ForeWord Reviews

They Fall Hard: A Gil Yates Private Investigator Novel
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Richard Manley is dying of cancer. The illegitimate child of World Champion Heavyweight Boxer Buddy Benson, Manley has some things he wants to know before he passes away. Was his father's untimely death really a murder? Did he lose the two fights to Claudio "The Mouth" Stone on purpose? To get these questions answered, he hires private investigator Gil Yates to take a look into the forty-year-old case.

Yates is an odd duck. His "day job" is as a real estate agent in his father-in-law's realty office. His wife, not-so-affectionately referred to as Tyranny Rex, and his father-in-law, referred to as a number of things (none of them flattering), do not know or believe that Yates's real job is as a private investigator. And he's a high-end investigator, charging hundreds of thousands of dollars per case. Manley can't afford that in cash, but he owns a number of apartment complexes around the Los Angeles area.

Yates, whose passion is planting palm trees, works out a deal in which he acquires one or two of Manley's buildings in exchange for his services. First he goes to visit Manley's father's old opponent, who after a conversion to the Nation of Islam, is calling himself Abu Hambali. Suffering from Parkinson's disease, Hambali lives in a nursing home and is largely uncommunicative. Part of Yates's strategy is to impersonate a patient and see if he can get close to the man.

Meanwhile, he starts digging through Buddy Benson's past. Everybody has an opinion on whether he threw the fights, but nobody can really say why. Roaming all over L.A. and Las Vegas, Yates chats with a variety of family members, gamblers, low-lifes, and boxers, chipping away at a very old and cold case, working it mostly so he can provide some closure to Manley's life.

The author has previously published half a dozen popular novels featuring Gil Yates, and is also a palm tree enthusiast. Yates is engaging, quirky, and a mangler of the English language, putting his own unique personal spin on clichés, like: "The houses were crammed in cheek by dewlaps, and there were a lot of quaint paper signs inviting you to park in front of their places and be killed."

The plot is mediocre and, except for Richard Manley, most of the characters, though

eccentric, never seem to quite come to life. Neither, for that matter, does Los Angeles. Still, Yates is such a vivid, strange character—just weird enough to be fresh—that he alone makes the book a worthwhile read for fans of crime fiction.

Mark Terry