

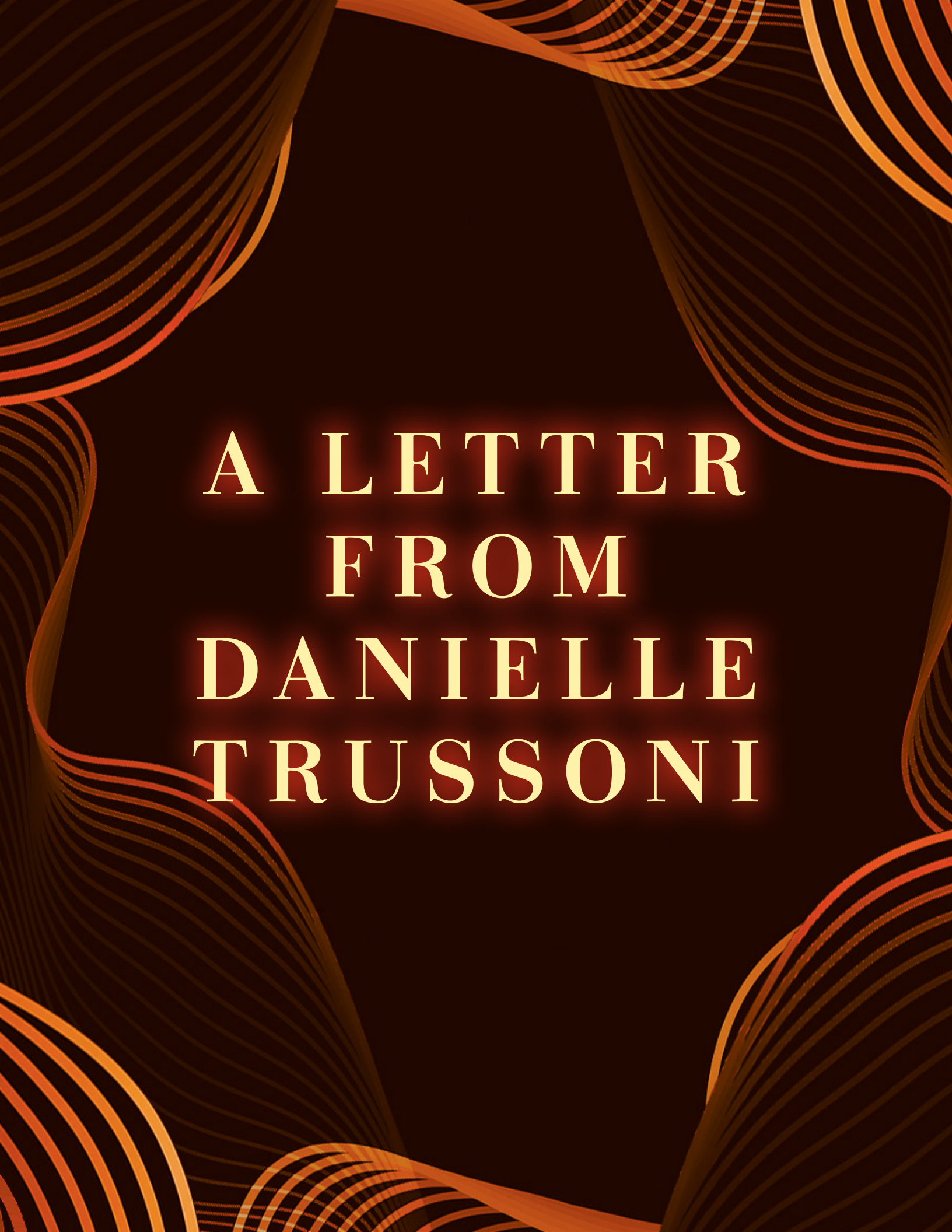
# THE PUZZLE MASTER

DANIELLE TRUSSONI



## BOOK CLUB KIT





A LETTER  
FROM  
DANIELLE  
TRUSSONI

## DEAR READER,

My new novel, *The Puzzle Master*, is many things—a thriller with puzzles embedded in the plot; a passionate supernatural love story; a mystery about the nature of the universe—but what most inspired me to write it was my fascination with the way its hero, Mike Brink, an ingenious puzzle solver, sees the world.

I write fiction because it allows me to explore the vastly different ways people experience reality. The lives we live stem from our unique perceptions and, in some ways, *The Puzzle Master* is a case study in how one man's life is utterly transformed when his perceptions change. Mike Brink was a regular guy until he suffered a traumatic brain injury that left him with an uncanny ability to solve puzzles. At first, he didn't understand what had happened to him. Suddenly, he saw orderly patterns in chaos, could solve complex mathematical equations within seconds, and experienced reality not as you or I do, but as a series of interlocking enigmas.

But his abilities weren't superpowers. As it turned out, his brain injury left him with a real medical condition called Sudden Acquired Savant Syndrome, a condition in which an ordinary person develops extraordinary abilities in art, music, mathematics, even foreign languages. This medical condition has been documented in around 70 people worldwide and, while rare, it raises all sorts of questions about human consciousness. I became fascinated with the idea that, for the few people who acquire Savant Syndrome, information is not learned so much as tapped into, like breaking through a barrier. What would happen if we all could tap into such knowledge?

