

Cooler than Blood

Robert Lane

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PI Jake is at once a classic noir character and something entirely his own, making for a fascinating protagonist.

Cooler than Blood by Robert Lane is a modern take on the classic film noir PI trope. It is at once a familiar and unfamiliar story, gripping and highly enjoyable.

Jacob (Jake) Travis is a retired Army Ranger who usually spends his time sailing and investigating large-scale boat insurance fraud along the Gulf coast of Florida. He gets pulled into an investigation to find Jenny, an old flame's missing eighteen-year-old niece, who killed her would-be rapist then disappeared along with \$284,000 in drug money. The police think the eighteen-year-old left of her own accord. Jake tracks down the rapist's brothers and gets further embroiled with an organized crime ring. When Jenny is abducted from her original kidnappers, he follows lead after lead, searching for the girl. The final twist is a fox in the hen house—both simple and cunning.

Jake is at once the cliché, winsome, rough-and-tumble private eye, and something entirely his own. He is already in a relationship at the start of the novel, and though both Jenny and her aunt are frequently described as attractive, he does not give up Kathleen for either. His own characteristically charming and indirect explanation for this comes early on, when he says self-congratulatingly, "Call me Mr. Monogamy, but if you don't know what the hell an anchor is for, you'd better get your ass off the water."

One cannot help but like Jake. Despite the historical evidence (shoot-outs on the water, bodies buried in the sand, wartime bloodshed, etc.), he never actually kills anyone on the page. Jenny does—she stabs her rapist with a piece of driftwood—but Jake does not. He only talks about it, and knocks a few other characters around. This belies some of his purported moral ambiguity and makes him very interesting.

The book's major flaw is the chapters from Jenny's point of view. Her voice is not convincing as an eighteen-year-old girl, and her turns of phrase are sometimes too reminiscent of Jake's. The reader is given to understand that her father was very similar to Jake, and that Jenny has had a life that would allow her to manifest a certain jaded attitude; however, a girl who spent her youth on a cheerleading squad would likely have internalized the nuances of typical teenage speech patterns.

Jake's first-person narrative runs the gambit from charming stream of consciousness to artful—and telling—self-editing. Lane really draws one into Jake's mind. Fans of noir novels will enjoy this tale.

EMERSON M. FULLER (August 20, 2014)

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