



The Devil Knows You're Dead

Lawrence Sanders

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Scudder is back, tracking a killer through the alleys of Hell's Kitchen and mapping the darker regions of the human soul.

Glenn Holtzman sits on top of the world, watching the sun set from his penthouse... half an hour later he's just another statistic, gunned down in a phone booth on Eleventh Avenue. When the cartridge casings of the fatal shots turn up on a well-known local Vietnam Vet the whole of the Big Apple knows it's an open and shut case. But not Scudder – this Yuppie lawyer has skeletons in his closet and Matt can hear them rattling.

The Devil Knows You're Dead Details

Date : Published September 2nd 1999 by Orion (first published 1993)

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Author : Lawrence Block

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From Reader Review The Devil Knows You're Dead for online ebook

Lynn says

Wonderful to read as always with strong recurring characters. Big changes at the end.

William says

A good beginning, and a superb and satisfying ending, both for the mystery and especially for the personal lives of Matt and Elaine.

Unfortunately, most of Block's books are 150 page novellas, padded with maddeningly repetitive, dull subpar dialogue and incessant descriptions of clothing and streets and dull, dull minutiae of Matt's sad life. I blame his publisher.

Of course, 8 Million Ways to Die (my review) and Out on the Cutting Edge (my review) are the brilliant exceptions. It's been 17 years since Sins of the Fathers, and Block was 55 years old when he wrote "Devil..." and perhaps his publisher is just too pushy about the number of pages it takes to make a profit in the business.... Whatever the reason, his books are mostly padded with crap.

There is, however, a lovely small subplot with the beautiful Jan, and how she copes with her terminal cancer. I have cancer, too, and I know some of what this is like. Mine appears to be suspended for now. God bless the UK National Health Service and all the extraordinary people who sail in her.

Block has famously never talked of his possible AA membership, but I would strongly suggest that every book he wrote after Matt (Block) goes sober is a "virtual AA meeting" for Block. They start out fine, you fall asleep in the too-dull middle, and then wake up for a rousing coffee/shootup at the end. Yes?

So I'm going to take a break from Block for a while, unless someone convinces me there is another unpadded masterpiece from him ahead, just awaiting my discovery.

Notes:

8.0% this starts out well. Good pacing and some nice dialogue with Elaine.

15.0% * sighs *.... dialogue constipation again. Around and around we go, with the same things repeated 5 different ways.

28.0% dull dialogue

31.0% ... infinite recaps of every previous book and story. Boring. Every single book now covers all the same old stories.

48.0% gah! Tons of prose that goes nowhere. It's as if every chapter has only one sentence that advances the plot!

49.0%

"That's remarkable," she said. "I didn't think there was a policeman or private detective anywhere in New York who wasn't trying to get a book published. Nobody's out looking for criminals these days. They're all looking for an agent."

53.0% terribly clumsy scene with Matt and Elaine. I feel manipulated.

56.0% nice dialogue in the interview with Julia.

71.0% ... Half this book is stupid, dull trivia of Matt's sad daily life. Shameful padding for higher book price. Which streets Matt uses, ad infinitum. What clothes people are wearing, ad infinitum. Previous book plots and characters, ad infinitum. Considering a new area to live, ad infinitum. Conversations about conversations about stuff that's been said three times before.

76.0% ... yet another rundown of part of the plot. First, Matt figures it out, then he explains it to the lawyer, then he explains it to Elaine, then he explains it to Lisa, then to Mick, etc etc. Lazy crappy writing.

84.0% ... omg, a nice quote.

I looked down into my glass. It held club soda, but the way I was gazing into it you'd have thought it was filled with something stronger. I used to stare like that into glasses of whiskey, as if they contained coded answers. All they did was dissolve the questions, but there was a time when that was enough."

85.0% "... omg Another good quote!

"You don't drink." As if that explained everything.

"So?"

