



Mister Big

By Harvey Havel

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MEDIA KIT

Author Bio

Book Descriptions

Book Excerpt

Press Release

Contact Author

Sports Fiction

Author Bio

HARVEY HAVEL IS A SHORT-STORY WRITER AND NOVELIST. HIS FIRST NOVEL, NOBLE MCCLLOUD, A NOVEL, WAS PUBLISHED IN NOVEMBER OF 1999. HIS SECOND NOVEL, THE IMAM, A NOVEL, WAS PUBLISHED IN 2000.

IN 2006, HAVEL PUBLISHED HIS THIRD NOVEL, FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION. HE HAS PUBLISHED HIS EIGHTH NOVEL, CHARLIE ZERO'S LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT, AND HIS NINTH, THE ORPHAN OF MECCA, BOOK ONE, WHICH WAS RELEASED LAST YEAR. HIS NEW NOVEL, THE THRUWAY KILLERS IS HIS LATEST WORK.

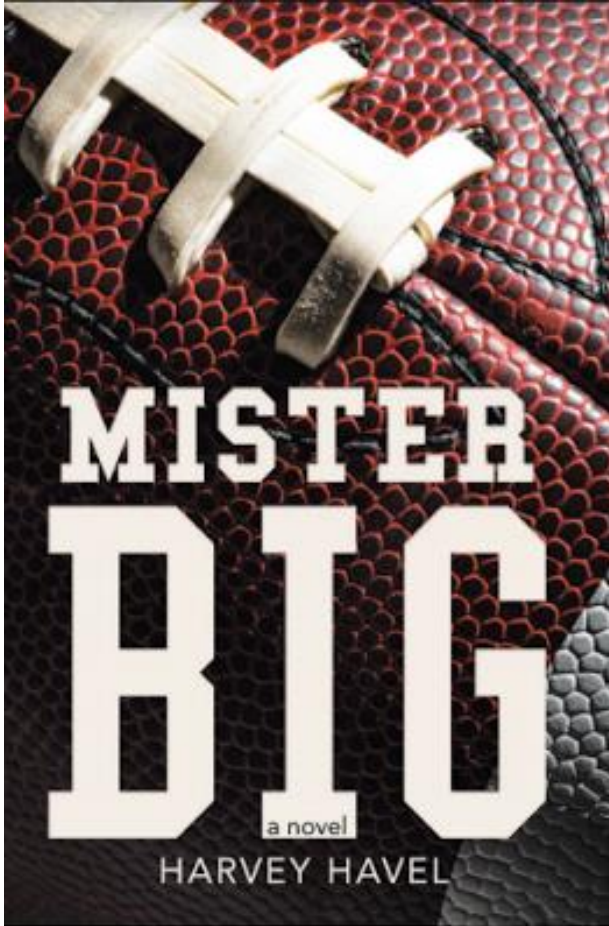
THE ORPHAN OF MECCA, BOOKS TWO AND THREE, HAS JUST BEEN RELEASED NEXT YEAR AS WELL AS A BOOK, AN ADJUNCT DOWN, WHICH HE JUST COMPLETED. HIS WORK IN PROGRESS IS CALLED MISTER BIG, ABOUT A BLACK AMERICAN FOOTBALL PLAYER.

HE IS FORMERLY A WRITING INSTRUCTOR AT BERGEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN PARAMUS, NEW JERSEY. HE ALSO TAUGHT WRITING AND LITERATURE AT THE COLLEGE OF ST. ROSE IN ALBANY AS WELL AS SUNY ALBANY.



Harvey Havel

Mister Big



In this novel, DeShawn Biggs is as formidable as his name suggests. At 6-feet-5-inches and 300 pounds, DeShawn seems headed for the NFL. Indeed, a football career is regarded as an inevitability for the young man in his native Albany. While most NFL-bound seniors head off to play college ball after they leave high school, DeShawn's abysmal math grades—and the fact that his parents can literally no longer afford to feed him—result in the giant lineman attending an elite Connecticut prep school for “grade thirteen.” After an emotional farewell to his parents, who are purposefully removing themselves from his life for good—“You’ve got to use your God-given talents to

make a life for yourself,” says his father, “and you cannot do that with your mother and me in the way of that life”—DeShawn is left alone among the white, wealthy student body. Sticking out like a large sore thumb, DeShawn attempts to walk the fine line between what is expected of him and what will not be tolerated. A cheating scandal gets him expelled but not before he secures a place at Montgomery Southern A&M, a football power that will set him up to advance to the NFL. DeShawn eventually gets his shot at the big leagues, but his trusting nature and penchant for making bad decisions dog him throughout his career. Each time, the stakes get higher. DeShawn has always been a pawn in a game controlled by other people, but how much of his own integrity can he compromise in order to get ahead?

