



Killer's Wedge

Ed McBain

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Her game was death -

and her name was Virginia Dodge. She was out to put a bullet through Steve Carella's brain, and she didn't care if she has to kill all the boys in the 87th Precinct to do it.

So Virginia, armed with gun and bottle of nitroglycerin, spent a quiet afternoon in the precinct house, terrorizing Lieutenant Byrnes and his detectives with her clever little homemade bomb. They all sat there waiting for Steve Carella. Could all the men of the 87th, prisoners of one crazy broad, be powerless to save Carella from his rendezvous with death...?

Killer's Wedge Details

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K says

Seven books into the 87th Precinct series and McBain throws in a very interesting curve ball. Instead of the usual scenario, with the detective squad investigating a few incidents, a lone woman, Virginia Dodge, walks into the 87th building, up the stairs to the detectives' desk area, takes a seat within that area, stating she's looking for Steve Carella, who happens to be out on a case. When politely asked to wait outside the area, she produces a .38 revolver and manages to completely take over the squad room! She threatens that she also possesses a bottle of Nitroglycerin that she's willing to explode, if the detectives fail to hand over their weapons.

So, here's where I would have knocked my rating down to a 3; this bit of the plot stretches incredulity to the breaking point. No way, no how would a group of police detectives (seasoned to varying degrees, but none are rookies) agree to put up their weapons and become willing hostages. As soon as she produced the weapon, she would have been shot by any number of the cops, before she even had the chance to tell them about the nitro (forget the fact that she could have brought a weapon into the station so easily, but one must remember the times in which these stories are set).

But, this story isn't really about whether or not it's believable. It's more of a fascinating one-act play of sorts-- how each of the detectives caught up in the squad room reacts, thinks, and behaves under these preposterous circumstances. Their gradual transition of emotion, from amusement, tolerance, all the way to pure hatred for this crazy woman is really where this book shines. The story is very short and moves at a rapid clip, so it doesn't really bog down where it easily might have. Oh, there's a few points where the reader is shifted outside the building, but for the most part, this story is more or less carried out in the thoughts of the cops and the eventually sadistic actions of Virginia.

And that's why I moved it back up from a 3 star rating to 3.5 (forced to round up to 4 stars). No, it's not a true, full-blown 87th Precinct best of breed, but I found myself completely immersed and entertained, so much so, that I stayed up longer than usual to finish it in one day. Not my typical M.O., but then again, this isn't the typical M.O. for one of this series. I can accept both with pleasure.

Nigel Bird says

A lady walked into a bar.

Ouch.

It was an iron bar.

A lady walks into the 87th Precinct squad room.

Ouch.

She was carrying a revolver and a jar of nitroglycerine and she wanted Steve Carella dead.

Carella doesn't know this, of course. He's over at the doctor's finding out that his wife is pregnant and that his life (whatever's left of it) will never be the same.

The woman with the jar of sauce is called Virginia and she doesn't give a monkey's about Carella's news. As long as she gets to blow his head off, she doesn't care about many things. And she has lots of time. All the time in the world.

The reason she wants Carella dead is that she holds him responsible for killing her husband. He didn't. The only part he had to play was arresting him and sending him to the prison in which he died.

It's the job of Kling, Meyer, Byrnes and Cotton Hawes to persuade her on the error of her ways. The problem they have is that she's holding them hostage and seems unstable enough to blow the department up and them with it if they try anything. There's an interesting examination of the loyalties of the men here. Byrne, who possibly feels the most love for Carella, is in the position of having to weigh up the lives of everyone in the room against that of one individual. The others, all brothers in the 87th, are prepared to put their lives on the line if need be and don't necessarily agree with their boss's approach.

As time goes on, the detectives all take turns in trying to calm the situation and get themselves out of a mighty hole. Not that Virginia's listening. She's sharp and alert and has a mean streak that's wider than the band of grey in Hawes's hair.

In a parallel universe of sorts, Carella is trying to get to the bottom of a suicide that doesn't smell right. There are similarities between the situations at the station and on the case. Both are set in confined spaces. Each is limited by the ticking of the clock. None of the people involved are in the mood to cooperate and Carella is the main player.

Star of the show is a violent hooker who brings a pleasing freshness to proceedings and keeps life in the squad room interesting when it might otherwise have lost some lustre.

The pressure builds at the station and in the family home of the suicide/murder victim. Tension mounts at a steady and pleasing pace and there are enough spanners in the works and plot twists to keep the eyes glued to the page.

Lots to love about this one. It stretches plausibility on occasion, but McBain handles it all with enough skill to force any questions to the back of the mind.

Killer's Wedge is another gem in the series. It may be less polished than some, but its value is high all the same. Go on. Give it a rub and watch it sparkle.

Randy says

When Virginia Dodge walked into the detective's room at the 87th Precinct, no one thought anything about it until she pulled a gun. She was there to kill Steve Carella because he'd arrested her husband in the course of a robbery where he'd shot a man, testified at his trial, and got him sentenced to prison for a stiff time (he was a career criminal). She'd just got word he'd died of tuberculosis and blamed Carella for "killing" her man.

