

THRILLER

Blue Collar Boston Cool: Schraft Street Shenanigans

Michael A. Connelly

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Three Stars (out of Five)

Jim Herlihy owns a remodeled three-decker Beantown house, the Schraft Street Sports bar, and Herlihy's Hardcore Gym. And he's a published author. Not bad for a guy in his thirties. But trouble is nipping at his heels like a pack of terriers.

He has woman trouble. One of the "Fabulous Fat Foursome" that frequent his gym flirts relentlessly. And neighbor in the three-decker, a young stripper named Amy Jordan, has a crush on him.

He has work trouble, too. Big Bill, Herlihy's minority partner in the gym, regularly lobbies for more investment in high-cost equipment. And Fat Frankie, the I-only-skim-a-little bartender at Schraft Street Sports, wants to remodel the place. It doesn't help that Fat Frankie wants to contract the work himself—at full retail rates.

Unfortunately, in *Blue Collar Boston Cool*, Michael A. Connelly tries too hard to imitate the hard-boiled crime capers of more than a half-century ago, which makes for sometimes stilted dialogue: "Public opinion I can deal with, least 'til you geniuses clear me one way or the other ... but what about Harry's friends and associates? What if they really didn't do it and start thinking maybe I did?"

And there's the crux of the story: Hoary Harry, Herlihy's childhood pal, has been beaten to death. Harry worked the wrong side of the law, and lately he had been mooning over Amy, the stripper. Herlihy had a protective big-brother attitude toward Amy, so when Harry turns up dead, Herlihy's a suspect.

But Herlihy is "wiseass cool," so a couple of cops sniffing around aren't going to keep him from traveling to Florida to visit an old friend who wants him to sell his Schraft Street enterprises and invest in a trendy West Palm Beach club. Unfortunately, this particular narrative thread distracts the reader from the drama in Boston.

However, Connelly makes his story believable—from the two-bit gangster's feelings for the seemingly innocent stripper to Herlihy's dealings with employees and customers. And the

author manufactures intriguing characters. The only problem is that his off-the-wall folks seem to be on hand only to play off Herlihy. One of them is Dale O'Dell, a personal trainer (and Herlihy's ex-girlfriend) who is studying to be a physician's assistant but spending most of her time catering to pretty-boy Doug Ballard, hairdresser-turned-male-model.

Connelly's *Blue Collar Boston Cool* is R-rated, with f-bombs and other earthy language plus plenty of sexual references. With macho repartee dripping off of the page, it's probably not the sort of crime caper that's going to appeal to a female audience.

Gary Presley