Book Excerpt

Prologue

It's physical despair, and if you want to try it, be prepared to bang other people up as well as yourself. No worries, though, because this stuff is legal. Maybe they change the rules every now and then. Maybe people hit too hard and send someone away in a stretcher. Perhaps you go for it all, a carpe diem kind of thing, a Hail Mary kind of thing, and the tragedy of sickness or injury emerges like a mad, socially mobile demon penetrating the acre you're playing on.

Again, all of it is legit. In fact, people support you, because you are the star and the legend on the field, but no one ever really talks about physical despair while you lift the weights, run the suicide sprints, take laps every few minutes so the coaches can decide what to do until the end of practice. Maybe you make a sack from behind the line of scrimmage. Maybe you protect your quarterback who finds his receivers in the dangerous territories of zone coverage. The receiver then heads into daylight and catches a precisely thrown ball. Maybe you win.

As a lineman you are getting bigger, leaner, meaner, and yet you get no credit whatsoever. The only time the TV shows aim their cameras in your direction is when you are castigated by unruly fans who see the flying yellow flag pulled from the waist of an old referee, pointing at you for holding, roughing the passer, off-sides, mistaking the play for a pass instead of a run, or missing a critical block. You dream the opposite of these things, because you want to be one of these elites. You will be the one who actually does some of the work on the team. You're

willing to work on a muddy field that has seen its share of torrential downpours and winter ice storms. And yet, there is no credit. Just a paycheck, more gym time, more time with the trainer, more time with the dummy sleds...

Yes, you should have been the one they clapped for, the one getting the media's attention, the guy who gets the prom queen before the handsome quarterback. Even a drone with laser sighting can't throw the ball that well. The ball falls into the receiver's belly like a newborn pot-bellied pig. Their hides will go towards making more footballs for the other professional games.

If your team wins that week, you go with them to the bars and drink with your fellow players. No matter how late or how drunk you are, your significant other allows you to sleep with your mistress who magically stands naked in front of you. If you lose the game, you return to a gaggle of disappointed housewives who tell you to work harder on the field or else she'll leave you for the better player she's sleeping with now. We're talking reality television that nets them even more money for very little reason. The housewives of the NFL. But you are too blind to see these things, especially when the season is on the cusp of a new beginning. You have the ability to arrive at game day after a string of practice sessions, so that you can continue being the gladiator in a country that resembles the strength, the excesses, and the eventual implosion of Rome.

Yes, these are the contemporary gladiators on the playing field. All we need are chariots, hungry tigers, and a young Ben Hur. This is God's game, a gift to mankind with a few knowing female reporters on the field and even in the locker rooms. It's all available, anything you want, just to keep you playing, just to avoid the physical despair from ruining your entire career. Yes, the game of football is that physical.

Even suiting up for a game is physical – miles of nylon athletic tape – the type that begs its players to have well-shaven ankles and legs.

Padding on the thighs and the knees, shoulder pads made of hardened plastic, the all-seeing-always-talking helmet with a remote link for the coach to talk to his quarterback while on the field, the cleats that can't stick properly to artificial turf, and the new mouth-guard that the trainer boiled and fit into your teeth a couple of nights ago - you have been waiting and wanting this.

But the gladiator wasn't home for dinner. The two parents ate in silence. They ate whatever leftovers their son didn't eat. They had pork chops with apple sauce, boiled red-skin potatoes, and buttered string beans. The father looked at his wife across the table, and with his smile and eyes staring straight into hers, he didn't have to say thank you for the wonderful dinner. He simply had to look at her in this special way – the vibes of thanks passing between their eye contact. The mother, however, didn't smile with him. While it was his favorite dinner, she still could not talk to him as they did when their son was there.

They didn't discuss their plans when their son ate with them. Instead, they made small talk and told him nothing. On a night like tonight, their son, DeShawn Biggs, was out with his school friends. He was old enough to be graduating from high school, but where he would end up, only his parents knew, and they wouldn't tell their son anything yet. They would wait until they were both comfortable with the idea first. They would then break the news to him upon his return. They believed he was headed to the mall with his friends after football practice. DeShawn loved his friends, or at least this was what his parents surmised. DeShawn and his friends vowed that they would never lose touch no matter where they went after graduation.

