

Slow Burn

Andrew Welsh-Huggins

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Brisk pacing and a complex plot make this mystery novel a juicy, satisfying thriller.

Slow Burn follows *Fourth Down and Out* as the second Andy Hayes mystery by Andrew Welsh-Huggins. Private investigator Andy is struggling in both his personal and professional lives when the grandmother of a convicted arsonist/murderer contacts him with a request to clear her grandson, who confessed to the crime. The case looks like a loser, which makes it about right for Andy. This fast-paced, complex mystery will satisfy genre fans, while spotlighting its Columbus, Ohio, setting.

Andy is already infamous around town for his crimes as a point-shaving Ohio State football star and tentatively embarking on a new relationship with college professor Anne. He's also broke and therefore happy to take on the case of Aaron Custer, who was a college-aged drunk and convicted arsonist prior to the tragedy on Orton Avenue, where a house fire killed three college students and badly injured a fourth. Aaron argued with one of the victims just hours before, had a history of setting fires, and left a fingerprint on the lighter that set the blaze. He quickly confessed to the crime, but the kicker is that he doesn't remember anything about the night in question: he is simply convinced by the evidence, as is everyone else in town. His grandmother wants Andy to take another look, as rumors of a dissenting witness have arisen. Andy's investigations will involve big oil and fracking, the plight of Columbus's homeless population, a local gang dealing in heroin, and a high-profile ex-girlfriend—and will endanger his fragile new relationship and his life.

Brisk pacing and a convoluted plot make *Slow Burn* a juicy, satisfying thriller as Andy follows multiple improbable but increasingly convincing leads; two lovely women playing on his affections not only add drama but come alive as substantial characters in their own right. The political maneuverings of the oil industry and opposing activism on the Ohio State campus make for an intriguing subplot. Solid, clean prose and the wry, often pessimistic tone of Andy himself round out a rousing read that will gratify the most jaded of mystery fans, with added interest for those familiar with Columbus.

JULIA JENKINS (Summer 2015)

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