"So a man has to do something, some fucking thing or other." He turned the key in the ignition, fed gas to the big engine. "It's nature," he said.

86.0% ... a lovely, thoughtful and important chat with the wonderful Jan. Poignant and full of personal truths. I can't believe half of every Block book is so full of crap now, when he clearly has the power to write these heartfelt and humane insights into who we are.

91.0% Info-dump to Elaine of the whole plot/crime... What we just learned in the preceding pages just before.

94.0% I have loved Bartok since I was in college in the 1970s.

"There are a couple of apartments for sale in the Parc Vendôme," I said, "and I'm sure there are others available in buildings all along West Fifty-seventh. I know you've always liked the one on the next block with the Art Deco lobby."

"And the one with the plaque that says Bela Bartok used to live there."

And here's the statue in London, that I pass often during my many cancer treatments at the superb Royal Marsden Hospital. God bless the National Health Service.

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Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Matt Scudder, PI

SETTING: New York

SERIES: #11 OF 18

RATING: 4.25

WHY: Matt Scudder's significant other, Elaine, has an acquaintance named Lisa Holtzmann. She and Matt get together with Lisa and her husband, Glenn. Matt doesn't care for Glenn at all. Shortly thereafter, Glenn is shot to death while making a phone call in a dicey part of town. The main suspect is a homeless man named George Sadecki. Matt is hired by George's brother, Tom, to see if he was innocent, as he believes. The plot was nicely complex. I liked the fact that Block didn't feel the need to resolve threads that weren't all that important. Scudder, always working on his sobriety, faces some challenges. This book marks a defined change in his life.

James Thane says

This is the eleventh entry in Lawrence Sanders's excellent Matthew Scudder series, and it remains my favorite book in the series. As the story opens, Scudder and his girlfriend, Elaine, are thrown together with a young couple named Glenn and Lisa Holtzmann. Elaine and Lisa are taking a class together; the Holtzmanns live in the same neighborhood as the hotel where Matt lives, and the two couples wind up going out to dinner one night.

Matt is not overly impressed. He and Elaine have little in common with the younger couple and there's something about Glenn that puts Matt off. Given that they're something like neighbors, Matt runs into Holtzmann occasionally on the street and Holtzmann keeps proposing that they get together for lunch. Matt always manages to find a reason for refusing the offer and then, suddenly, he no longer needs one when Holtzmann is gunned down while using a pay phone a couple of blocks from his apartment.

The police immediately charge a street person named George Sadecki with the killing, and the evidence seems overwhelming. The police do not recover the weapon used, but Sadecki, a Vietnam vet, has policed the area and the police find the shell casings in his jacket pocket. Sadecki, who has never been quite "right" mentally, admits that he might have killed Holtzmann, but he doesn't remember one way or the other.

Sadecki's brother, Tom, knows Matt from AA, and doesn't believe that George would have been capable of killing anyone. He knows the odds are long, but he convinces Matt to look into the case in the hope of giving him some sort of closure. Matt agrees, although the case looks open-and-shut, and he warns Tom Sadecki not to expect much.

In a case like this, SOP is to start by investigating the victim to see who, if anyone, might have had cause to wish him harm. On the surface, Glenn Holtzmann appears to be a pretty straightforward yuppie lawyer, but as Scudder begins poking around, he uncovers some secrets about the late Mr. Holtzmann that are troubling, to say the least.

The case itself is intriguing, but what sets this book apart for me, above all the others in the series, is that Scudder is presented with two very critical moral issues that are not really directly related to the case itself.

The real strength of this series has always been the development of the characters, Scudder in particular, and it's extremely interesting to watch him wrestle with these two issues.

To describe either dilemma would be to give away too much. Suffice it to say, that neither is easy, and both will require that Matt look deeply into his own soul in the hope of finding some sort of resolution. Fair warning: watching him do so may well require the reader to examine his or her own conscience as well. This is at least the third time I've read this book, and I'll eagerly look forward to it again as I make my way through this series the next time--one of my favorite crime novels of all.