DeShawn headed to college, but his Math grades needed immediate help if he were to be accepted at one of the Southern universities that would position him well enough to join the NFL after a couple of years of eligibility. Already, his mother, especially, hated the NFL and all that it stood for. Nothing was ever good enough for her DeShawn, and even

though his father steered his son's future like a captain guiding a ship, he too realized that his son's gifts in size and athletic ability were also a curse and not just a blessing to get all excited about. He didn't want to lose him either, and he reminded his wife of this every night before they went to bed.

But somehow, he was the bad guy in all of this. He was the one who supported having their talented son leave the family. He reasoned that they could no longer afford him. They couldn't even feed him properly. Just like children who had to be abandoned by their parents to ensure better lives for them, such was DeShawn's situation. Only his mother was reluctant, as his father already made up his mind that his son would leave and never contact them again while heading to the next level of his professional career. They had to sacrifice their son in order to ensure a better life for him rather than the one they had in the ghettos of Albany, New York.

He put down his fork after polishing off the string beans and said, "okay, Didi, what's wrong?"

"Why should I even have to say it? It's not like you don't know."

"I know."

He brought his fork and knife together and pushed it to the rim of the plate. One of the reasons why Didi loved him so much was because of his manners. Her husband's mother had been very strict with him on dinner etiquette when a child.

"Do we have to go over this again?" asked the father, Crosby Biggs his name.

"Every night," she said, "because what we're doing is something that's going to affect him and us."

Didi took her dissatisfaction with the plan into the kitchen. She returned with a warm apple pie and vanilla ice cream.

“It’s a better life for him, Didi. You know that.”

“I’m not letting my boy stay with anyone else. I don’t care if he makes it to the NFL or not, but we can’t just drop him off at college and leave him there. It’s wrong, and he’s my baby, and no one will take that away from me.”

Crosby Biggs cut a large slice of apple pie and scooped up a spoonful of ice cream and plopped it on top.

“There must be another way,” she said.

“Like what?” said Crosby, sectioning off the large piece of pie with his fork.

“You’ll find one.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. This is your idea, isn’t it?”

“It must be done. We can’t afford to feed him anymore. I make about forty grand a year at the agency, and our big and tall son commands at least half of it with his eating. The two of us can hardly live here, Didi. You have to consider that. I can hardly feed the both of us. And the college recruiters said that this type of thing has been done many times before.”

“So we’re leaving DeShawn on the footsteps of a football college? No one does that, Crosby.”

“Honey, it’s done all the time. We can’t just keep him here. We both don’t make enough.”

“I’ll get a second job.”

“Doing what? Cleaning another welfare motel? We can’t live like that anymore. And you have to get it out of your head that you’ll work until age eighty. You don’t need to do that. I’m sure you can do that, but you

don't need to do that. We don't have any money as it is. We can't afford his clothing either. Luckily the recruiters are stepping up to the plate.

"Don't ruin his chance to shine, Didi. We'll always regret it if we keep him with us. He's not made for these streets like we once were. And that's exactly where he'd be headed – right to the streets with all of them crack-heads and heroin addicts who graduate from that so-called high school of his."

"We also went there, y'know," she said.

"And where did it get us? I'm cleaning toilets, and you're cleaning out motel rooms full of used condoms, crack pipes, and beer bottles. That's where this neighborhood has gotten us. It's terrible, Didi. I'd rather see DeShawn on television with a lot of money to his name, sacking quarterbacks and all, than having him spend one more year in this place. Think about it."

"Oh, I've thought about it," she said, clearing the dishes and silverware away from the table.

"There's no other alternative."

"There must be. How am I supposed to live without my son? Tell me that, Crosby?"

"We both have to live without him. And it's not like I want my son to go away either. I hope you don't think that."

When she returned from the kitchen, she hovered above the table in thought. She finally said, "of course not, Crosby. I know you'll miss him just as much as I'll miss him."

"But it's for the best," he said. "It's the best for our son. I mean, we'll then move into a smaller place. We won't need to be renting such a big house anymore. A one bedroom apartment will do. We can also get out

of this crime-infested neighborhood. You'd like that, wouldn't you? And at the same time, we'll see that our son is well-taken care of."

"Are you sure about this? You're boss says we're headed in the right direction?"

"Our son will be a college graduate one day. And he'll be in the pros with his new degree. What can be better than that?"

After dinner, Crosby Biggs waited up for DeShawn. Didi adjourned upstairs for some much needed sleep. She had to work the next morning. Crosby also had to work, but he was on the night shift for the coming weekend. Both parents had one day off a week. They worked hard, but at the same time, they both didn't want to end up regretting their decision.

