



The Empress File

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Pulitzer Prize-winner John Camp--author of *Shadow Prey*, *f Prey*, and the first novel featuring the enigmatic Kidd, *The Fool's Run*--returns with another Kidd thriller. After the cover-up of the shooting of 14-year-old Darrell Clark by police, Darrell's friend Marvel links up with Kidd through Darrell's computer, and they plot to bring down the corrupt officials involved.

The Empress File Details

Date : Published November 1st 1992 by Berkley (first published April 1st 1991)

ISBN :

Author : John Camp , John Sandford

Format : Kindle Edition 372 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Crime

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From Reader Review The Empress File for online ebook

Owlsinger says

Liked the story, but things just seemed to come together too easily for Kidd & Luellen. Although, karmically speaking, a month in the hospital after getting the crap kicked out of you probably balances that out quite neatly. Watching & waiting for developments on the "couple" issue, too. I remember a brief crossover in at least one of his Lucas Davenport novels, but not what their status was. Another reason to keep reading.

Jim A says

Another of Sandford's early works, written as John Camp, featuring Kidd and LuEllen. Kidd is a computer geek (80's style), an artist, a Tarot Card reader, and a criminal. LuEllen is not as complex, she's just a high class burglar.

Kidd and LuEllen are asked by Bobby, their go to guy for computer hacking, to help out a friend in a small Mississippi town. The task involves taking down the town mayor and town council.

Bodies mount and break ins are the theme in this fast moving novel.

Personally, I really enjoy stories about revenge and retribution. This one fills my comfort zone quite nicely.

Kathy Davie says

Second in The Kidd psychological suspense series and revolving around a brilliant man whose computer hacking supports his art career. Based in Minneapolis, Kidd will sail down to Mississippi to right the wrongs of corruption.

My Take

Most of what I've been reading the last few years has been about detectives, private investigators, and that type of thriller-mystery-suspense, and it's a bit of a twist to read of someone out for himself — Kidd has an interesting moral code. He mainly works to make money so he can continue to paint. He prefers to work on the side of good, and sometimes he's the *good*. That attitude really comes out in *The Empress File*. A bit coldhearted, but also very realistic.

Of course, he can be as stupid as the rest of us too. His accountant sure is shaking her head. And the IRS would like a word.

It all starts in a small Southern town with trigger-happy cops who can't be bothered when it's a black person. A murder that riles up the disaffected. One of whom is a friend of Bobby Duchamps.

”Goddamn it, Billy Lee,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘You went and shot yourself the wrong

nigger.””

.It’s backroom deals, breaking-and-entering, and using a tarot deck to instill the “proper” motivation with a first person protagonist point-of-view from Kidd’s perspective. And it doesn’t take Kidd’s POV to ensure I understood that Hill and St. Thomas are jerks when they’re shooting kittens in a cage for fun.

That scheme to shake up the city council was a good ‘un and definitely causes greed to rear up. Sorry, I should have said “schemes”, ‘cause Kidd and LuEllen are mighty busy ticking people off.

There is a heavy price to pay for this clean-up, and it’s a case of *eventually* crime doesn’t pay with karma catching up to the bad guys.

The Story

One stifling summer night in Longstreet, Mississippi, fourteen-year-old Darrell Clark ran home thinking about two things: the ice cream he couldn’t wait to eat and an algorithm he was working on, a way to generate real time fractal terrain on his Macintosh computer. The cops who shot him in the back, mistaking him for a purse snatcher, found the ice cream in the paper bag on the ground next to Darrell. They’d never know about the events they had just set in motion.

When the predictable cover-up occurs, a group of blacks, led by Marvel Atkins, decide the time for action has come. The city government must go. Through John’s friendship with Bobby, Marvel, with the incredible liquid eyes, links up with Kidd, who takes on jobs that may be a little beyond the law.

She lays out the objective, but he makes the plan. The mayor, city council, and city attorney are all corrupt. The firehouse is the center for drug dealing, and the recreation director skims money like algae from the municipal swimming pool. And then there’s Duane Hill, the dogcatcher/enforcer who uses Dobermans to get his way.

