



## **Bella**

*Steve Piacente*

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A striking widow intent on proving the military lied about her husband's death lures a Washington journalist into the investigation. Working together, they discover the power of temptation, the futility of revenge, and the consequences of yielding to either.

## **Bella Details**

Date : Published June 13th 2010 by Createspace Independent Publishing Platform

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Author : Steve Piacente

Format : Paperback 268 pages

Genre : Thriller, Mystery, Fiction, Mystery Thriller, Suspense

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## From Reader Review Bella for online ebook

### Julie Schoerke says

BELLA has all the components that keep me turning pages until I'm finished. And then I wanted more, of course, by the last page. Dan Patragno, Washington, DC journalist, is a favorite new character of mine. He's a flawed protagonist in a story of moral ambiguity and professional ethical purgatory. The author doesn't waste a word, which I greatly appreciate. The writing is tight as only a journalist-turned-author could accomplish to this degree.

Thank goodness Piacente is releasing another novel featuring journalist Patragno, earlier in his career. I hope this is just the beginning, because from now on Piacente books will be on my "must read" list.

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### Lou says

9/11 a date imprinted on the minds of many a time in history that saw the loss of countless lives and changed the minds and hearts of those that were left behind forever. Sometimes the truth is darker than fiction. Steve Piacente has penned a story that could have been any one of the stories we have seen on the news in the past, a story about a man Hank Moss who lost his beloved sister in the fallen and gave up all. He put his career on hold, he was a top professional tennis player and had a wife and kid, he enlisted himself to go and fight in Afghanistan and never returned again except in a casket. His wife Isabel (Bella) a strong main character of this story wants the truth on his death and those responsible held accountable. Bella seeks out the help of Danny a Washington journalist to uncover the truth and bring it out into the open. Danny finds himself seduced by the one strikingly beautiful widower, recently himself out of a marriage with a child to his name, is he on the rebound? Or is he caught in a web of deceit and just a pawn in a game?

This story is it just about selling the papers and getting the votes or its more about the truth even though it could dispirit those in a similar position as Hank Moss?

The author Steve Piacente, also experienced as a Washington journalist, knows the world around the journalist character Danny well and weavers the story and hooks you in with the need for truth. There are some really nicely put together descriptive passages in this story and he tackles many feelings in this story of love and loss, trust and dishonesty. For a debut he has done well in tackling a big story of fiction that has quite a non-fiction reality to it.

"They wound up placing a few mementos in her casket—a childhood bible, a family photo, her diary and a lock of her daughters hair. At the wake, five-year-old Sally gestured toward the casket and tugged his sleeve. Is she there, Uncle Hank? That was when Hank decided to put his career and family on hold and go fight in Afghanistan." Hitting tennis balls seems ridiculous right now," he told Sports Illustrated the day he enlisted. "I don't want special treatment from the Army. I just want to go."

"The Secretary of Defense posthumously promoted Hank to corporal and awarded him a Silver Star for gallantry, valor and heroism." A hero and a patriot who made the ultimate sacrifice," the Secretary said."

"The same things once impressed your wife. No more. Your wife not only knows your tricks, she knows every shirt, tie and pair of pants hanging in the closet. After a few years, she doesn't

even look up when you go out the door. So an adoring new girlfriend-or boyfriend for the neglected wife-is great for a flagging ego. What no thinks about is that after a little time, once the glow fades, the adoring girlfriend learns to hide the harmonica because the same songs over and over begin triggering migraines that make her feel like her eyes are bleeding."

Also video of the author and book trailer here.

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## **Dawit Habte says**

Bella, by Steve Piacente, is a thriller of a widow on a journey to prove a scandalous mystery surrounding her husband's death in the frontlines of Afghanistan. The "fallen hero" came home and received a hero's welcome and equally deserving farewell. A few days after the funeral, the widow receives a phone call from one of her husband's brothers-in-arms. The phone call shakes the widow's trust in the army and the US government. The widow, with the help of a Washington investigative journalist, starts a journey to uncover the events surrounding her husband's death. The rest is told by Steve Piacente with a great deal of imagination and mastery of the English language. More than the story, what I found in Piacene is imagination and style of writing that brings each character and surrounding neighborhoods to life.