Crosby fell asleep on the living room couch waiting for his son to return. Crosby awoke with a start in the early hours of the morning and made sure that DeShawn had arrived safe and sound. His boy slumbered on his king-sized bed in a room filled with trophies, pictures, and posters of famous NFL stars.

When Crosby went to work the next day, he approached the head of his janitorial company before he set about cleaning the next office building further uptown. He sat in front of him at his big desk. The head of the company and Crosby always got along. The company head was a big supporter of the high school team. A booster, he liked to call himself. Crosby, in his uniform with the company's name embroidered on his chest, sat there as the company head took a phone call. Once his boss hung up, Crosby was free and clear to speak his mind on the issue. Even though it was his boss, he didn't mind expressing how he truly felt in front of him.

"Didi hates the idea," said Crosby, "but she also knows that it's the best for him."

The head of his company twirled a cigar in his hand and lit it up after cutting off the back tip. The smoke was rich, thick, and sweet-smelling.

“You’re son is gifted,” he said. “With a gift like his to play ball, you and Didi should both know that we’re doing the right thing. Of course, I want him to play for Rutgers, but I would say let the South East Conference have him. Down there, they don’t care about anything but football. They’ll ram him into shape, much like the Army.”

“Didi’s worried.”

“She’s the son’s mother, Crosby. Of course she’s worried.”

“What was that alternative we were talking about?”

“Maybe you can have him be a post-graduate for a year at an elite school before he heads south.”

“What’s a post-graduate?”

“Basically, your son gets an athletic scholarship for one year at one of these elite boarding schools. They keep him for an extra year past high school. They make sure his grades are good so that he can get into the college of his choice. I mean, Crosby, his grades are not great, right? He still failing Math?”

Crosby hated to admit it, but there was something about his boss’ pressed suit and silk tie that made the man superior to him and hinted at an income way beyond the paychecks he had been receiving from his entire life cleaning offices. Crosby relied on his advice, ever since his boss spotted DeShawn for a Division One school. Rutgers, though, was out of the question. The South would have him learn and compete like nothing both parents had seen before. Crosby almost loved the man for his help. He loved all white people. They were always so eager to help even though their bank accounts loomed miles above his. It wasn’t that Crosby envied whites. He just always listened to their advice, as though wealth and success were a part of their genetic makeup.

“He’s failing Math, alright,” said Crosby dourly.

“Maybe a ‘grade thirteen’ at a boarding school is the answer. It would surely help Didi get used to the fact that her son has moved on. In case she gets too sad about it, you guys could always take him back.”

“But that’s the whole point. If DeShawn were to come home after the boarding school, it would be a huge emotional setback for him. We’d have to be out of the picture totally. We’d have to move on so that he couldn’t find us if he ever wants to know where we went. We’re putting him totally on his own. He’ll grow up and become a self-reliant man.”

“You’re a brave man, Crosby. Letting your son succeed like that. Let me put you in touch with my prep school in Connecticut. Maybe I could arrange a post-graduate year for him? What do you think about that?”

“If you say so.”

“You can trust me, Crosby. An amazing life for your son awaits. He’ll learn from the best, and after his football career is over, he’ll be ready for the working world with any job he damn-well wants. I know you want that for him, especially considering your present circumstances. Your son will command triple that amount at any entry-level position they throw him. Imagine that? And this after playing for the NFL?”

“If you could make that happen,” said Crosby, “I’d forever be in debt to you.”

“Actually, I’d be in debt to you too. If he goes to my Alma Mater, I’ll definitely be in debt to you. Your son is headed for the NFL for Chrissakes. Whatever he does, he’s definitely headed there. All he has to do is pass Math. He’s amazing on the football field. His attitude is so good that he’s the coach’s favorite player, and that asshole is tough to please.”

“I’d be grateful, sir. A grade thirteen would help us a great deal.”

“I’ll work on it. Give me a week, and we’ll arrange it. Now get back to work!”

“Yessir,” said Crosby.

The head of the company smiled graciously as he fielded another phone call. Crosby left his office ready for work. They would do it all for DeShawn. Crosby was well-certain of their decision as never before. His son at the elite school would make contacts - a group of better, wealthy, white friends. His son would eat better than ever before. DeShawn loved his mother’s cooking, but an elite school like the one the head of the company described that morning would double his amount of quality food, so that his son could go to bed every night well-rested and ready for practice the next day. Crosby felt that DeShawn was always starving for more food for his large body. What a relief an elite school would be in this regard. Didi would like it much better as well, because if they ever regretted the decision, they could always have him back.