Kidd will simply find the crack in the machine and work it until the city comes down like a house of tarot cards.

The Characters

Kidd has an impressive past and currently lives in a paid-off condo (a warehouse conversion) with a similar place, paid-off, in New Orleans. His legit computer work is working an economic and psychological profile program he developed that politicians are really into. The illegit is usually stealing ideas. He likes the **Waite-Rider tarot deck**; he believes it forces him to a different perspective. **Chaminade Loan** doesn’t like coming second in anyone’s life.

LuEllen “Case” is a burglar who restricts her thefts to money from people who can afford to lose it. The **Wee Blue Inn** is a very bad place run by **Weenie**; he’s LuEllen’s phone drop.

Bobby Duchamps is an online friend whom Kidd has never met. He’s a wizard on the Internet and an even better hacker.

Longstreet, Mississippi, is...

...run by a corrupt city council: the suspicious **Chenille Dessesdelit** is mayor and the city’s chief administrative officer with a powerful greed for money (**Ralph** is her deceased husband); **the Reverend Luther Dodge** runs a Baptist church and a city recreation center where he clips the tickets and enjoys a nasty perversion; **Carl Rebek** is an insurance agent who does what he’s told and collects a piece of the pie; **Arnie**

St. Thomas is a loan shark who uses the city money for his piggy bank; and, **Lucius Bell**, the only straight shooter, is a farmer with a need for a bridge.

Duane Hill is animal control...and the machine's muscle. *He does love him some shootin' out at the shelter.* **Archie Ballem** is the city attorney and their fixer. **Mary Wells** is the city clerk; her brother has the Chevy dealership in town.

Officers Roy R. "Tud" Dick and **Billy Lee Teeter** are way too gung-ho with the weapons. **Lucy** is a police dispatcher. The fire department handles the dope trafficking.

Marvel Atkins is a Marxist with plans. **Harold** has been friends with Marvel since childhood. **John Smith** works for a legal services company that does investigations...and he's an artist. **Becka Clay** is a cleaning woman at City Hall.

Brooking Davis is a lawyer who does appraisal work for the county assessor. **Matron Carter** coaches basketball at Longstreet High School. **Marvin Lesse** and **Bill Armistead** are being set up for a temporary seat.

Darrell Clark is 14 years old, is brilliant on a computer, and has a hunger for ice cream. **Clarissee Barnwright**, a.k.a., "Old Lady Barnwright", is a retired Latin and English teacher and thrilled her husband has died. **Clayton Rand** saw the mugging. **Elvis Coultier** is the night manager for E-Z Way, a convenience store. **Annie Carlson** is a bit of an exhibitionist. **Danny Oakes** was running his mouth. **Humdinger's** is a ferns-and-antique-bricks restaurant where the movers and shakers lunch. **Gloriana Trent** has a house with a view; her family owns the department and sporting goods stores in town. **Brown** owns some land along the river bank.

Fred is a river rat who tutored Kidd and LuEllen in piloting a houseboat, the **Fanny**. **Maggie Kahn** had been the disaster in *The Fool's Run*, 1. **Lund** is Kidd's art dealer in Chicago. The **Cale Gallery** represents Kidd in New Orleans.

The Cover and Title

The cover is a deep royal blue, the deep blue of a snow-filled landscape at night, stretching out into the distance. A wave of a film strip with a bright red background silhouettes five different figures in action. The author's name and title are both in an embossed dull gold, one at the top and the other at the bottom with info blurbs in white.

The title refers to a card in the tarot, one that could apply to any one of three people. It's *The Empress File*, for sure.

Patrick says

This was an interesting book. It wasn't so much about computer hacking as Kidd and LuEllen using their skills to take down a town. It was interesting to see how they did it. You might find it interesting as well, but I think it's a bit far fetched.