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## **Inga says**

I picked this book today on purpose. Since it is 4th of July, I think this book is very suitable for the day's celebrations.

My review:

Steve Piacente is an excellent writer and his first novel Bella is absolutely a very good book to read. Steve's writing style shows that he has been working as a journalist: his use of language is like seeing a bird fly high up above the clouds – it's witty, intelligent, quick, intriguing and beautiful to read. If he keeps writing, I am sure that he will have a great career as a writer.

Regarding the plot:

This story is about Isabel Moss who is trying to solve mystery about her husband's death in Afghanistan. Her husband Hans Moss had a beautiful career in front of him until the day he decided to join the military until the day he dies. Dan Patragno is a cocky journalist whose faith brings him together with Isabel. Isabel convinces him to investigate what happened to her husband and this is how the story begins.

The story is a very good political thriller where the part of romance between Isabel and Dan is nicely spicing up the plot. There are many twists and turns, so the book is very dynamic, filled with surprises, tragic events and well written characters.

Regarding the characters:

Isabel is la femme fatale. Literally. She is beautiful, intelligent, and seductive and she definitely knows how to get what she wants. She is not afraid of breaking the rules to get to the result. She is also a little atypical heroine because she is very strong and very vulnerable and broken inside at the same time. I loved her

character and also felt petty for her. I think the author created a brilliant character with Isabel.

Dan is a journalist with many problems in his life. Yet he feels drawn to Isabel which does not make his life easier thinking that he is on the edge of divorce. There was a good portion of bitterness in him and at the same time you understand his choices – at least to some extent.

Generally:

I had difficulties of finding the right word how to describe this book and after some thinking I decided that the best word to describe this book is: complete. It has everything what a good political thriller needs: intriguing plot, fascinating characters, it deals with important and delicate topics for many people and last but not least – it has a message. Besides that, Steve is one heck of a writer!

5 stars out of 5.

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### **Moonlight Gleam says**

The novel Bella is written from Dan Patragno's point of view. He is a Washington correspondent for a Florida paper who is drawn to Isabel Moss, a grieving widow to a husband who died under alleged enemy fire. The latter believes the military was involved in a cover-up of her husband's murder. She refuses to believe that he was killed by enemy fire, but rather by the actions of one of their own. Through her persuasiveness and allure, Isabel Moss gets Dan Patragno assigned to the story. Although Dan is initially skeptical of Isabel's accusations and believes her judgment is clouded by grief, he too begins to believe. With nothing more than a single anonymous call made to Isabel, stating that her husband was not killed the way they led her to believe, Dan and Isabel set off to find out the truth.

"Anonymous" leads send Dan Patragno and Isabel Moss into a wild chase around the country. Their journey is not easy as they run into many dead ends. As the truth begins to unravel, Dan becomes increasingly intent on seeking justice for Isabel, however, not without sacrifices along the way.

Steve Piacente's self-published novel Bella will pull you right into this political journalistic thriller. The author gave his characters life, demonstrating strength, determination, emotion, and weakness. Bella will take you through highs and lows, and through twists and turns, so buckle up and enjoy the ride!

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and I am thrilled to have had the opportunity. Bella was very well-written with a strong plot and characters that jump right out of the pages. I would definitely recommend this novel to those who enjoy thrillers and mysteries with a healthy dose of romance. I hope to see more of Dan Patragno's adventures in the near future.

4/5 - An Enjoyable Read, Well Written, Recommended

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### **Tina Peterson says**

The back of the book:

A striking widow intent on proving the military lied about her husband's death lures a Washington journalist

into the investigation. Working together, they discover the power of temptation, the futility of revenge, and the consequences of yielding to either.

