

The 3rd Option

Author Ben A. Sharpton tackles a controversial issue



By Andrew Carter

Ben Sharpton is the author of *The 3rd Option*, a new work of fiction just released by Belle Isle Books in Richmond. The novel takes a daring look at the abortion debate through the eyes of Allan Chappel, an everyman who stumbles into the center of a murder scheme, a political scandal, and a major scientific breakthrough.

Sharpton explains that the inspiration for the novel came from a church Sunday school class that discussed the abortion debate. He realized that both sides were completely polarized, with neither pro-life nor pro-choice willing to concede any middle ground. Later, while having a conversation with a friend, he speculated on whether there “could ever be a third option, a technological option that could act as a possible solution to the problem.” For Sharpton, who grew up in a conservative family whose views he found unfulfilling, the “story seemed to write itself.”

Considering Ben Sharpton has been writing for a long, long time, *The 3rd Option* is a natural progression. His first published article came in 1978, and over the next fifteen years, more than one hundred more articles and several stories appeared in more than thirty magazines and books. A large portion of these writings was for corporate training and development, which he wrote for organizations like Tupperware and Universal Studios.

In 2012, he turned to writing fiction, publishing his first book *7 Sanctuaries* in September. Despite this massive body of writing, *The 3rd Option* was a whole new experience. “All of the writing I had done was tied into curriculum,” he explains, “but *The 3rd Option* was written as entertainment.” Corporate writing had its benefits; it helped him learn how to use phrases that lead the reader in, as well as how to write more directly and concisely. It is this mixture of honed, developed writing with an infectiously entertaining plot that makes *The 3rd Option* such a compelling read. What is his advice for aspiring writers? “Keep writing,” he says. “The more I write the better I get, the better it sells, and the more interesting it is to me.”

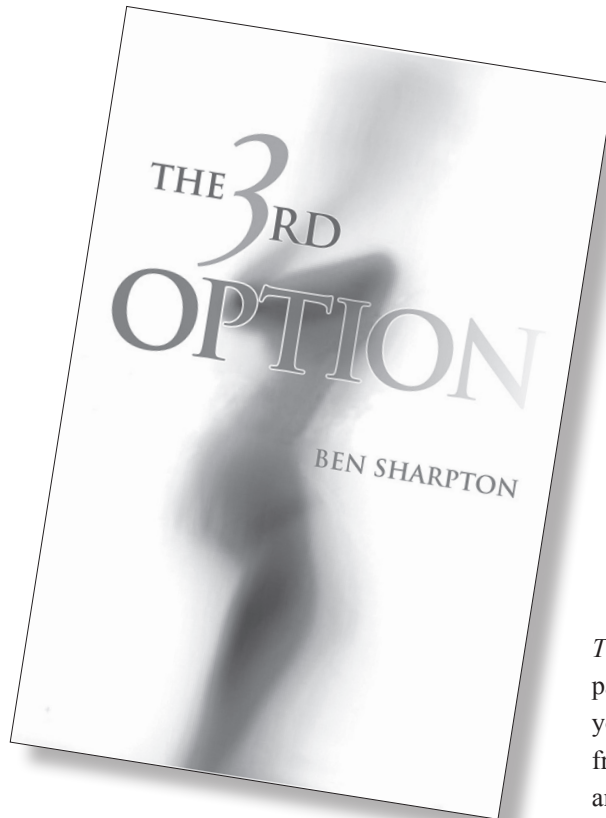
While Sharpton has never been caught up in a life-threatening scandal, his life experiences, such as the ten to twelve years as a youth minister, helped shape and strengthen the plot. A perfect example is the novel’s strong sense of location, featuring vivid descriptions of two seemingly opposite cities: Atlanta, Georgia, and Klaipeda, Lithuania. These places are not arbitrary, but rather are beloved settings that play strategic roles within the plot. Sharpton spent the majority of his life in Georgia, and when considering where Alan Chappel’s home would be, Atlanta seemed like a no-brainer. In 1996, during the Atlanta Olympics, terrorist Eric Rudolph set off three pipe

bombs in Centennial Olympic Park that killed one and injured over one hundred more. Considering the story begins with an abortion clinic bombing, Sharpton found Atlanta to be a “good fit.”

In the book, after Allen narrowly escapes death, he sets off in search of answers. His search leads him to Klaipeda, Lithuania. For many readers, going from Georgia to Lithuania may seem like a strange or random jump. However, Lithuania and its culture holds a special place in Ben Sharpton’s heart, and *The 3rd Option* presented him with a perfect opportunity to represent a country that affected him deeply. During his time as an instructor, Sharpton was given a chance to teach a business course in Lithuania. He then spent a month in Klaipeda, during the coldest time of the year. Despite the less-than-perfect weather conditions, he fell in love with the country’s unique culture and decided to capture it in *The 3rd Option*.

Writing about heavily polarizing issues, such as abortion, comes with its own built-in controversy. Rather than shy away from this reality, Sharpton is seeking to expose the problems that arise in a “society where people are so busy shouting over their own perspectives and viewpoints that they fail to see that volatile issues have grey areas.” While he has no intentions to personally offend anybody, he hopes for a broader understanding that “some people are more vulnerable and weak,” and that the vitriol from these public debates can cause serious emotional damage.

Ultimately, he hopes that *The 3rd Option* will provide people with an entertaining and enjoyable read. More importantly though, he longs for a day when “people will think more for themselves, be more tolerant of other views, and come to a realization that you can be wrong if you want to.” Furthermore, he hopes that his novel will inspire others to do more research and become passionate about concepts like exogenesis, so that eventually we can divert money from the pro-choice vs. pro-life debate and invest in a real “third option.” *pl*



The 3rd Option (\$15.95, paperback) is available from your favorite bookseller, or from belleislebooks.com, amazon.com or bn.com.

Denis A Shorter

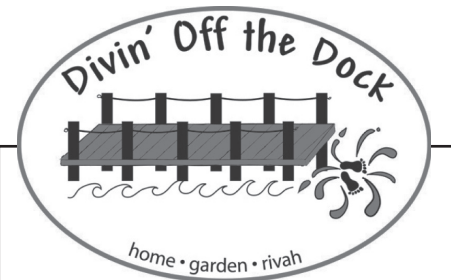
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