



New Jersey Noir

William Baer

Able Muse Press (Feb 26, 2018)

Softcover \$22.95 (266pp)

978-1-927409-82-4

Writing is crisp, sarcastic, and wryly funny, steeped in New Jersey lore and anecdotes that add great historical and cultural dimensions to its mystery.

When wisecracking and smoothly confident private investigator Jack Colt goes on the hunt for his uncle's killer, his case widens to include a powerful judge, local mob figures, and even the governor's mansion. William Baer's *New Jersey Noir* is an entertaining and delightful homage to the Garden State.

Colt, the thirty-something proud descendant of the gun maker, narrates the fast-paced mystery. It unfolds over a ten-day period in a personable, if somewhat world-weary, manner. Colt realizes that his uncle's death might overlap with several other ongoing cases, even one previously considered solved. Postcards of Asbury Park with the words "You're next" keep popping up, and Colt is hired by a dead woman to find her killer.

There's a lot going on in this novel, but it's a good kind of busy. Colt is a striking protagonist who doesn't take guff from anyone. The lovely Roxanne, a California transplant who makes his office hum, assists him. Her information-laden reports on various suspects are italicized for better emphasis. The book is steeped in New Jersey lore and anecdotes that add great historical and cultural dimensions to the story, whether they involve George Washington or an infamous 1966 cold case.

Writing is crisp, sarcastic, and wryly funny in spots. There initially appear to be three intertwining stories, with Colt's detective pursuits as the main one. An unknown masked man appears to be watching a woman sleep; a Q&A session involving someone's brother and his fiancée and a tragic accident also come in. All connect by the book's powerful conclusion in a way that is highly surprising.

Characters are authentic and realistic. Dialogue is brisk and to the point. Colt's penchant for quoting classic movie lines is endearing, especially when other characters fail to catch their relevance.

Intended as the first book in a series, *New Jersey Noir* introduces an ultracool hometown detective from Paterson, set perfectly in his well-detailed locales.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (January/February 2018)

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