My review:

Bella is the ideal Political Thriller. You have the military, the government, senators, generals, congressmen and others covering up a story. A story about Hank Moss, upcoming tennis star and soldier in Afghanistan who is killed. His wife, Isabelle, receives a call "It's about Hank. He didn't die the way they said." Isabelle goes to her congressman, because congressmen are supposed to listen to their state's people. He tells her to go to the Army and follow the chain of command. Then she goes to Dan Patragno, Washington Correspondent, to ask him to look into her husband's death, which he reluctantly does.

Bella is very well written with short chapters that are packed with information and intrigue. Steve Piacente's writing reminded me a lot of John Grisham although his story didn't move quite as fast at the beginning. The first several chapters are background to the story told by Isabelle, along with some of Dan's family story. After that the story starts really moving fast and it's hard to put the book down.

The characters of the book are well written and easy to get to know. Isabelle is a beautiful woman who knows how to use her body to draw men in and yet you get the feeling that she loved her husband. Dan is a family man with Trouble - yes, with a capital T. And of course, Isabelle and Dan have a story of their own.

There is quite a bit of language and adult themes so I wouldn't recommend it for kids under 18 - but if you enjoy a good political thriller you will truly enjoy this book.

A short interview with Steve Piacente:

Would you share where you got the idea to write Bella?

No one event inspired the idea for Bella. Rather, over a long reporting career, I covered several tragic events, including the murder of a boy from Florida named Adam Walsh. I have always been interested in how people respond to profound grief – in the Walsh case, the parents channeled their grief into action by lobbying the state legislature in Tallahassee to pass tougher child protection laws. I'm also interested in how people act when faced with tough ethical choices – essentially what decisions they make when no one is watching. The action in Bella is driven largely by ethical decisions key characters make on the battlefield and in the bedroom. What others are saying about Bella:

What was the most difficult part of writing Bella?

The toughest challenge for me was to persuade readers to empathize with Bella. She behaves despicably in many situations, but as any journalist will tell you, there are at least two sides to each story. This woman suffers a terrible loss, and it is arguable that when we meet her, she is not the same woman who was happily married to Hank. Whether she will ever again be caring and compassionate is up for debate, but I wanted readers to pull for her despite her shortcomings. I view her as a complex but flawed character with many admirable traits.

What others say about Bella:

Piacente's use of characterization, plot and description in his novel are on-the-mark. I love his news-jockey/journalist, Dan Patragno, who was at once sassy and serious, sharing the inner dialogue of a seasoned, wise and jaundice-eyed, investigative reporter. Danny is an engaging character with strengths and rough edges that make me long to know more about him and his journalistic exploits. ~ D. Previte

Piacente has written a smart, clever book that's also sexy and seductive. He's a wonderful writer, and I'm hoping he writes another fast! After you read the last page, Bella stays with you for days. ~Karen,

Penetrating character study of a woman few men can resist. Bella unfolds like a Venus Fly Trap. ~ readingmom24/7

Here is an author who knows how to give his characters a voice. So strong and so distinctive. Right away you are pulled into this journalistic/political thriller. Very powerful, jump off the pages characters, strong plot, twists and turns and true human drama keep you turning those pages. I thoroughly enjoyed this read!!! ~ Jeffrey

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### **Matt says**

When asked to review this book, by the author, I was unsure what to expect. I'd read the summary and it seemed interesting, so I thought I'd give it a shot and hope for the best. In doing so, I discovered some interesting writing, good character development, and a decent story that kept my attention from beginning to end.