Dan Schwent says

An acquaintance of Scudder's is gunned down at a pay phone and it looks like a homeless man is the culprit. The homeless man's brother hires Scudder to clear him. Scudder's investigation takes him through a world populated with transsexuals and blackmail. Also on Scudder's plate are the pancreatic cancer of his ex-girlfriend, his relationship with Elaine, and the affair he's having with the dead man's wife...

The Devil Knows You're Dead wasn't quite up to par with the rest of the Lawrence Sanders' Matthew Scudder series. It wasn't a bad book but the plot meandered and the resolution of the case felt tacked on. (view spoiler)

Scudder and his supporting cast continued to grow. The character pieces were the saving grace of the book, particularly Jan's predicament and TJ's reaction to the trannies.

To sum it up, TDKYD was worth a read but it wasn't the greatest of the Scudder books by any means.

Mark says

This novel about Matthew Scudder is quite an interesting one. It starts with the death of a fellow who is known to Scudder but he does not rate too much stock in the gents person. Anyhow the guy is dead and the police find a homeless man who was present at the crime-scene with the bullets of the gun in his pocket, an easy solution.

First Scudder gets approached by the brother of the "so-called" killer to find out if he was the killer as it is so out of character.

Secondly the widow has some questions about some money found in her apartment for which seems to be no logic reason.

Thirdly an old flame of Scudder contacts him because she needs a favor.

All three story-lines make a very coherent tale that keeps you guessing up till the end about what happened and is going to happen. Scudder gets into trouble with Elaine because she feels shut out as he has not explained anything about certain aspects of the three matters at hand.

The solutions in this book are both original as insightful in the third case. Mr Block does write a very humane story about living and dying in the beautiful portrayal of New York in all of its aspects.

A must read in the genre.

Bill Kerwin says

This time, a less violent, more melancholic Scudder: less darkness without, more darkness within. It is a welcome change, at least in theory, but I found the resulting plot more meandering than leisurely, the resolution more a slight surprise than a fulfillment.

Matt is hired by the brother of a homeless man held for the murder of a solid citizen, an innocent who was using a neighborhood pay phone when somebody put bullets in head. Although Matt believes the homeless man is probably guilty, he starts to investigation anyway, and soon discovers the citizen in question is not so solid or innocent after all. In addition, Matt has his own questions to answer: his direction in life, his long-standing relationship with Elaine, and another relationship as well.

As always, Block does what he does very well. I just didn't think this was a compelling book.

Aditya says

A middling book to start off a new year *The Devil Knows You're Dead* is the most underwhelming entry in the Scudder series so far. The series was stagnating before it was revitalized by a change in approach at book #8. Meandering mysteries gave way to suspenseful thrillers as Block even picked up his only best novel Edgar award during that phase. This is a reversion to the older days - a much slower whodunnit that doesn't really work.

The main problem is when the series started, Block wrote 200 page mystery novellas with just a hint of characterization to stand out amidst competition. But this book is a 350 page slice of life story set in New York with just a hint of mystery to keep the fans appeased. And this simply has not got enough going for itself to work as a character piece. The main plot has a random murder, another random coincidence to solve it and a belaboured resolution about which no one seems particularly bothered. The series always had unheralded yet strong plots, so it is surprising the main plot is so bare bones.

There is neither any character growth nor much dramatic conflict to speak of. Scudder's ex wants his help to euthanize herself while Scudder also cheats on his girlfriend. So Block had ample opportunity to provide the necessary tension but he is content setting up interesting boobytraps without ever really springing them. The problem is Block's writing is greater than the sum of it's parts. When the characterization is an added bonus on the mystery, it seems low key yet subtle. When the characters become the selling point almost every one other than Scudder seems half baked. Block's characterization just proves the adage less is more.