Mike Brink's abilities also allowed me to delve into another topic that fascinates me: puzzles, patterns, and games. For me a well-told story often feels like a puzzle: I read to put the pieces of a narrative together, to struggle to make connections, and to learn something I didn't know before. I was not a puzzle expert before I began this novel, but as I dived deeper into the world of puzzle constructors, I began to appreciate the artistry behind making puzzles. I spoke with real-life puzzle master Will Shortz, editor of the *New York Times* Games Page and was able to work with some of the most talented puzzle constructors working today to create puzzles for the book. It was a fascinating experience and I hope that you feel the thrill of being swept up in the mysteries Mike Brink uncovers as you read my novel.

Thank you for reading *The Puzzle Master*. I'd love to hear from you with your thoughts about the book, so please send me a note at the address below.

**YOURS,  
DANIELLE TRUSSONI**

[danielle@danielletrussoni.com](mailto:danielle@danielletrussoni.com)






QUESTIONS  
FOR  
DISCUSSION

1. Mike Brink's condition is a medical disorder known as Sudden Acquired Savant Syndrome. Had you heard of this before you read the book? In what ways does it make Brink's life easier and in what ways does it make it more challenging?
2. Jess Price's life is destroyed after she comes across the God Puzzle. Is what happened in the aftermath her fault? Does she deserve to be exonerated?
3. Describe the relationship that develops between Jess and Mike. Were you rooting for them to become a romantic couple? In what ways do they complement each other and in what ways do they seem incompatible?
4. Discuss the role of Lilith in the novel. Did you see her purely as a force of evil, or as a character with whom you could have some empathy, based on her history?
5. What is Cam's motivation in going to work for Sedge? How do you view him as a father? How did you view the compromises he makes for his daughter?
6. The novel uses a variety of texts—letters, historical documents, diary entries—to tell a story. Did you engage with some of these more than others? If so, which ones? How did you feel they were employed to build suspense?
7. Discuss the roles that secondary female characters Thessaly, Anne-Marie, and Rachel play in the story. What are each of these characters motivated by? What do they want?
8. Discuss what Sedge's motivations are, as well as those of Gary Sand and Vivek Gupta. How are they driven to use the same means for different ends?
9. Discuss the solution to the God Puzzle and how it is employed by Sedge. What surprised you about this?
10. What does the novel say about the human impulse to solve puzzles? Are there some secrets and mysteries that are better off hidden?
11. What do you see in the future for Mike and Jess? Where do you imagine life takes them after the ending of the book?





**LOCATION  
GUIDE**



**★ RAY BROOK, NY | TUBERCULOSIS SANATORIUM**

*The Puzzle Master* opens with Mike Brink traveling to Ray Brook, New York to visit an all-women’s minimum-security prior. There he meets Jess Price, and the novel’s mystery takes off. The women’s prison in *The Puzzle Master* is actually based on a real place – a tuberculosis sanatorium that opened in 1904, which was New York’s first tuberculosis sanatorium. It was located in the mountains so that the patients had access to fresh air. It continued to run as a sanatorium until the mid-1960s, when it was turned into a rehabilitation center for women but then soon closed.

**★ NEW YORK, NY | THE MORGAN LIBRARY**

Towards the end of the novel, Brink travels to The Morgan Library to tell the director about LaMoriette’s doll and discover its connection to the God Puzzle. The Morgan Library began as the personal collection of Pierpont Morgan where he collected illuminated manuscripts, rare texts, as well as master drawings and prints. The library was specifically designed to magnify the objects it held. After Pierpont Morgan’s death, his son decided that the library shouldn’t be left private and transformed the collection into a public institution.

**★ KERHONKSON, NY | THE STARLITE MOTEL**

Our main character Mike Brink and his beloved dog take up residence at The Starlite Motel at the beginning of his investigation. Located in the Hudson Valley, The Starlite Motel is a 1960s motor lodge complete with neon signs and unique character. The location and the details are different in the novel but were inspired by the original.

**★ CLERMONT, NY | WILDERSTEIN**

The Sedge House, the Gilded Age mansion where Jess Price stays in *The Puzzle Master*, is based on a mansion in Clermont, NY called Wilderstein. The house has beautiful scenic views of the Hudson River and mountains. Throughout the years, the Wilderstein has been remodeled and has held art, personal artifacts, and historical items. The last resident of the house, Margaret (Daisy) Suckley, had close relations with former president Franklin Delano Roosevelt. After her death, a suitcase full of letters between her and the president were found.

## 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY PRAGUE

Dollmaker LaMorie's letters transport the reader back to 19th-century Prague. During this time, the Industrial Revolution was beginning and the Czechs were demanding autonomy in their country in what was called the Czech National Revival movement.