I will generalise here and say that Americans are too obsessed with their wars and the need for them. Just as September 11, 2001 seems to have somehow been a battle cry to write ad nauseum about the subject and terrorists, so too does the US (and to some degree, the highly influenced Canadians public) find the need to beat a dead horse. When I got into the 'war' part of the book, I wondered if Piacente was going to flog me with "RAH RAH USA" blather for the sake of national ego-boosting. He did a great job in promoting an anti-war, anti-military cover-up angle and rejuvenated the bully tactic that Bush and his cronies made so famous... if you speak against the military, you must side with our opponents. The main character in the book fights against this 'rah rah sis-boom-bah' that has become so nauseating and makes a case that news is not always what benefits or promotes the home team. There are stories that need telling and trying to kybosh them for the sake of looking good is just a waste.

Piacente does a great job of making his main character have a life outside the main storyline; a wife, a child, romance, despair. He humanises him to the point that he could be a cousin, an uncle, a neighbour. Some authors so want to inculcate you with their ideology that they forget the subtleties and leave you wishing you'd not spent that money on a book. This was a well-weighted book with enough personal background to keep it interesting.

If I had to offer one suggestion, I suppose it would be to keep the tangential nature of some of the side storylines to a minimum. Write a prequel if you want to get into deep background. It causes me to try to skip ahead to what the author is trying to illustrate with the long flashback in the middle of the paragraph.

Kudos, Mr. Piacente.

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### **Caren ~ the misfit geek says**

I wasn't sure what I would think of this book when I picked it up. The description intrigued me and I saw there were a lot of terrific reviews. Sometimes this ends up disappointing me. I was not disappointed. I was hooked right away. Although it is categorized as a political thriller, it was more like a drama for me.

The plot revolves around the story of an accidental act of fratricide and the resulting cover-up by the military. The deeper story seems to be a man hell-bent on self-destruction. The book is written in Danny's

point of view and what a fascinating man he is. The reader is often allowed a glimpse of his private thoughts and struggles which adds a depth to the story.

It is really a character driven book. Character development was brilliant. Even the supporting cast was complex, real, and added to the storyline rather than being tedious and distracting.

I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys a well-written, thought-provoking novel. I will definitely be reading more from this talented author.

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## **Giovanni Gelati says**

Right off the bat I want to tell you I am interviewing this author today @ 6.30pm EST on my blogtalk show, The G-ZONE. Here is the link for that:

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/gelatiss...>

Lincoln Crisler starts off the show at 6pm, Steve is on at 6.30. I have to hand it to the author; he can write a serious novel that is not just good but multi-faceted. I really enjoy the prose, the witty nature of his journalist main character and the many ways he tried to humanize him. Many people like to put down self-published authors but "Bella" is another prime example why it works so well. The plotline was tight, the characters well developed, excellent dialogue, and no dead pages. I don't hesitate to recommend this read and I am really looking forward to getting my opportunity to talk to the author later today. Tune in for what I am sure is going to be a very fast paced, engaging conversation. If Steve Piacente is anything like the characters he has created I am going to have my hands full.

Here is the synopsis:

"A striking widow intent on proving the military lied about her husband's death lures a Washington journalist into the investigation. Working together, they discover the power of temptation, the futility of revenge, and the consequences of yielding to either. "

A little something on the author:

"It began for me in 1954. Eisenhower was president, no one beat the Yankees, and Elvis was still an unknown. TV was three channels and two colors, black and white. Growing up, I didn't particularly like school. I liked baseball, egg rolls and comic books, and it was Superman that got me interested in reading and writing. Raised in New York and educated in Washington, I kept moving south after college, eventually learning all they left out at journalism school at the foot of street-smart newspaper editors in Florida and South Carolina. In 1985, one of those editors found me presentable enough to send back to D.C., this time as correspondent for the Tampa Tribune. The job ended four years later, and I found myself in steep competition for a similar slot with the Charleston, S.C. paper. I remember pumping the Charleston editor's hand and pleading, "Please don't let me become a press secretary." The man was merciful, enabling nine more years of Washington reporting, and front row exposure to the real South, as Charleston is far deeper into Dixie than Tampa, geography be damned. As time wore on, my NY sensibilities blended with Southern convention to produce stories on intriguing topics such as public celebration of the Confederate flag, and segregationist Senator Strom Thurmond. It was a great time until Charleston ran out of cash and shuttered its one-man D.C. bureau. Out in the cold, I - by this time a father of three ravenous, athletic, college-bound children - found warmth in a little known Federal agency. I began as a speechwriter and today head the web, new media, and graphics teams. Though Bella is my first real fiction, some thin-skinned politicians would say the stories I wrote about them were just as fabricated. In fact, no fiction bubbled up until I earned my license to write in the Johns Hopkins Master of Arts program in 2000. During this time, I also reentered the classroom at American University, my alma mater, and began teaching journalism classes. My insistence on clean, tight writing did no lasting harm to the three afore-mentioned children, now taxpaying adults in the fields of public relations, graphic design, and engineering. It wasn't until years later that I learned that the kids snuck secret help from their mom, Felicia Piacente, a special education administrator in the

Montgomery County (Md.) Public School System. “

Things have changed around here. I am now the published author by Trestle Press of “I Have Chrome Balls, Don’t You?” an “In Between The Collaborations”, “Down Low- Dead” with Vincent Zandri, “The Jersey Shore Has Eyes” with Big Daddy Abel”, “G.S.I Gelati’s Scoop Investigations Psychotic Detectives” with Thomas White, “Who Whacked The Blogger” with Benjamin Sobieck, “Thad and The G-Man’s Most Awesome Adventure” with Thad Brown , “Hotel Beaumont” with B.R. Stateham, “Bring Us Your Living...Now!” with HR Toye and the soon to be released “Edge of Cataclysmic” with Big Daddy Abel. All the stories are available @ Amazon, Barnes & Nobles and Smashwords. I am also the host of the wildly popular The G-ZONE blogtalk radio show. Thanks for stopping by today; We will see you tomorrow. Have a great day. <http://www.gelatisscoop.blogspot.com>

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## Naomi says

Anyone on Goodreads who knows me, knows I read alot of books. So, I love it when a book shocks the hell out of me. Bella was it! When I first read the jacket for Bella, I thought probably not as good as the other reviewers are saying. I was wrong! Bella is like reading a train wreck with several trains in participation. Not only is it a mystery/thriller, but, IMO, it is also a "psychological study" in watching the downspiraling of a man who is easily led into manipulation and willing to throw away everything good in his life. Finally, I think it is a "study" of journalistic integrity and what one man is willing to do "to get the story." I found myself pushing everything out of the way to continue with reading Bella which I ended up doing in about 2 hours(the book is 254 pages of readable material)

Also, anyone who knows me, knows I am a big fan of Sherry and Narcotics by Nina-Marie Gardner. Bella has that same darkness and destruction of Sherry and Narcotics. Like Mary in S&N, I kept asking Daniel, the main character, "What the hell are you doing?".

As I said, this book shocked the hell out of me because it was so good. Like I asked of Nina Marie Gardner, if this is the quality of this author's debut, what do we expect out of him when he becomes a seasoned author???

One thing I would warn readers about is that this book is written in the first person. As I don't read alot of books that are done that way, it took me, I would say, a good 50 pages to keep the storyline straight...after that, it exploded!

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## Elena (For Books that Matter) says

A Gone Bookserk Perspective

A striking widow intent on proving the military lied about her husband's death lures a Washington journalist into the investigation. Working together, they discover the power of temptation, the futility of revenge, and

the consequences of yielding to either.

This is definitely one of those stories you'll find it is more impressionable than at first seems. While not as glorious as some of the book covers you'll see out there, and they have gotten to be more eye candy than good content, this book leads the example for that.

I was incredibly surprised by this book, not at all what I expected. At first, I had the impression that it was going to be more of an action story with some kind of theme carrying through to the end. In many ways it was, but it was also truly a mystery novel as well as a psychological debate of fate. Throughout the novel there are many angles to be wondered about and hypothesized. The layout of one man's consequences to his many dark and self destructive actions is absolutely well constructed.

