

The Disposables

David Putnam

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For those who crave fast-paced, noir-like thrillers, David Putnam's The Disposables is a novel that won't disappoint.

Combining the pace of a thriller, the tone of noir, the style of hard-boiled fiction, and the plot of a crime novel is a difficult and delicate task when it comes to detective fiction, but David Putnam has managed to merge all these genres with finesse in his debut novel, *The Disposables*. This novel has a quick pace and also delves into a topic rarely covered in crime fiction—the abuse of children.

What makes this novel even more compelling is that the protagonist, Bruno Johnson, isn't the typical good cop seeking justice; he's an aging ex-cop who has just been released from jail for killing a murderer while on the job. Altruistic and complex, Bruno has seen it all without becoming the cynical, unemotional old cop waiting for retirement. Instead, he is determined to save small abused children, the disposables, whom he has encountered through his time as a cop.

The Disposables is filled with seedy characters and a palpable grittiness. The author served as a cop in many criminal fields, including narcotics, violent crime, and SWAT, which undoubtedly contributes to the characters' authenticity. The bad guys aren't predictable or identical but diverse and developed. Just like the denizens of any large metropolis—from the drug-addicted hooker to the small-time drug dealers to the cops who have lost the line between good and bad—this novel presents the underbelly of city life through believable, conflicted characters.

In some crime novels, too many characters obstruct the plot and slow down the drive. This isn't the case with *The Disposables*. Putnam weaves the many characters through the plot and subplots so successfully that it vitalizes the narrative smoothly. Besides Bruno's calculated plot to save abused children, his old partner asks him to help with a case in which an arsonist is torching victims with gasoline. Even after twenty years of experience, Bruno still can't become hardened to the horrifying crime, saying, "I'd seen my share of burnt people, charred people, an image sewn into all your senses, the reek, the stark fear forever frozen in the victim's eyes."

The Disposables is an entrancing read because it's laden with tension and action. Its plot is deftly crafted and the pace is unforgiving. Putnam's complicated characters have clear, real motives that many novels of this genre often fail to deliver. There's dirt, revenge, and deceit. It's what a crime thriller should be. For those who crave fast-paced, noir-like thrillers, *The Disposables* is a novel that won't disappoint.

MONICA CARTER (April 25, 2014)

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