

## Naked We Came

**Robert Lane**

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*Naked We Came is an emotionally austere and endlessly surprising thriller that brings new depth to the Jake Travis series.*

Robert Lane's *Naked We Came* finds the rakish and irresistible Jake Travis back in the thick of unfortunate circumstances—and this time, they hit a little too close to home. Replete with the wit and charm that characterize Lane's singular style, this is a thriller with heart.

When the body of a local ne'er-do-well, Hawkins, washes up near Travis's beach, the former soldier knows that serious trouble is brewing. The deceased had a history with Travis, who long suspected that Hawkins might be responsible for his sister's disappearance decades before. Travis's suspicions might have been resolved, but the connection persists, and soon he finds himself as the top suspect in the investigation.

Countermeasures force Travis to confront the jagged family memories that he's long tried to drown in booze and sensuality. Suddenly, he's on a collision course with the Russian mob (which is very aware of its nation's interference in the American elections, thanks), the CIA, and a cloyingly apologetic trust fund kid, all of whom have a stake in keeping the story of Travis's family's dissolution buried. If Travis is to navigate their traps unscathed, it will require that he trust his instincts as never before.

Jake Travis remains a character who shines among other genre leads. His dialogue is snappy, his appetites are insatiable, and his fearlessness when it comes to confronting, and besting, the worst of the worst makes him an able investigator. *Naked* maintains those qualities, but also introduces an intimacy and vulnerability to Travis's character that was less apparent in previous stories.

As Travis struggles through his feelings of guilt and mourning, his able facade threatens to crumble. Scenes in which he wrangles his demons—with booze, as always, though this time to less jovial effect—are raw and affecting:

*Alcohol is sex without rapture. It takes you to the edge of all your desires—and leaves you there, dripping with heat and struggling to breathe. It is both soaring anticipation and hollow disappointment. It is consistent.*

Travis is less nimble than usual as he bounces between the duplicitous characters and fellow survivors who make up the rest of the cast—uncertain about whom he can trust, and yet still too quick to believe strangers' stories. Villains, viewed through his perspective, are formidable but hazily constructed as a result, while similarly vulnerable allies receive somewhat less than his typical self-emptying care. Travis's sense of self seems more at risk than even his life, including in scenes where he's facing down mobsters and government plots.

A bracing pace seems designed to leave little space for Travis's introspection, resulting in a plot that is both engrossing and distancing. The minute details of the investigation take a backseat to the protagonist's personal turmoil. An emotionally satisfying conclusion comes as a true surprise as a result—one that strains credulity, perhaps,

but that gives Travis back his center.

The muggy South is endearingly constructed throughout—practically a secondary character, from its beach sunsets and entrancing waves, to the down-home settings where ancillary characters seek to hide. Travis's worshipful postures towards women—even Florida becomes a she, and its originator a goddess, in his loving gaze—add a lusty element.

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MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July 13, 2017)

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