The writing is also effortless. I love that I could read this book so fluidly without any struggle to the language. Some writers try so hard to put out a novel that they forget that sometimes is just about telling the story rather than fiddling with the language. Bella is one of those novels where you'll forget get about the delivery of the language and will focus more so on the story, if not completely.

There are a mix of emotions through this novel. It's seductive. It's tragic. It's compelling. It's sophisticated and philosophical. It's action - packed and suspenseful. I absolutely loved it. There is so much more to say, absolutely so much more.

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## **Donna McBroom-Theriot says**

Book Quotes:

"She was, as Frost said, an awakener, not a teacher. Now I am awake, alert even. I am not especially thrilled that my blissful sleep was disturbed. I was, to be sure, hibernating through life...Some creamy smooth women come armed like bear traps, treacherous, but not appearing so, lest you're tempted to study one nose to tooth and get yourself snapped in two. Such blessed females are immune to the routine plagues...Women mutter Bitch; men murmur Baby... You know the kind of girl I'm talking about, and yes, of course there is a male version, and he's just as predatory. My awakener, however, was a woman, and so it is her story, and mine, that I will tell."

"Thirty-five Americans were killed by friendly fire in the Persian Gulf War, damned better than the 8,000 accidentally killed by fellow soldiers in Vietnam, and the 21,000 in World War II. Those were the official Pentagon estimates; the real numbers were probably higher."

"There's no such thing as a tidy newsroom. Narrow, half-filled spiral notebooks, old newspapers, personal knick-knacks and plastic coffee containers are everywhere. There's also no decorum; when editors need something, they need it now and everyone know it, because the yelling as deadlines approach is nearly constant. Reporters, too, are not shy about speaking up to copy kids or the people they're interviewing by phone. Think of a library and picture the opposite. When librarians have nightmares, they probably dream of newsrooms."

"Canton Spivey had circled three items in red marker. The first said journalists should avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. The second, that journalists should remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility. The third circled item said journalists should abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

"Are you in violation, Danny?" I stared at the code I knew by heart....

"Yes," I said. "terrific story though, huh?"

"Yep, sure was.""

### My Review:

This book has it all. There is intrigue, cover-up, scandal, lust, and sex, and in the end, there is justice; but we must remember that justice is not always in the eye of the beholder.

I find it utterly fascinating (and sexy) that a man would write romance. It is like having a front row seat to their thoughts. No, this was not what the book was about, but I had to mention it because I am completely captivated with the idea and I am curious as all get out. I want to read more romance written by men. I am enthralled by the way their minds work. Now, with that being said, I need to write the rest of my review.

This book was like a day in the life of a reporter and the extremes he goes to get the one “big” story. Our government buries its bones and the reporters are like bloodhounds on its trail. As fast as cover-ups are constructed, the hounds are there sniffing around, digging up buried bones faster than the government can dig a hole.

I like a book that reminds me of what is important, and brings me back to the present when I’ve become too complacent with what is going on in the world.

Bella is a soldier’s wife, a soldier who lost his life to “friendly fire.” And, to compound the tragedy, the Army lied about it. She is a young wife and mother, whose determination and cunningness helps to uncover the truth about her husband’s death. Bella hones in and seduces the reporter she has handpicked to break the story about her husband’s death. She is not above using sex, tears, playfulness, or her feminine wiles to get what she wants. Of course, it doesn’t hurt that the reporter is consumed by her intoxicating presence. Danny falls in love with Isabel, only to find out that Isabel has shut down emotionally, vowing never to be hurt again. And, as his marriage crumbles, he is fired from the job he loves.

Together, the two of them will uncover the secrets surrounding her young husband’s death, while giving you insight in to the workings of our government and newspaper life.