The usual flashes of Block's wry humor is present so it is not a chore to read even though nothing interesting really happens for the most part. But at the end of the day it is undeniably regressive and not recommended to anyone but author/series fans. Rating - 3/5

Richard White says

Excellent, but what did you expect. The entire series is excellent.

Jaret says

Another fun episode in the Matthew Scudder series. At first, I was disappointed in the mystery. It seemed like such a let down. But, Lawrence Block twisted the ending and left me with the fun surprise I have come to love with his writing. I also loved the twists and turns in Matthew's personal life in this episode. I liked the way that part of the story ended as well.

carol. says

This one redeemed the Scudder series for me. I understand why other readers might feel it doesn't compare with its immediate predecessors: very little violence, no emotional attachment to the victim and almost no blood, although Matt does seem to be in several sorts of emotional danger. However, the emotional subplots are the trimmings that elevate the Scudder series above ordinary noir detective or mystery thriller going for the roller-coaster climb, and it's why the Scudder series consistently yields such satisfying reads.

Elaine and Scudder are settling into a solid companionship, and she convinces him to go on a couple-date with Lisa, a woman she met in an art class, and her husband, Glenn. While the women hit it off, the men don't, despite Glenn's obvious enthusiasm for Matt's work. In the next few weeks, Glenn runs into Scudder a few times, ostensibly to discuss writing a book. Matt would rather avoid him--there's something sly and sneaky about ol' Glenn. Shockingly, Glenn is gunned down while making a call at a public telephone not long after they meet. Police are certain they have the killer, a homeless guy who is mostly living in the Vietnam war. The suspect's brother and Lisa both entreat Scudder to get involved, and he finds himself unenthusiastically conducting an investigation. An exchange from when Scudder meets up with Durkin perfectly summarizes the police reaction:

"You know what's wrong with the case, Joe?"

"The only thing wrong with it is you're taking an interest. Aside from that it's perfect."

Scudder's ex, Jan, reappears from the past with some significant life events and blows him into a tailspin. There are some fascinating conversations that sound emotionally authentic around Jan's storyline. However, the whiff of *carpe diem* has an unanticipated effect on Scudder's decision-making. While I can understand some of his reasoning, I don't respect his behavior. Others may have found their squirm point in prior books; this one had mine. It's a measure of Block's skill as a writer that he can create such conflict in the reader about the justification of Matt's actions. Elaine doesn't even know the half of it when she exclaims, "You've got him buying guns and selling dope and hanging out with transsexuals. You're a wonderful positive influence on the boy."

I love that Block is willing to be judgement-neutral with his characters, whether gender-bending Julia, TJ's fascination with her, or the lawyer Kaplan figuring out how to best serve his client. Almost everyone's a little dirty in this one, except the charming elderly publisher who hired Glenn. Listening to a murderer explain why assisting a suicide is morally wrong was fascinating, and almost understandable. As a by-product, the investigation gives us a little insight into a transsexual's life, and I respect Block for not playing up the

freak/shock factor. Likewise, he treats the homeless and mentally ill suspect with a great deal of sensitivity. The suspect's brother perfectly summarizes why the suspect should be free if he isn't guilty: "I don't want to glamorize the life he leads, make him sound like some kind of Noble Savage. It's a horrible life. He lives like an animal, he lives in fear and torment... I wouldn't live his life for the world, but it's his life, do you follow me? It's his f-ing life so let him f-ing live it."

Levity was added in Block's usual sly asides, including an insult about the Big Book of AA, which Scudder describes as "the sophistication level was that of a Rotary Club Breakfast in a small town in Iowa." Snerk. Then there was the off-handed slap at Block's competitors: "I didn't think there was a policeman or private detective anywhere in New York who wasn't trying to get a book published. Nobody's out looking for criminals these days. They are all looking for agents."

Thankfully, Block found a good one.

Kemper says

Just as Babe Ruth couldn't hit a home run with every at bat or Joe Montana couldn't throw a touchdown pass on every throw, even Lawrence Block had to eventually produce a Matt Scudder novel that's just 'pretty damn good' instead of 'freakin' awesome'.

