a great deal about Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, much more than their paintings, but who they were and how they struggled. You sometimes forget when famous paintings are hung on museum walls how the painters were real people with real struggles. I also knew relatively little about the connection between AbEx and American politics. Although it’s a minor notation in art history, its quite fascinating and lent itself to a great story.

## 3. What does the title mean?

The title means a lot to me. And, like writing the book, the title also emerged as my understanding of the story crystalized. It wasn’t until I finished the book and understood Liz, one of the main characters, and who she was, did I find that *For the Minds and Wills of Men* was the right title. It is a quote from one of President Eisenhower’s speeches and captures the essence of the cold war and the cold warrior.

## 4. What part of the storyline is real or based on real events?

At the end of the book, I include an Author’s Note which attempts to untangle for the reader the strains of historical truths and present what of the novel is fact and fiction. I attempted to render the biographies and personalities of the artists, their art, and the art history to the best of my ability. I also tried to represent the anti-communist fervor and fear of modern art accurately. The crux of the story, the relationship between Abstract Expressionism and the CIA, is based on fact; and for that, I leaned on Frances Stoner Saunders’ book *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* and several academic articles. But, for the most part, the story is a complete fabrication threading between actual events and historical figures.

## 5. You present Jackson Pollock more as an outsider and not very successful. Is that right?

For the most part, yes. Kline and de Kooning were viewed as the leaders of the AbEx artists in the village. Both had strong art backgrounds and had taught at Black Mountain College, which was the place to be at the time. Jackson Pollock did not fit in, and his personality was extremely abrasive. He did struggle to sell his paintings to the larger public. He was ‘famous’, the first ‘art star’, which Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, and Damien Hirst have taken to a new level, and the critics loved him, but his paintings didn’t sell well at all.