Mike Kennedy says

#2 in the Kidd and LuEllen series. Not as good as the Lucas Davenport or Virgil Flowers series. Kidd and LuEllen are called down the Mississippi to help a friend get revenge on a corrupt, racist city where a young African American was mistakenly shot. Good pace to the story. Kidd is into reading Tarot cards, which to me didn't really do much for the story, and it is talked about a lot. Interesting characters, and plot idea. Not the best Sandford I've read, but still good.

Amanda says

Really enjoyed this - didn't realize it was a series until a few chapters in so will need to locate the 1st book so I have a better understanding of the background between the 2 main characters. If you enjoy characters that have a few shades of grey regarding the way of the world this is definitely a series to look into.

Jack Rochester says

This is, perhaps, the second novel John Sandford published, one of four of the "Kidd" works, prior to beginning the Lucas Davenport novels. I was introduced to Sandford [I've often wondered why John Camp, a highly respected journalist, chose to write under a nom de plume, but whatever...] by Mike Henderson, my best friend from fifth grade, who threw a bunch of the Lucas Davenport "Prey" novels in a box and gave them to me to read. I ended up reading them in order, which is important as Lucas grows and changes, although Sandford does an excellent job of reminding you of what has happened to him in previous books.

But I digress. "The Empress File" I had not read, and picked it up on a whim. It's definitely a sophomore effort by an author who had not yet hit his stride but who was already earmarked as an excellent writer. Kidd is an artist - a painter - who is also expert at Tarot card interpretations. He's also something of an outlaw and he smokes pot. A complex character indeed, and one who takes on freelance jobs as if a cross between a detective, a fixer, a MacGyver and a hitman. Intriguing, perhaps matched only by his sidekick, the alluring LuEllen.

The plot is kind of implausible, but as a story it's engaging because there's a lot of action and risk and some genuinely nasty characters, which would become a hallmark of the "Prey" series, and later the Virgil Flowers novels. Yet perhaps its greatest weakness is the two-dimensional characters, Kidd and LuEllen. I didn't feel anything for them; I never felt engaged with them, even when Kidd gets beat up. Again, this is, I believe, Sandford's second novel and his characters [and plots] get better as he writes more. Perhaps it was this weakness that motivated him to move away from Kidd and introduce Lucas; if so, it was a wise career move. I live inside Lucas: see through his eyes, feel his love, his pain, his dilemmas. I've read everything Sandford's written and enjoyed them all, some more than others of course, but I'm a 100% committed John Sandford fan.

Ed says

This was the second of the "Kidd/LuEllen" series and was published in 1991. That's 20 years ago and the age

shows because Kidd is a computer geek and the technology is obviously dated. I believe Sandford only did four books in this series, the last one in 2003.

Interestingly, though, the out of date technology did not detract from my enjoyment of the story. No different, in some ways, from reading historical fiction. Put another way, technology does not drive the plot, the characters do.

Kidd, the geek, and LuEllen, a thief, are both into playing con games but usually for a good cause. They remind me of Lawrence Block's Bernie Rhodenbarr and to a lesser extent his "Hitman". In this story they are trying to destroy the power structure in Longstreet, a small Mississippi River town. They, of course, hope to make sizable profit in the process while empowering the black majority and other law-abiding citizens of the town.

Unfortunately, the stakes go up precipitously when people start being murdered and their scam is close to being uncovered. The plot develops from there. There are no surprises except, perhaps, for the unmitigated brutality of those in charge of the town's fortunes.

While I've spent time in the U.S. South and have read stories of the corruption and violence in some of the more backward towns and cities there, I had a hard time believing that what went on in Longstreet could last for as long as it did. The characters were a little stereotypical but nevertheless interesting, especially the residents and rulers of Longstreet. The story's ending is also a little bit contrived but by that time I was so hooked that I was happy with what happened to the major characters.

I enjoyed this story enough so that I plan to get my hands on some of the other Kidd/LuEllen books, dated though they may be.

Baustman says

I like Sandford's Kidd and LuEllen series, but they definitely lack the gritty action of the Lucas and Virgil novels. However, the witty dialogue and well-drawn characters remain intact. There are enough plot twists to satisfy Sandford fans, and computer nerds will love these books. This particular story reminded me why I don't live in the South!