### ★ JEWISH QUARTER

Much of *The Puzzle Master's* mystery is based on Jewish mysticism. In LaMorie's letters, readers follow LaMorie and Jakob, a Jewish man, as they travel through the Quarter. Jakob teaches LaMorie some of the history of Jews in Prague. The Golden Age of Jewish Prague occurred during the 17<sup>th</sup> century because it was the largest Ashkenazic community in the world.

### ★<sub>2</sub> OLD JEWISH CEMETERY

The Old Jewish Cemetery is considered one of the most important Jewish monuments in Prague. While this is not the oldest Jewish cemetery in Prague, this cemetery is where many people important to the local Jewish community were buried.

### ★<sub>3</sub> THE OLD-NEW SYNAGOGUE

The Jewish Quarter has six synagogues that all were preserved throughout history. In *The Puzzle Master*, LaMorie and Jakob enter the Old-New Synagogue. This synagogue is the oldest active synagogue in the world and one of Prague's first Gothic buildings.





**BECOME A  
PUZZLE  
MASTER**



# Welcome to the world of The Puzzle Master

By Danielle Trussoni

## ACROSS

- 1 Flexible mineral
- 5 Brand for Bowser
- 9 Gets into swing music
- 14 For one
- 15 Losing proposition?
- 16 Madonna role
- 17 The conundrum at the heart of "The Puzzle Master," with "The"
- 19 Andrea Bocelli, for one
- 20 Think tank products
- 21 New York Times bestselling author Danielle
- 23 "Better \_\_\_ next time"
- 26 Rub the wrong way
- 27 "72 Variations on the Name of G-D" author
- 31 Adam's first wife, in folklore
- 36 Roll
- 37 The \_\_\_ Prayer ("Our Father")
- 39 Hit half of a 45
- 40 "M\*A\*S\*H" star
- 42 Conductor Georg
- 44 Scrawny
- 45 Gertrude who wrote "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose"
- 47 "Rigoletto" composer

- 49 Marie, e.g.: Abbr.
- 50 Scary subject for a New York Times Book Review column written by 21-Across
- 52 Jess Price is sentenced to 30 years in this rural town
- 54 Surfing site
- 56 Barre room bend
- 57 Jewish mystical teaching studied by Madonna and Rabba Rachel
- 62 Frank of the Mothers of Invention
- 66 Adage
- 67 Brink's borough
- 70 Like many a thriller
- 71 Dublin's home
- 72 Aurora Sedge relation to Jameson
- 73 Borders
- 74 Destroy
- 75 Spanish eyes

## DOWN

- 1 Crèche trio
- 2 Old music box?
- 3 Like "The DaVinci \_\_\_" meets "The Silent Patient" (novel comp)
- 4 Shock
- 5 Wood-dressing tool

- 6 Fashionista Claiborne
- 7 Skin
- 8 "S.N.L." alum Cheri
- 9 Fun on a lake
- 10 Currier's partner
- 11 Trattoria order
- 12 School on the Thames
- 13 Eastern gown
- 18 "Round up the \_\_\_ suspects"
- 22 It might be bookmarked
- 24 Corp. money managers
- 25 Bolshoi rival
- 27 Inundated
- 28 Sled dog with a statue in Central Park
- 29 Milk dispenser
- 30 Freud contemporary
- 32 Left-leaning pol.
- 33 Emphatic rebuttal
- 34 Coming up on the hour
- 35 Salma who played Frida
- 38 Watch part
- 41 Tire filler
- 43 Romantic interlude
- 46 They're hardly celebs
- 48 Mediterranean tourist destination
- 51 Fam. member
- 53 Coiled Western gear
- 55 Breaks
- 57 "The Awakening" novelist Chopin
- 58 Dismissed
- 59 \_\_\_ cherry
- 60 Big name in audio products
- 61 Acclaim
- 63 Spitting sound
- 64 Balance parts
- 65 Type of literary hero
- 68 New Deal org.
- 69 "Listen!"

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17				18						19				
20							21		22					
				23		24	25		26					
27	28	29					30		31		32	33	34	35
36				37				38		39				
40			41		42				43		44			
45				46		47				48		49		
50					51		52				53			
				54		55		56						
57	58	59	60				61		62			63	64	65
66						67		68	69					
70						71					72			
73						74						75		





THE  
GOD  
PUZZLE





The background features a dark, almost black, field with intricate, flowing patterns of thin, parallel lines in shades of orange and gold. These lines curve and swirl, creating a sense of movement and depth, reminiscent of liquid or smoke. The overall effect is elegant and modern.

# PLAYLIST

CLICK HERE TO OPEN IN SPOTIFY

---

**PUZZLES**

*Kupla*

**CONUNDRUM**

*EDX*

**TRANSCEND**

*TWO LANES*

**OTHERSIDE**

*Post Malone*

**LILITH**

*Halsey*

**SINGULARITY**

*Bright Eyes*

**PORCELAIN (ARTY REMIX)**

*by Moby*

**TRANSCEND (PIANO VERSION)**

*TWO LANES*

**THE 72 NAMES OF GOD**

*Marco Milone (Guided Meditation)*