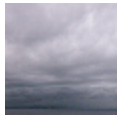


Thursday, April 30, 2026



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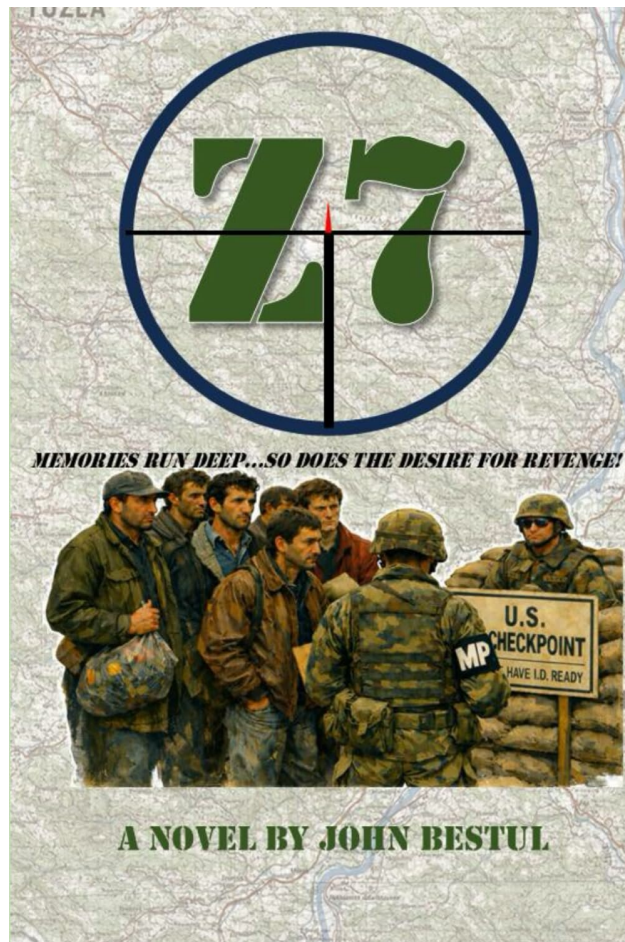
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Local veteran, author celebrates first novel release



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Posted Sunday, February 15, 2026 12:00 pm

By Chris Gureski
Contributing Writer

If you set out to write a novel, where would you begin? For John Bestul, he stuck to the ever true words of “write what you know.”

Bestul’s new novel Z7 follows government operative Will Oleson, who after being forced into retirement, is sent out on a seemingly simple photography job by the FBI.

Bestul discussed how his military experiences come out in the novel.

“I was in the 432nd Civil Battalion deployed to Bosnia in ‘96 where the novel begins. It starts with two men who were imprisoned. That actually happened,” he said.

Bestul’s experiences as a NATO peacekeeper tie themselves to the backdrop of the novel.



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“Once we got there we were parceled off to different units. It was a civil war between people of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and followers of Islam. We were one of the few US teams who actually fought on the Serbian side,” he said.

Though Bestul had first hand experience, he still needed further research to deepen the world of the story.

“There were some things I needed to do but fortunately for me, two people had webpages on the actual incident that sparked the book, even as far back as 1996.” he said. Bestul added how a UW-Green Bay professor, Steve Dutch, lent his diary, detailing the experiences of another team during that time.

Bestul also blends his experience from working as a news reporter in La Crosse into various news segments throughout the novel.

“One of the characters runs a TV room in Green Bay. Some descriptions of the room have actually been 40 years removed since I’ve done TV news. However, there were a lot of similarities and lots of shared knowledge that still applied,” he added.



One particular aspect of the novel Bestul highlighted was its focus on Wisconsin settings.

Out of all the towering trees, sprinting deer, architecture and more, much of the media tends to gloss over Wisconsin outside of the accents and the occasional cold one.

“The first time we’re introduced to the main character is in the current day taking wildlife pics. The whole concept came to me in dreams and over a number of nights where someone was in the woods taking pictures using knowledge they gained as a member of the military,” he said.

From start to finish, Z7 was the culmination of 11 years of work, progressing intermittently while he continued to care for himself and his family.

“The hang up was that I couldn’t figure out the finish, however once I figured it out I was able to write it out quickly. There was also something unplanned where people had read it and no matter who, all are waiting for a sequel,” he said. “I originally didn’t intend for a sequel, but now in retrospect I can see why they’d want it. I’m trying to conceptualize where it goes next. I’m at a very early start, but right now I’m particularly enjoying these characters.”



Readers can purchase Z7 online in both digital and physical formats from Amazon, Walmart and Barnes and Noble.

Keywords

John Bestul, write a novel, Z7, author interview, first book, veteran, new book, local author, book release

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