

**The First Two Pages: “Running Interference” by Kathryn Prater Bomey**  
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Barb Goffman, and Marcia Talley (Wildside Press)

An Essay by Kathryn Prater Bomey

All through my teenage years, my friends and I endured grueling practices in the summer heat, dedicated our afterschool and weekend hours to our team, and vigorously competed for state championship titles.

But we weren’t playing a varsity sport. We were in the marching band.

As any true band geek will tell you, marching band ought to be considered a sport, given the amount of discipline, skill, teamwork, and competitiveness required.

So when I heard about a submission call for short stories that would appear in a sports-themed crime fiction anthology, I pleaded my case to the editors. Their ruling: My story could be eligible if the marching band shenanigans took place at a football game, rather than at a marching band-only competition. (Those do exist.)

A resounding affirmation that marching band counts as a sport? Not exactly. But I’ll take what I can get.

Joking aside, I’m so grateful to editors Donna Andrews, Barb Goffman, and Marcia Talley and judges Lucy Burdette, Dan Hale, and Naomi Hirahara for including my story, “Running Interference,” in *Three Strikes—You’re Dead!* and

giving me the chance to showcase the third team taking the field at every high school football game.

In “Running Interference,” two high school trumpet players battle over a coveted marching band solo. One of them falls ill the night of the performance, paving the way for a clear victor. But when the nature of the ailment is questioned, a troubling truth emerges: The hobbled musician has more enemies than friends.

This story opens with a musician on stage playing the last notes of a slow jazz solo on her trumpet. Readers are transported to a scene straight out of a nightclub—until the moment is interrupted by a drum major’s command. We realize the beautiful music was coming not from a swanky club but from a football field, illustrating that musicality is just as important in marching band as physical strength and synchronized movement.

The first two pages capture the excited spirit of marching band members on game day, even as they work hard at rehearsal to perfect their craft and deliver a stunning performance. But the pages also lay the groundwork for the rest of the piece by foreshadowing the impending face-off over the solo and referencing recent upgrades to the school’s athletic fields, which will play a key role later in the story.

The theme of hard work versus privilege is frustratingly present in the rivalry between the two trumpet players. And throughout the story, readers are

introduced to a diverse cast of characters—a band director, drum major, groundskeeper, journalist, superintendent, and other students—who each had reason to root for the trumpeter of their choice and knock the other down a peg or two.

Although I may have exaggerated the competitiveness of student musicians just a little (okay, a lot) for the sake of telling a good story, ultimately this piece gives readers a glimpse into the many facets of life in a marching band, from rehearsals and band camp, to on-the-field performances, to behind-the-scenes prep and planning—including, in this case, some rather nefarious (purely fictional) activities.

### **The First Two Pages of “Running Interference”**

Kinsey Kennedy held her breath as her friend’s trumpet caressed the final notes of the piece. Sunlight glinted off the polished brass of Elena Martinez’s instrument, making it glow against the red velvet curtain behind her. The musician held the fermata on the last note, her tone never wavering. She closed her deep-brown, long-lashed eyes as the rich sound faded into the early evening.

Silence descended upon the intimate stage. Elena lowered her trumpet, holding it vertically in front of her torso, bell down.

Kinsey slowly exhaled, the ball of nerves in her stomach beginning to unwind. Elena’s hard work had paid off—that had been an immaculate performance.

“Mark, time, mark.” The drum major’s voice sliced through the stillness. “Forward, move.”

Surrounding the stage, fifty right feet took a step. Then fifty left feet. Right. Left. Right. Left.

Kinsey, who'd been watching Elena in her peripheral vision, marched forward in perfect synchronization with her high school classmates. Sure, it was just a rehearsal, but she wanted to do everything she could to make that night's marching band show amazing. She knew how important the performance was for her best friend. That trumpet solo could be just the thing to catch the attention of a collegiate music school.

