

What If Someone Met a Serial Killer and Didn't Know It? Phantom Ranch Blurs the Line Between True Crime and Fiction

Scott Wells' new psychological thriller was inspired by a real-life encounter with a man believed to be serial killer Robert Durst.

DALLAS, TX, UNITED STATES,
September 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/
-- What if you spent time with a stranger, walked away, and only later discovered you may have been face-to-face with one of America's most notorious killers?

That chilling possibility is at the heart of [Scott Wells'](#) new psychological thriller, [Phantom Ranch](#), inspired by a real-life encounter with a man believed to be serial killer Robert Durst.

Set deep within the Grand Canyon, Phantom Ranch follows estranged brothers Ben and Todd Brady, who reunite to fulfill their father's dying wish by hiking the canyon together. Years of resentment already threaten to derail the trip when Ben befriends a mysterious loner in the canyon.

“

The most frightening part wasn't what happened in the moment. It was realizing later who I may have been standing face-to-face with.”

*Scott Wells, Author of
Phantom Ranch*

Blending true crime, psychological suspense, family dysfunction, and survival, Phantom Ranch turns a brotherhood journey into a chilling fight for survival where trusting the wrong person could be deadly.



Scott Wells' new psychological thriller, Phantom Ranch, was inspired by a real-life encounter with a man believed to be serial killer Robert Durst.

Behind the thriller is an encounter that stayed with Wells long after it happened. What initially seemed like an interaction with a stranger took on an entirely different meaning when Wells later came to believe the man he had encountered was Durst. That realization helped inspire a story

built around a question that continues to fascinate true crime audiences: Can you recognize danger when it is standing right in front of you?

Phantom Ranch explores the psychology behind that question: trust, deception, perception, and the assumptions people make about strangers. The isolation of the Grand Canyon raises the stakes, placing its characters in an environment where help is far away and a seemingly ordinary decision about whom to trust can have devastating consequences.

At its emotional center is the fractured relationship between Ben and Todd, two brothers carrying years of resentment and unresolved family history. Their father's final wish forces them back together on a journey where survival may depend on confronting not only the danger around them, but the secrets and wounds they brought into the canyon.

The novel originated as Wells' screenplay Phantom Ranch, which was named a semifinalist at the Atlanta Screenplay Awards before Wells expanded the story into a novel.

-PHANTOM RANCH COMES TO LIFE AT IMMERSIVE DALLAS VIP EVENT-

To celebrate the release, Wells will host an exclusive, invitation-only immersive VIP launch experience in Dallas on September 29, 2026, bringing the world of Phantom Ranch off the page and into real life.

Rather than a traditional book signing, invited guests will walk through environments inspired by the Grand Canyon and scenes from the story, designed to create the feeling of stepping directly into Phantom Ranch and onto a movie set.

The evening will feature a live, guided conversation with Wells exploring the real encounter behind the story, the psychology of the novel and its journey from screenplay to book.

Actor Bourke Floyd, who is attached to the Phantom Ranch film project, will make a special appearance and join Wells for an onstage conversation and VIP meet-and-greet. Additional actors connected to the project are expected to join the evening, with further appearances to be announced. Floyd's film and television credits include Dawson's Creek, Minority Report, Tears of the Sun, Criminal Minds, Station 19 and Swagger.

The private guest list will include media, true crime personalities, booksellers, book club leaders, influencers, entertainment industry guests, celebrities and other invited VIPs. Guests will also receive curated Phantom Ranch VIP gift bags.

Media and industry guests may request an invitation to the [Phantom Ranch VIP Experience](#). The private Dallas location will be disclosed only to confirmed guests.

-ABOUT SCOTT WELLS-

Scott Wells is a bestselling thriller and horror author and award-winning screenwriter known for

transforming extraordinary real-life experiences into gripping stories. Raised in Idaho with a lifelong connection to the outdoors and adventure, Wells draws from personal experiences, unusual encounters, and the darker sides of human nature to create stories exploring psychological suspense, survival, complicated relationships, and the unknown.

His bestselling supernatural thriller, *Marked by the Ouija*, was inspired by events Wells experienced as a teenager and was recognized as a Killer Nashville Claymore Award Finalist. His work explores relationships, choices, and hidden truths when ordinary people are pushed into extraordinary circumstances.

***Members of the media interested in interviewing Scott Wells, receiving a review copy of *Phantom Ranch*, or covering the launch may contact Bridgetta Tomarchio at Bridgetta@WadjetPR.com.

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