

Not Without Risk

Pete Trewin

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Not Without Risk is filled with twists and turns from the get-go.

In Pete Trewin's engaging crime novel, *Not Without Risk*, an unwitting underdog is caught in the throes of corruption.

Martin Bennett, a stroke survivor who has been given a second chance at life, has doctor's orders to remove as much stress from his life as possible. He is having a difficult time recovering from his broken marriage and job issues. Irony immediately steps in when he witnesses the murder of John Hardin, a man he hasn't seen in years. Martin risks his life to investigate John's mysterious demise.

Not Without Risk is filled with twists and turns from the get-go. The opening hospital scene, in which Martin's life hangs in the balance, is riddled with uncertainty. The scene shifts to a neutral situation when John enters, then shifts again because of his untimely death. This shifting from one aspect of uncertainty to the next becomes a driving force for the whole of the narrative.

Dialogue that concentrates on relationships over fast-clipped scenes sets the pace in this crime thriller. A small but elusive cast finds characters functioning primarily as red herrings, introduced into the story line in snippets via alternating scenes. These constant changes play a critical role in providing underlying plot tension, behind-the-scenes action, and clues to possible culprits. Chapters close on cliffhangers that are frequently not resolved until several sections later, and realities are mixed in with untruths.

The narrative places dodgy fictional characters within realistic settings, such as Liverpool and surrounding areas—Speke, Huyton, and Kirkby—in Merseyside. Secondary topics include scandals and money laundering, sheep rustling, the sale of illegal meat, drug gangs, and housing projects.

Underdogs are not limited to the protagonist. Many of the characters are evasive and are either pawns or perpetrators of corruption. Although this good-versus-evil theme flows well, it is tricky to know who is truly good or bad until close to the end of the book; characters variously portray both aspects.

Dilapidated backdrops set the tone, augmenting the book's overarching theme of corruption and creating a dark, near dystopian aura. Balance comes through reflections on "the good old days," when Liverpool contained plenty of green space and homes weren't deliberately being torn down to create new housing projects. Even though these incessant reflections feel more like filler than like direct narrative ties, the twists in the mystery overshadow the moments of ennui enough to keep the story flowing and draw the story to a satisfying conclusion. *Not Without Risk* is a nuanced work of crime fiction.

ANITA LOCK (May 25, 2018)

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