Crosby had to clean an office floor at an uptown location. He took his 1988 Cadillac Coup Deville to work that afternoon. He had huge respect for the Cadillac brand. He kept his car vacuumed, fresh-smelling, and always in tip-top shape. Granted that it was a very old model, but he kept it running as new with frequent trips to his brother-in-law’s garage in Arbor Hill. And then he thought that maybe he’d leave his prized automobile for DeShawn. It would be a token for him to remember his father by.

He suddenly choked up a bit. The Cadillac was the only prized possession he had. The car meant so much that it was the only item of real value that he could give to his son. Other than his prized car, Crosby had nothing else to give. With this realization, a few tears leaked from his eyes. He would have given his son the world if it were at his disposal. Instead he drove in the old-school luxury of his Cadillac - leather seats, automatic lights, power windows, power steering, climate

control, and a bus for a body - as he drove up from the downtown state government work zone, passed the bipolar points of the wealthy Pine Hills neighborhood and a crumbling Arbor Hill, the social segregation so apparent that it called out for some kind of protest against the government, and into the parking lot of a faceless corporate complex across from a crowdless shopping mall whose stores were going out of business.

He had already been used to driving a luxury car while wearing his janitor's uniform. He used to think it an embarrassment, especially when other drivers peered in, curious to know how a janitor could afford such a car, despite how old it was.

He returned home after ten hours of waxing, polishing, vacuuming, and mopping. He was dead tired. Luckily, Didi had stayed awake to make him another dinner, but this time it wasn't as special. Meatloaf, crinkle-cut French fries, and salted peas. He always admired her cooking, though. And as far as Didi was concerned, she knew that if you took care of a man's stomach and his dick, a man would never leave her. After so many years of being a wife to an exhausted janitor, she was still right on point. And once again, DeShawn had a team meeting that night, so he was out with his friends late all over again.

He was never home. Always football and his friends, and rarely did he do any homework. His primary subject was football. Math was a priority, but a close second. The subject became a stubborn problem that his coaches wanted to quell. But it was useless. Crosby Biggs would send him to grade thirteen, and when he mentioned it to Didi, who by this time had been riding the peaks and valleys of her own maternal emotions, she liked the idea better than sending her son to a Southern football factory right after graduation. They also realized that DeShawn would never pass Math otherwise. And what if he did pass Math at an elite prep school? The college and university football establishment would fall begging at his feet. He was that good on the

gridiron and that poor with his Math skills. As far as his other courses were concerned, both faculty and staff exempted him from further responsibility.

“I like the idea,” said Didi. “At least if something happens to him, he’ll be much closer to us.”

“What might happen?” asked Crosby.

“He could get sick. He could get injured - ”

“Why do I think you’d like it that way,” he asked with a smirk.

“Y’know, Crosby, I wouldn’t mind it at all. Let’s say to hell with it and keep him here.”

“Why don’t you go turn on some music.”

“It’s late. Won’t we disturb the neighbors?”

“Nah. Turn it on.”

Didi went to their obsolete stereo system and had it drop an old forty-five onto its turntable. She played Same Cooke and turned the volume up slightly. Crosby abandoned the dinner she made and joined her in the living room. Together they embraced in a slow dance. Didi hung onto his collar and wept. There was no mistake that they were both getting older and more fragile.

The stereo struck a groove of their favorite song in high school, and together they clung to each other, still having doubts about letting their son go. Crosby was determined to see it happen. He wanted to see him on television on Super Bowl Sunday one day. Didi, however, still felt vacant, as though her womb had never held such a talented young boy. That’s what it must have felt like for a mother to give up her baby - an intense emptiness that sucked the life out of them both, even though Crosby kept a stiff upper lip about it. He held his wife in the glow of the stereo. The track had finished, and for a few minutes more he held her

close as she wept into his collar. They made love that night as best they could.

In the morning, Didi made a stack of warm, fluffy pancakes along with five eggs, ten strips of bacon, and a half-pound of hashbrowns. The two men in her life, both Crosby and DeShawn, barreled down the stairs at roughly the same time. Most of the food went to DeShawn. His large frame and size had him eating plates of food that Didi kept cooking for him. Crosby ate very little, and Didi had a cup of coffee, as she had eaten earlier that morning. They waited for DeShawn to finish his gigantic meal before they talked to him seriously about his future.

“When’d you get home last night?” asked Crosby.

“Late, Dad,” said DeShawn. “We saw a late movie.”

“You haven’t been hanging around those losers, have you?”

