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Bleeding Out

Baxter Clare
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Some crime novels succeed or fail on the merits of the

mystery; others succeed or fail on the appeal of the main character. Ideally, a successful crime novel has both. This one does, and the reader will be rooting not only for a solution to the crime, but for the mental and physical welfare of the main character. Lieutenant L.A. Franco, head of Homicide Squad #93, is a tough cop in the toughest part of a tough city, Los Angeles' South Central Division. What makes Franco different? She's a woman.

Bleeding Out has all the elements of a noir City of Angels police procedural: brutal, violent crimes, a gritty atmosphere, dubious law enforcement politics and a stable of colorful, hard-working, hard-drinking cops. Franco stands out for her compassion and toughness, which is a lacquered facade she wears over memories of a murdered lover. Franco stands on the edge of a nervous breakdown: the breakdown is caused by the job, while at the same time the only thing keeping her from plunging completely off the edge is her work. It's a balancing act that will keep the reader turning pages late into the night. After a

shooting, Franco asks the police psychologist if he's going to take her off the job. The psychologist shakes his head and says, "No, I won't take away the only thing you've got."

The story revolves around a serial killer who is kidnapping young girls, raping them and then battering them to death. When the police investigation gets bogged down, a young narcotics detective, Allison Kennedy, is recruited to act as bait. The sparks fly between Allison and Franco, and this attraction/repulsion is the heart of this excellent book. Readers will want to know whether Franco will find something…or someone…besides the job.

Told with gripping realism, a deft sense of character and place, careful attention to police procedure and psychological nuance, Bleeding Out is an almost perfect example of a hard-boiled police procedural. If readers like the early novels of Joseph Wambaugh or any of the fifty 87th Precinct novels of Ed McBain, they will be more than happy with this novel.

MARK TERRY (May / June 2000)

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