A yuppie lawyer gets murdered when making a call at a payphone, and everyone thinks that a homeless and disturbed Vietnam veteran was the killer. Even the vet isn't sure if he did it or not but admits he could have. The vet's brother asks Matt to check it out to make sure his brother isn't being railroaded. Matt's a little hesitant because he had actually met the victim a few times, but decides to take the case.

As he looks into the murder, Matt has to make some decisions about his on-going relationship with Elaine. He also gets some bad news from an old friend as well as an unusual request.

There's nothing really wrong with this book. But after the crazy creative high that Block had been on with Scudder since *8 Million Ways To Die*, it was probably inevitable that he'd have to cool off a bit.

Block seemed a bit unfocused and out of sync in this one. He almost always used the parallel stories of Matt working on a case while working through some stuff in his personal life, and this one fits that formula perfectly. There's just a lack of energy and momentum in this one that was present in the previous books. Part of the issue may be the lack of a strong villain in this, and after the wicked line of bad guys Matt had been dealing with in the previous books, that makes this one seem a bit less urgent and dangerous.

Plus, this has a rare story telling miscue by Block. (view spoiler)

Even though it's just an average Scudder, an average Scudder is still better than 90% of what you'd find in the mystery section of any bookstore.

Anthony Vacca says

After the high-octane thrills of the last three Matthew Scudder novels--which found our ex-cop, ex-alcoholic PI immersed in mysteries which pitted him against a series of pathetic yet ultra-dangerous freaks--*The Devil Knows Your Dead* is a return to the banal murder mysteries of the first few entries in this series that could almost be sold as pitch-black tragicomedies if there wasn't the fact that we had to watch Matthew squirm through several hundred pages of personal dilemmas. In a lot of ways, this is Block's most deliberate attempt to date at this brand of literary novel masquerading as a grocery-store mystery. (I meant that as a compliment even if it sounds like mean kidding.)

This time around the mystery which serves as a vehicle for the reader to hop into the mind of our (sometimes) hero involves a skeezy yuppie that gets shot to shit while making a late night payphone call in a part of the Alphabet City that he has no business being in. When a derelict Vietnam veteran gets tagged as the killer, the suspect's brother hires Matthew to figure out whether or not his brother is getting railroaded by the police force. To make matters worse, Matthew kind of knew but didn't like the victim, and is also hired by the victim's wife to look into her husband's increasingly sketchy personal affairs.

In a lot of ways this book feels like Block wanted to give the expectations and conventions of the genre a hearty "fuck you," and for the most part this aspect of the novel goes off like gangbusters. As Matthew finds himself getting into a very serious relationship with his girlfriend of the last few novels (an ex-call girl who Matthew has shared a various of relationships with: friend, client, business partner, protector and, finally, lover), he begins to grow increasingly restless. It doesn't help matters when an old flame calls up Matthew to tell him that she is dying from cancer and wants to know if he can do her a bitch of a favor. Add in an outrageous transsexual, a few late-nite rap sessions with BFF Mick "The Butcher" Ballou, some inventive uses of rhyme from Matthew's sidekick, the young street hustler TJ, and the over-all result is an entertaining but gloomy and paced and digressing and morally dense meditation on what it means to truly know and trust another person and how most of us fuck it up every time it really counts.

Piker7977 says

An acquaintance of Matthew Scudder's is murdered in a park. The deceased was an attorney for a printing press who also had an interest in Scudder's choice of work. He left behind a curious amount of funds to his pretty young wife. Scudder's mission is to unravel the mysterious aura surrounding the dead man's character while considering where his own life is headed...and who will accompany him along that journey.