The book leaves you questioning the true number of our men and women who have lost their lives serving our country under similar circumstances, only to have the government call it “friendly fire.” Steve Piacente does an outstanding job of weaving the intricacies of love, life, newspaper, and government into a story that is so believable, you forget you are reading fiction. It is also evident that a lot of research went into the writing of this book so that an authentic story could be told. This is an outstanding book and one worth reading.

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### Andrea Corley says

**Title:** Bella

**Author:** Steve Piacente

**Length:** 268 pages

**Publisher:** CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

**Published:** June 13, 2010

**Genres:** Fiction; Political Thriller; Mystery/Thriller

Visit my review: <http://chorleychronicals.blogspot.com>

My Rating: ★★★

### **Synopsis:**

A striking widow intent on proving the military lied about her husband's death lures a Washington journalist into the investigation. Working together, they discover the power of temptation, the futility of revenge, and the consequences of yielding to either.

### **My Review:**

I have thought and thought about what I was going to write for this review, and just wanted to put out a disclaimer that this probably has to be one of the hardest reviews that I ever had to do.

I instantly thought I would love this book when I read the description, even though there are quite the conflicted reviews. I now understand, because I am still quite conflicted over a month after finishing this book!

I did really like the book, but there was just something about it that made me give it 3/5 stars. I think it was my distaste for Isabel Moss. And lack of respect for Dan Patragno.

I found the plot to be wonderful and shocking and just full of twists and turns that kept you wanting to turn the page and find out exactly what happened. However, the idiocy and total lack of thought or consequence on Dan's part, just really irritated me, along with Isabel's total disregard for anyone or their feelings. Granted, I understand she had been through a lot, but that woman is ice cold!

As for the characters, I think they are a diverse group! Piacente did a really good job with creating the type of characters that we don't read about often, if ever. However, I have often found in my reading, that if I don't like a character, what they do, or what they about, it turns me off from the book a bit, so I seem to find characters quite important to me for me to be able to enjoy the book.

This was the hardest story for me to rate because there are parts of it that I really like and would love to give it a higher rating, and there are parts of it that I really do not like. Overall though, I'd say I'd get it a 3.75 rating! This book shows me that Steve Piacente has great potential of providing me with a fantastic reading, so I would not hesitate to read another of his books!

**Disclaimer:** I was provided a copy of this book by the Author in return for an honest, unbiased review.

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### **Annette Mardis says**

Deception, infidelity, journalism ethics, gamesmanship and a heartbreaking case of mistaken identity are at the core of Piacente's compelling, 2011 debut novel.

Nearly all of his characters are flawed and have a turn at behaving badly. Many are held accountable for their transgressions. And a few show the potential for redemption.

Driving the story are seductive war widow Isabel Moss, for whom the book is named, and seduced reporter Danny Patragno, who serves as narrator.

Isabel wants Danny to look into the death two months before of her soldier husband, Hank Moss, who was blown to bits by a hand grenade in Afghanistan. Isabel suspects he was killed by "friendly fire," not by the enemy, as the Army has told her.

From the start, the mercurial Isabel strikes Danny as being more than a little off, but her exotic beauty pulls him in. Troubles at home become the married father's justification for violating a sacred journalistic canon against personal involvement with a story source.

As he works to unravel the military cover-up of the events surrounding Hank's death, Danny finds himself careening toward that proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. Even though he suspects, and is warned by

confidantes, that the light is from an oncoming train, he deludes himself into thinking he can escape being crushed beneath the wheels.

One of the novel's most compelling characters is the man whose death unravels so many lives. Hank is a rising pro tennis player who decides to enlist after his older sister, and only sibling, perishes in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers.

Hank's story is reminiscent of the saga of pro football star Pat Tillman, who left behind his multimillion-dollar playing contract and his new wife to become an Army Ranger in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

After Tillman was accidentally shot by fellow U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan in 2004, the Army told his family, and his country, that the enemy killed him.