After Elena climbed down two metal rungs to the ground and fell into step with the rest of the marchers, Kinsey caught her gaze and gave her a nod. If Leo had been there, he never could have done that good a job, Kinsey thought. She hoped he wouldn't show up later and ruin everything.

Half a dozen members of the band's color guard rolled up their flags around handheld poles and laid them on the mobile nightclub stage. Unlocking the wheels beneath it, they pushed the prop over the football field's manicured grass toward the end zone. A banner that read, "The Eagleridge High School Marching Band Presents . . . 'All Jazzed Up,' " hung from the platform. It fluttered in the late-August breeze typical for Michigan—still warm but with a hint of the chill that was coming soon. Blond strands of hair escaped from Kinsey's ponytail and blew across her face, but she resisted the urge to brush them away, instead keeping her fingers firmly wrapped around her clarinet.

As she and her fellow students approached the painted white sideline in unison, Kinsey focused on head drum major Eddie Douglas, a senior with dark-brown skin and black hair styled in a flattop. He called out several commands, bringing the marchers to parade-rest position. Shoulder to shoulder, they waited expectantly.

"Fall out," Eddie said.

Breaking formation, they gathered on the school's recently resurfaced running track. Kinsey and the others looked up at their band director, Mr. Scott, who stood on the first plank of newly replaced bleachers. His blue-and-black Eagleridge High School windbreaker and thinning salt-and-pepper hair rustled in the breeze.

"Terrific dry run for tonight's show, everybody," Mr. Scott said. "Even though it's the week before classes start and most of your friends are still in summer-vacation mode, you've given it everything you've got. And it shows. You should be proud of what you've accomplished in just one week of band camp. And let's hear it for Elena. That solo was gorgeous."

As the group clapped and whistled, Kinsey beamed. Her friend deserved those accolades—and then some. If only Mr. Scott and their classmates knew how much Elena had practiced all summer to level up her trumpet skills for college auditions this fall, Kinsey thought.

She nudged Elena with her elbow and leaned toward her ear. “Mr. Scott is right. You killed it.”

A blush blossomed on Elena’s golden-brown cheeks. She ducked her head, wavy black hair swinging around her face. “Thanks. I know I only get to cover the solo because Leo’s traveling, but at least now I can put ‘soloist’ on my music-school applications.”

The applause subsided when Mr. Scott held up his hands. “A few reminders for tonight: Drink plenty of water. Stretch before we line up. And don’t lock your knees when you’re standing in the pregame tunnel, especially if it takes the football players a long time to run through.”

As her teacher spoke, Kinsey ran her arm over her forehead, wiping off sunscreen mingled with sweat. Although Michigan nights cooled off as fall approached, the sun still beat down during the all-day rehearsals of band camp, and she had to reapply the lotion often to stop her fair complexion from scorching.

“Since this is the first game of the season and the debut of the school’s improved athletic facilities, we want to look our best,” Mr. Scott continued. “Keep your chins and eyes up—try not to stare down at your music during halftime. Let’s show the district the football team isn’t the only thing on the field that can make the crowd go wild.”

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Kathryn Prater Bomey writes short crime fiction and is pursuing publication of a mystery novel. Her short story, “Running Interference,” was published in April 2024 in *Three Strikes—You’re Dead!*—part of the award-winning anthology series edited by Donna Andrews, Barb Goffman, and Marcia Talley; her flash fiction piece, “The Competition,” appeared in *Shotgun Honey* in 2023; and her short story, “Beneath the Surface,” ran in *Black Cat Weekly* in 2022. She has served as president and secretary of the Chesapeake Chapter of Sisters in Crime. As a manager of a communications team at a global nonprofit and a former journalist, her nonfiction writing has appeared in magazines, blogs, and daily newspapers, including the *Indianapolis Star*, *Grand Rapids Press*, *Lansing State Journal*, and *Saginaw News*. Follow her author page on Facebook at <https://facebook.com/KathrynPraterBomey>.