I feel obligated to give a brief synopsis for these books before going into my thoughts. In the above description, most of what you read is filler whereas the heart of *The Devil Knows You're Dead* is in the second half of the last sentence. In this entry we delve deep into Scudder's thoughts on his life including his sobriety, love life, personal motivations, and individual code. Some of these are explicitly described by Block through Matt's inner narration while the others are revealed through the events in the book. The heavy emphasis on character study may sound like a bore at first but, trust me my friends, it slightly departs from the crime genre in a manner that is interesting, compelling, and profound.

At this stage in his life Matt is in limbo. Sober with a serious girlfriend, he still finds himself detached from the things that most people care about. I've always like this about our main character: his flaws. Matt is not what one would call honorable nor is he particularly deviant. He is human. And his human characteristics are where the surprises come into play, not only in this entry but in the other books as well. For instance, when a

colleague inquires about the sexual habits of a transsexual prostitute, Scudder shrugs and states that it would simply make a man feel good. He lets a youth deal drugs and buy guns to progress his own motives. What is interesting is that he does not exactly condone this behavior as he understands that people must do tasks which are not agreeable to a worldly view. This is not lawful but Matt probably considers these ideals just. Just like in previous novels, when he used violence as a means of justice and retribution, his reasoning and instincts in *The Devil Knows You're Dead* make the reader cringe while acknowledging that they might have done the same thing under similar circumstances.

The co-characters are even more interesting than in previous novels. Especially regarding TJ. TJ is a little more street savvy and edgy in this book whereas he was an urban teenage caricature before. We get a better handle on how dangerous his life is and how he is able to come up with the information for Scudder. Elaine and Mick are wonderful as always but reader beware...they are eclipsed by a familiar face from other novels. The dimensions that this character brings to the plot are worth the price of the dust cover. This oddball assortment of derelicts make a great supporting cast for our (anti?) hero as he seems to only relate to those who are just as (if not more) screwed up than he is.

If you've read this far in sequence then be prepared for some twists. The surprises aren't exactly of the smoking gun, red herring type but result from our character's self doubts, revelations, and flaws. Those that enjoy the character are in for a treat.

Brandon says

A man is gunned down and the person deemed responsible is caught red handed at the scene of the crime. While the accused's brother realizes that the evidence is damning, he cannot imagine his brother committing such a horrible act. He remembered meeting a man who identified himself as a detective during an AA meeting and reaches out for his help. The man in question is Matt Scudder and he agrees to take the case even though he has his doubts he'll make a difference.

As with all the books in Block's Scudder series, one of the most important characters is New York City itself. Whether he's writing about dingy bars like the infamous Grogen's or the folks that live in the city's high-end condos, Block finds away to let the Big Apple play a central role in all of Matt's cases. While talking with a homeless man about the shooting, the man tells Scudder that even though he shares the same neighborhood as the deceased, they couldn't be further apart.

"Man, how would they know him? He didn't live here."

"Of course he did," I said. "You can see his building from here."

He made a show of following my finger as I pointed at the top floors of Holtzmann's apartment building. "Right," he said. "That's where he lived, up on the fortieth floor."

The twenty-eighth, I thought.

"That's another country up there," he said. "Man commuted from the fortieth floor over there to some other fortieth floor where his office is at. Where you and me are is the street. Man like that, the street's just a place he's got to pass through twice a day, getting from one fortieth floor

to another."

The Devil Knows You're Dead is seemingly about Matt wandering through different worlds without ever leaving New York City. However, I suppose that's life in and of itself. No one carries the exact same experiences that make up a life and because of this, everyone seemingly exists within a different world. With Scudder being a detective, he finds himself drifting in and out of the lives of others, trying to see the world from their eyes while absorbing as much as possible.

Of course while the crime plays an important part in this novel, it's what Matt experiences in the course of the investigation that gives the story its legs. Whether he's exposing his sometimes sidekick TJ to questionable situations, comforting an old friend who has received devastating news or figuring out where his relationship with his girlfriend Elaine stands, The Devil Knows You're Dead is a very important novel for the character of Matt Scudder.
