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Thriller

Wyatt: A Wyatt Warren Thriller
Garry Disher
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Wyatt is a thief. While he's had a long and successful career, due in large part to the meticulousness with which he plans his capers, advances in technology are making it harder for him to earn a living without getting caught. When the story begins he tries to steal $75,000 from a corrupt harbormaster, yet the escapade goes spectacularly awry. As he struggles with what to do next, one of the fences he has established a working relationship with in the past, Eddie Oberin, comes to him with a job that appears to be a winner: ambush an international courier, snatch his cargo, and get away with a small fortune in jewelry. Low risk, large reward.

This sounds like a pretty good deal, so even though he prefers to work alone, Wyatt agrees to join in the plot. But as things unfold he quickly discovers that the mission is not what it appeared to be. First off, the cargo is not a few handfuls of jewelry, but bearer bonds, instead. More than £260 million worth! Eddie and his psychotic, ex-stripper girlfriend Khandi double-cross and try to kill him. Wyatt is shot in the chest and left for dead. Then things get really ugly.

Pretty much everyone in this story is a villain, even the police detective who investigates the case. Wyatt, no exception, is a cold, emotionless professional who is hard to empathize with, let alone like. As the author relates, "He hated being questioned. There was no point to it. He never looked inwards, and there was nothing he wanted to impart to anyone." Those personality traits make for a decent bad guy, and they simultaneously build a character that is very challenging for readers to connect with. Yet, somehow, it works. Much like Luke Skywalker was defined by Darth Vader in *Star Wars*, Wyatt is revealed through the various scoundrels he interacts with. Alain Le Page, the courier, is the most interesting, yet all of the supporting cast are a lot of fun, even bit players like Ma, from whom Wyatt purchases his illicit weapons.

Garry Disher is one of Australia's best-known novelists. Winner of the Ned Kelly Award, he has published more than forty books, including *The Dragon Man*, *Kittyhawk Down*, *Snapshot*, and *Blue Moon*. This experience ensures *Wyatt* is a real page-turner. Unfortunately,

Disher turned out this book a bit too fast: In a few places he takes the easy way out, saving the day for his star rather than making him work through a challenge. The worst instance is near the end of the story: Wyatt decides to carry a single bullet in his pistol despite the fact that throughout the book he has carried a full magazine. Intended to make for a dramatic conclusion, it cheapens the end of an otherwise excellent story.

The plot is solid, pacing excellent, and the characterization first-rate. Fans of Barry Eisler and Ted Bell should also appreciate Disher, who, if he skips the shortcuts in future offerings, may wind up atop the thriller field.

Lawrence Kane