“What losers?”

“Those crack addicts, those pot smokers, that Malt liquor crowd?”

“No, Dad. I went out with Marshall and a couple of girls from the High School.”

“You wear a condom?”

“Dad?”

“Hush, now, Crosby,” said Didi, stirring her cup of coffee.

“Just checking,” said Crosby. “Because those guys are going nowhere. They’ve been raised by the streets, and we don’t want anything to do with them. Isn’t that right, DeShawn?”

“Yes, sir. I don’t smoke no crack, and I don’t drink no liquor.”

“And why is that so important?”

“Because I don’t want to wreck my future.”

“That’s what I like to hear, son. You keep that attitude around here, and you’ll finally get out and live a great life. You understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good.”

“DeShawn,” said his mother, “we have some things we want to go over with you, now that the school is almost over. Now I know you’ve been having a good time with your school friends, and I know you want to go to college right away, and become your full potential and all, but son, there have been a few things we want to talk to you about.”

“What did I do now?”

“Nothing, son,” said Crosby. “You’re doing just fine.”

“That’s a relief,” said DeShawn. “I know I’ve been coming home late and all, but me and Marshall, we want to make sure we’re tight even after college.”

“He’s off to Morehouse, right?”

“And Johnny off’s to Fisk.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” said Crosby. “At least they’re not in jail.”

“Crosby, please?”

“Sorry, hon.”

“DeShawn,” began Didi, “we’ve heard that your recruiter is coming today from the college. You need to improve your Math scores much more than where they are now.”

“I’m trying, Mom. I’m even being tutored in it.”

“Who’s tutoring you? Hopefully it’s not that Melissa?”

“Yeah. She’s really good at Math.”

“Don’t forget that condom, son.”

“Crosby! Not at the table.”

“Sorry, hon. Please go on.”

“Well, DeShawn, They want you to do what is called a ‘post-graduate’ year of schooling.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? I’m all set to go for football practice this summer.”

“Basically, son,” said Crosby, “they want you to go through another year of high school, so that you can pass Math and get recruited by even better college programs.”

“Who me? Another year of high school? But, Dad, I - ”

“Now just hold on, son. Not here at our school. Let your Mom explain.”

“We want you to go to a Connecticut boarding school, so that you can pass Math. Your options will be many more, and you’ll have a stronger hand to bargain with to get into Montgomery Southern as a student.”

“But, Mom, I don’t need another year. I asked Coach, and he said that I can go straight to many colleges if I want.”

“We want you to do another year. The school we want you to go to is in Connecticut.”

“Connecticut?”

“You’re going,” said Crosby, “and that’s their final decision, both theirs and ours. This is the last group of decisions we’re ever gonna make for you.”

“That’s a relief.”

“The recruiter from Montgomery-Southern A&M is coming tomorrow. She intends to announce their decision that you must go to a post-

graduate school. Your Math has to improve, and I'm thinking that the recruiter will agree that a post-graduate year is necessary at this time. An educated man is a good man, DeShawn. Most of the time in life, you'll live with a degree and not a football in your hand. Get my meaning?"

"But, son, my baby, there's another decision we're making that you should be aware of."

"Son," said Crosby, "you need to be on your own from now on. We are no longer going to interfere with your life from here on in. That's the way it has to be."

"That's a step in the right direction?" said DeShawn.

"I don't think you know what we mean," said Crosby.

"In other words, son," said Didi, almost in tears, "we can't afford to take care of you anymore. Once we take you to Connecticut, you are on your own. You will not see us again."

DeShawn looked up from his lap, as he had been in deep thought listening to what his parents said. And after a brief silence where words could no longer be expressed due to the difficult decision they made, DeShawn said, "what do you mean by that?"

"I think you know," said Didi. "You're also a smart kid, if you study more."

"Son, we have to leave you off into the hands of those who can give you a better future."

"So what are you trying to say?" asked DeShawn.

"We can't afford to be a part of your life anymore," said Didi, her eyes moist. "Once you go to the Connecticut school, we are not going to contact you anymore. And I'm so very sorry, my baby boy. So sorry that we cannot take care of you anymore, but those who will soon guide

you into the NFL will do all of your care-taking from now on. We'll be out of the picture."

"You guys make it sound like I'll never see you again."

The table fell silent, and Didi wiped away her tears with a napkin.

"Son," said Crosby. "This is your life. It is not ours. It is all about you from here on in."

"But don't you love me? I'm your only son. Are you mad at me? Did I do something wrong?"

