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BHS graduate pens first novel

BY NATHANIEL LIEDL/Staff Reporter

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Ridgecrest's own, and 1980 Burroughs High School graduate, Brett Battles has written his debut novel - "The Cleaner."

"Writing is what I've always wanted to do. Specifically writing novels," said Battles. "There's an old saying, write what you know. I only half believe that. To me what is more important is write what you like to read."

Battles lists Alistair MacLean, Robert Ludlum, Graham Greene, and Stephen King, as his biggest thriller and suspense influences.

"'The Cleaner' comes out of that desire to write a story I would like to read," said Battles. "I'm a big fan of thrillers and I enjoy international settings."

Part of "The Cleaner" takes place in Europe. Battles has "traveled extensively" according to his Web site (www.brettbattles.com), including trips to Germany and Vietnam. The 368-page "Cleaner" has received positive reviews since its release June 26. Here is what Publishers Weekly had to say:

"Displaying an enviable gift for pacing and action, Battles's debut novel is a page-turner that may remind some readers of the cult TV spy series *Alias*," said Publishers Weekly. "Ex-cop Jonathan Quinn now works for a shadowy U.S. intelligence agency known merely as the Office, erasing all traces of violence and mayhem when an operation goes south."

"During an apparently routine assignment to look into a fatal fire that claimed the life of Robert Taggart, a viral biologist, in his Colorado home, Quinn finds evidence that Taggart was murdered, and that discovery is followed by an attempt on Quinn's own life. While Quinn survives, he learns that the Office's top operatives have been killed in near-simultaneous attacks. Quinn, who makes a compelling protagonist, heads to Europe to track down the mastermind behind the scheme. Admirers of quality espionage fiction can look forward to a new series worth following."

Battles has already finished a draft of the sequel to "The Cleaner" and has begun work on a third book in the series.

Though he has moved away from the Indian Wells Valley, Battles still resides in Southern California - Los Angeles.

"After graduating from Burroughs High School, then attending Cerro Coso for a year, I traveled around for a couple of years before moving to L.A. to go to school at Cal State Northridge," said Battles. "I've pretty much been in the L.A. area ever since. It gets crazy sometimes, but I like it. Lots of energy, and lots of inspiration for stories."

Battles is not certain where his writing inspiration originated but said he "wanted to be a novelist since Mr. Hodges' sixth grade class back in China Lake."

"I think I had a love of reading first, and somehow decided I wanted to actually write the stories. It's a passion that's been continually growing ever since."

During his time at Burroughs, Battles said he was "very involved in the community."

"Specifically with the drama club at Burroughs where I served as President my senior year," he said. "I still have a lot of friends in town and get up there every couple of years."

Battles' advice for aspiring novelists is to read, observe, experience, and write.

"I think the best advice for someone who wants to be a writer I could give is A, read - there is no greater teacher than those who have done it before us," said Battles. "B, observe the world around you and try to understand it from all perspectives, C, experience life - both the common and the uncommon, and most of all D, write. Write every day. Doesn't matter if your work is bad or not. Like anything from driving a car to painting a picture, you only get better with practice."

"The Cleaner" was released by Delacorte Press, a division of Random House, Inc. Look at Battles's Web site to read excerpts of his book from Chapters One and Two. Red Rock Books at 206 W. Ridgecrest Blvd. has copies available for sale.