Noting that friendly fire deaths have happened in wars throughout history, Piacente said in an email interview that "Bella" was not inspired by Tillman's case.

"Rather, over my long reporting career, I covered several tragic events, including the murder of Adam Walsh in Hollywood, FL," the author said. "I have always been interested in how people respond to profound grief – in the Walsh case, parents John and Reve channeled their grief into action by lobbying the state Legislature in Tallahassee to pass tougher child protection laws.

"I'm also interested in how people act when faced with tough ethical choices – essentially what people do when no one is watching. For me, the action in 'Bella' is driven largely by ethical decisions that key characters make on the battlefield and in the bedroom."

Piacente's 25 years as a print journalist included a four-year stint as a Washington, D.C. correspondent for The Tampa Tribune, starting in 1985. So it's no surprise that Danny works in the nation's capital for the fictional Tampa Daily News, which is striking similar in some respects to Piacente's former employer.

Asked about Tampa's prominence in "Bella" – it's where Isabel still lives and where Hank grew up – Piacente explained: "I needed a military town, as well as one where tennis was big. ... Tampa was a perfect fit on both counts.

"And yes, I was writing 'what I knew,' having covered the Tampa mayor, county commission, local politics and more, plus having logged many hours on the courts at Davis Islands."

Conversely, Piacente wrote in his email that he "never encountered someone sexually aggressive like Isabel Moss" during his years as a newspaper reporter.

"... But I did have to deal with fierce advocates in many different situations," he wrote. "I always tried to do what I'd been taught (both by editors and experience), which was to be fair to both sides. This was tough sometimes, as reporters have opinions like everyone else.

"But the commerce of journalism is information, and you don't get it if you're perceived as being biased."

In *Bella* and its prequel, "Bootlicker," released in September, Danny Patragno acts contrary to what he was taught in journalism school and to what his conscience tells him is right.

Justifiably, he pays a heavy price for his mistakes.

But Danny's story isn't over, and the next installment can't come soon enough.

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## Lyn (Readinghearts) says

When I picked up *Bella* by author Steve Piacente, I wasn't sure what to expect. I had seen it classed as a political thriller, a mystery/thriller, a romance. Sort of all over the gamut. For me, it turned out to be a character study into the minds of the two main protagonists, Dan Patragno, a mediocre journalist who is dissatisfied with his life, and Isabel Moss, a beautiful young widow whose husband was recently killed in Afghanistan. I was drawn into the story by the author's writing style, which just seemed to flow. His crafting of the characters in this story was what kept me reading, though. I am not just talking about Dan and Isabel, either. I was excited to see that Piacente had included a number of subsidiary characters that were rich and interesting, even down to the characters with the smallest roles. The story was peppered with real people and real emotions, however flawed they were or unexplainable their actions seemed.

As a political thriller, however, I felt the book fell short. I read a lot of thrillers, and when I do I am generally looking for one of two things. First and foremost, I love to be surprised by them. Nothing makes me sit up and take notice, or rave about a book more, for that matter, than when an author takes a story in an unexpected direction or makes a character do something that I totally did not see coming. Neither of those things happened for me in this book. It was pretty apparent to me early on where the political side of this story was going to go, and I was not wrong in my presumptions. I will still give high marks, though, if a book is not surprising, but has a mystery that I enjoyed solving along with the characters in the book. In this case, this book did a reasonably good job, but I still enjoyed the characters and their flaws more than the mystery story line. To me, the mystery part of this story was simply a venue for the characters to showcase their flaws and foibles.

All in all, though, I think the author said it best when he said, "Bella is usually described as a political thriller, but the novel is mostly about the relationship between Bella, the alluring widow, and Dan, the married reporter she persuades to help her uncover the truth about her husband's death." I totally agree with him and as such the book is a success. If you are indeed writing what you know, Steve, please keep it up. You have a talent character studies.

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