At this point Didi began to sob at the table. She ran upstairs in tears, leaving both Crosby and DeShawn at their seats.

"Mom, I'm sorry! For whatever I've done, I'm sorry!"

Crosby put his hand upon his, and said, "stop right there, son. You have done nothing wrong, and we love you more than life itself, but you have to listen to us. You've got to be a man out there. You've got to use your God-given talents to make a life for yourself, and you cannot do that with your mother and me in the way of that life. This is going to be your life, and it will be your career, and it will be your money at the end of the day. Your mother and I have already decided on this. Once you go on to that nice prep school, you are on your own. We will be totally out of the picture."

"I don't get it."

"You don't get it yet, my son. Not yet. But once you are in the pros, you will understand that decision we've made, because we love you, my son. And you don't have to apologize for anything. This is a tough world, and you will have stand like a man through it. You'll have to feel the joys and pains of it just like most folk have to. But from now on, you'll be doing that without us."

They sat in silence for some time. Didi didn't return to the table that morning. Both father and son sat together for a little while longer, until the father adjourned upstairs to check on his wife. DeShawn, shocked by their decision, went out with his friend Marshall to the shopping mall along a busy Western Avenue. They bought a few tee-shirts and even a New York Giants sports jersey. And yet, through it all, DeShawn could not hide his tears for very long. He too wept on Marshall's shoulder by the time they left the mall and waited patiently for their bus.

Losing his friends was one thing, but he never before thought that he'd lose his family over talents such as his. In a way, he regretted being a football player for the first time. A talent so grand held no other option than to travel up to the New England prep school and at the same time, abandon the failed family that he loved so fully. Yes, he regretted it, but he figured that his father and mother would never guide him wrongly. And while they said that they loved him more than life itself, rarely do parents ever hear their own children whispering to themselves, 'Mom and Dad, you're wrong. It is I who love you more than life itself. It is I who love you more than life itself...'

The college recruiter soon knocked on their door. She was a woman of refined tastes, high fashion, and perfect style. She was also shrewd and yet tried to be honest with the Biggs family at the same time. She reeked of success at an early age, but this never defined her as incompetent. On the other hand, she may have been too competent to be corrupted by old ideas of what college recruitment was once like. She sold the school to the Biggs family in a professional fashion, and she sold it well, not by surrendering to the desires of young recruits, but by giving them a picture of the life on campus for a Montgomery-Southern A&M college student. Yes, college had beautiful girls, but this female was everything about being a woman and not a girl. Maybe she had grown up too quickly? Probably not. Her young age concealed an

experienced mind and a wizened intellect. Her defenses were even stronger.

They all sat at the Biggs' kitchen table, and Didi gave her some apple pie. She figured DeShawn's stomach was her stomach as well. Of course, DeShawn already committed to Montgomery-Southern, but this recruiter made sure that DeShawn headed in the right direction and not just to another southern football program.

"We want him to go post-graduate," said the recruiter, "That's what my boss at work says too. Do you think it's that necessary? He doesn't have to be a perfect student. We already know his Math scores and as well as his test scores are low, but do you think another year in school is a good idea?"

"We want an education for your son as well," said the recruiter, "and we need that for him. Academics is very important at our school. It has to be important for DeShawn too. We have a strong Math department. We can have tutors in place to boost his Math scores, and while it's true that most students need a very strong background in Math to enter the college, DeShawn is in different boat. He is a very talented young man, and all colleges and universities would love to have him, but we need better Math scores for him to be accepted into the university. How high, though, is a matter of interpretation. Also, we have very strong connections to the NFL, probably the strongest connections out of any other college or university. We train our football players to succeed. There is nothing more important to us."

"I see," said Crosby. "And also maybe it'd be better to have him close by for one year, just in case his Math doesn't work out, and if our separation from him doesn't work out."

"Yes. But we need to de-commit here as well. What if he goes on the post-graduate school and still doesn't do well in Math. What then?"

"Then we take him back."

“Okay, then. If that’s what’s best for him, it’s best for us too.”

Didi poured them both some more coffee.

“We still need to de-commit, though, Crosby,” said the recruiter. “You have seen what we have to offer, and we can’t continue to delay his entry into college sports or the NFL. We want a letter of intent, even though he’s moving on to a private school for post-grad. As long as you agree that he can do a post-graduate year, then of course, we’ll have DeShawn playing for the NFL in no time. If not, we can’t take him. His scores have to improve. Those are the requirements. He has to be accepted first.”

“Okay,” said Crosby. “I guess that’s it. Let’s put it together. A post-graduate year it is, but you will carry him next. Do we have an understanding?”