Alger says

This is a transition novel, written at a point where the technology was not so old and established that the author could just mention it in passing and assume the reader would know what it was and how it worked, but also at the moment that the technology was so new that there was a kind of excitement about all that new potential in a future with computers in every house! The result is a book that I read with a happy feeling of nostalgia for the days of dial-up bulletin boards and dos-based pine mail, and about ten years of knowledge that I never thought I would need again. Happily I was wrong. This is a very good book, and the suspense story is a little shopworn and predictable, but the telling and the characters carry it off with real style. This book has a ton of pages, but every one was a pleasure to read.

I will however point to one huge error in the blocking, just because I was so happy to have found ONE error in a book with a lot of complicated action. In the scene where they are breaking into city hall by way of the roof, they are trapped at one point by a door that is blocked on the other side by a filing cabinet. They get past this problem by pulling the hinge pins and removing the door. Problem is, the door opened into the other room, so the hinges were on the far side of the door from them.

Ooooops. Oh well. a really fun novel.

Denver Barnes says

I'm not a big Lucas Davenport fan, but John Sandford is the master of his craft and it's just so easy to read his books and so I read every last one of the Davenport series. Then I read every last one of the Virgil Flowers books. I like Virgil. He's my kind of guy.

That left Kidd and LuEllen. Truth be told, I wasn't expecting much because these were written a long time ago. Stanford was a young man and it would have been forgivable if he hadn't mastered the art of the thriller just yet but lo and behold they're as good as anything he's written since.

I've read the whole Kidd series now but this was my favorite so I've chosen it to review. Kidd's a computer hacker and it's sort of fun to read these in 2018 because the technology is so dated, but I was around back then and Stanford gets it right. Kudos. There are a lot of authors who try to fake this sort of thing. He didn't and it matters if you understand it.

Then there's LuEllen...a cat burglar with a nose for high grade cocaine who Kidd tends to rope into his work. They really have nothing in common but they work well together.

Here's what I really like about John Sandford and this book in particular. He doesn't get preachy. A lot of northern authors tend to view the South as a caricature. They can't resist the temptation to moralize and virtue signal. Sandford doesn't do that sort of thing. Perhaps he recognizes that his native Midwest and not Dixie is the most segregated part of the nation, even now. Whatever it is, he understands the South so well that I can only assume he's spent a lot of time there and has seen the good, the bad and the otherwise. Also (and this is important) he respects his readers too much to treat them like dolts.

If you cut your John Sandford teeth on Davenport as I did, you owe it to yourself to read one of the Kidd novels. They're all good, but as I said, this was my favorite.

Kerry says

I'm a John Sandford fan but this book was an exception. I had trouble getting into and following the plot. The information included about the animal shelter (although accurate I'm sure) was less than endearing and was very disconcerting.

Kathe Pines says

It was off to a engaging start. About half way through the story lost steam, I got lost on a lot of twist and turns but could figure it out enough until the end. A fast read. Some colorful characters. Tarot card readings, a crystal ball and superstition interwoven throughout, along with political upheaval in a corrupt small town setting .

D. says

The second in the KIDD novels, this one heads a completely different direction than the first. Instead of corporate spying, Kidd and his partners head into the deep south and get involved in a political tug-of-war.

In all honesty, this wasn't one of my favorite Sandford novels, but it was a diverting read. It was nice to have him try something different, and the southern setting and look at race relations and small-town secrets led to some interesting moments. Overall, though, it wasn't as cohesive or suspenseful as the best of the Lucas Davenport books. There were several plot twists that I predicted, and the ending fell a bit flat for me.

Still, it's better than 80% of the thrillers out there, and worth your time for a quick, diverting read.

Susannah Carleton says

Interesting story about a corrupt town in the Deep South, and Kidd's and LuEllen's and Bobby's attempts to change the town council membership and get the guilty people punished.

Things don't work out quite as expected, but, overall, the result is desirable.