“Yes,” said the recruiter. “Consider it done.”

“Okay. Where are the papers?”

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Harvey Havel Announces Release of Mister Big

A good-natured black football player has to make it in a duplicitous world after a serious spinal cord injury.

New Sports Fiction Novel

Book Details:

In this novel, DeShawn Biggs is as formidable as his name suggests. At 6-feet-5-inches and 300 pounds, DeShawn seems headed for the NFL. Indeed, a football career is regarded as an inevitability for the young man in his native Albany. While most NFL-bound seniors head off to play college ball after they leave high school, DeShawn's abysmal math grades—and the fact that his parents can literally no longer afford to feed him—result in the giant lineman attending an elite Connecticut prep school for “grade thirteen.” After an emotional farewell to his parents, who are purposefully removing themselves from his life for good—“You’ve got to use your God-given talents to make a life for yourself,” says his father, “and you cannot do that with your mother and me in the way of that life”—DeShawn is left alone among the white, wealthy student body. Sticking out like a large sore thumb, DeShawn attempts to walk the fine line between what is expected of him and what will not be tolerated. A cheating scandal gets him expelled but not before he secures a place at Montgomery Southern A&M, a football power that will set him up to advance to the NFL. DeShawn eventually gets his shot at the big leagues, but his trusting nature and penchant for making bad decisions dog him throughout his career. Each time, the stakes get higher. DeShawn has always been a pawn in a game controlled by other people, but how much of his own integrity can he compromise in order to get ahead?

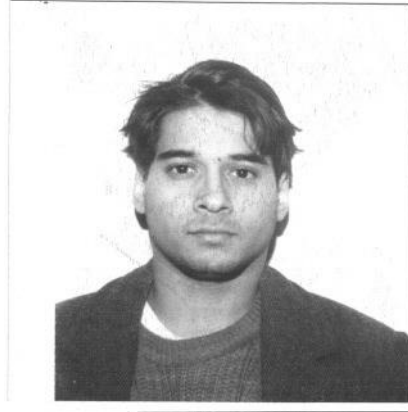
About the Author:

Harvey Havel is a short-story writer and novelist. His first novel, *Noble McCloud, A Novel*, was published in November of 1999. His second novel, *The Imam, A Novel*, was published in 2000. In 2006, Havel published his third novel, *Freedom of Association*. He has published his eighth novel, *Charlie Zero's Last-Ditch Attempt*, and his ninth, *The Orphan of Mecca, Book One*, which was released last year. His new novel, *The Thruway Killers* is his latest work. *The Orphan of Mecca, Books Two and Three*, has just been released next year as well as a book, *An Adjunct Down*, which he just completed. His work in progress is called *Mister Big*, about a Black American football player. He is formerly a writing instructor at Bergen Community College in Paramus, New Jersey. He also taught writing and literature at the College of St. Rose in Albany as well as SUNY Albany. Copies of his books and short stories, both new and used, may be purchased at www.barnesandnoble.com, www.amazon.com, and by special order at other fine bookstores.

For More information on Mister Big: <http://booklaunch.io/rabtbooktours/mister-big>

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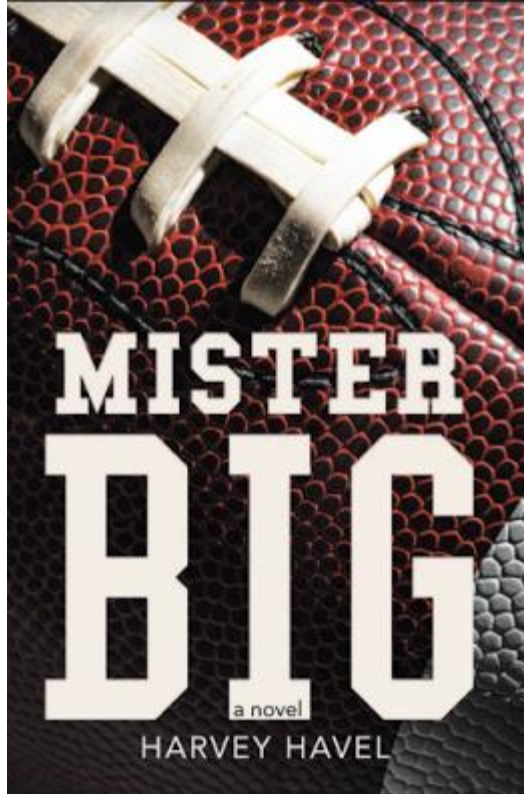


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