Her wedge was a bottle of nitroglycerin in her purse and she was planning to hold the detectives hostage

until Carella arrived, shoot him, then make her getaway because of the nitro.

Carella was out investigating a suicide of a rich old man with three sons who inherited everything and had found his body hanging in a locked den with no windows.

It had to be suicide, right?

Carella was suspicious of course, so was spending extra time there, investigating, while the tense standoff was going on back at the 87th.

Michael says

You know when a long running tv series gets about three quarters through the season it often kicks out an episode where our heroes get caught up in a bank siege or some other contrivance that sees them confined to one or two rooms. Basically they spent all the budget on flashier episodes. Killer's Wedge feels a bit like one of those but in a book. It's easy to become over critical though and forget that 87th Precinct was never meant to be still being appraised, praised and loved over half a century later. They were just 25cent pocket book ephemera that folk might fill a dinner hour or a boring commute with.

A woman turns up at the 87th squad room armed with a gun, a bottle of nitro and a heart filled with hate for Detective Steve Carella. Most of the shift of detectives are present, or stumble in on the proceedings, with the exception of Carella himself. He's off at a creaky old mansion trying to solve a locked room mystery. And it's a very dull mystery with even duller suspects that has the detective mainly fiddling with the locked door, bits of string and crow bars.

Meanwhile back at the squad room various members of the shift roster, including our new hero Cotton Hawes try to work out a way to divest the murderous revenge lady of her weapons. The tension gets cranked to the max for sure, and there's a great wildcard character introduced to the mix, a girl who may or may not have slit a gang leader's throat... but I just didn't enjoy the experience. On the plus side we did get a bit of a look at the inner workings of the precinct. Aside from all that I look forward to the boys getting back to what they do best - fighting crime and shooting the breeze.

Karl says

This is the first hardcover edition copy write 1959 published by Simon and Schuster.

I originally owned the 'Permabooks' Pocket Books, Inc., New York, published in 1962 version of this book. This was perhaps my favorite cover for the book for which many multiple versions have been published. Somewhere in moving it must have gotten lost.

From 1961–1962 there was a television show about the 87th precinct. This book was one of its episodes, season one (1961) episode two and was titled "Lady in Waiting". The series stars were Robert Lansing, Ron Harper, Gregory Walcott. I know of the show's existence and sadly have never seen an episode. If someone knows where it can be seen or purchased please let me know, as I do not think it is available on DVD.

The book begins with Virginia Dodge, who is determined to put a bullet through Steve Carella's brain, and she doesn't care if she has to kill all the boys in the 87th Precinct in the process. Armed with a gun and a

bottle of nitro-glycerin she spends an afternoon terrorizing Lieutenant Byrnes and his men with her clever little home-made bomb.

Curlyhair says

Still enjoying these books, well I was years ago when I read them.

Sean Harding says

McBain's books, and in particular his earlier ones were lean and tight and well written, packing the punches and building the tension, full of his trade mark procedural process and with good solid and actually believable mysteries. Crime fiction at its finest, not saving the world, not larger than life criminals but good solid crime fiction.

Jack says

This broad walks into a police station with a gun and bottle of nitroglycerin to kill the detective who arrested her husband, who died in prison. Clearly, the arresting detective is responsible.

So what are a chief detective and 3-4 other detectives to do? What would you do?

Thus is the beginning of a tough story in a tough town filled with tough people (through intention and circumstance). And there is a suicide that might or might not be a murder.

Excellently written and full of fantastic and sometimes hilarious descriptions, great characterization, this was a thoroughly entertaining read. At times I was screaming at the broad for her stupidity and maliciousness, but that indicates my own psychosis and how deeply we are drawn to the characters as real people by the author.

Do not let anyone drive a wedge between you and your reading this book. Unless you don't like good books. But you like good books, right? I thought so. Highly recommended.

James Thane says

One afternoon, a woman named Virginia Dodge walks into the detectives' squad room in the 87th Precinct asking for Detective Steve Carella. When informed that Carella is out on a case, Mrs. Dodge announces that she will wait. She helps herself to a seat at a desk and when told that she must wait outside the squad room, she pulls a .38 from her purse and says that she's fine right where she is.

She forces the four detectives in the room to surrender their own weapons and announces that she's on a mission to kill Carella. Carella had arrested her husband who was then sent to prison and who has just died there. She blames Carella for his death and is determined to exact her revenge. When the detectives begin to circle around, she pulls a bottle from her purse and sets it on the desk. It's Nitroglycerine, she says, and if

anyone comes closer, she will shoot the bottle and blow the entire precinct to hell and back.

The crisis plays out through a long afternoon and evening as each of the detectives speculates about whether there's really nitro in the bottle and about how they might outsmart Mrs. Dodge. Meanwhile, blissfully unaware, Steve Carella is investigating the apparent suicide of a very wealthy man whose body is discovered by the three sons who will inherit all his loot.

It's a classic locked room mystery and there seems no way that the man's death could not have been a suicide. But Carella isn't satisfied, and until he is, he's not going to leave. Eventually, of course, he will have to wrap up his investigation and return to the squad room. Will it still be standing when he gets there? If so, will the grieving widow exact her revenge?

To my mind, this short novel is one of the weaker entries in the series. The only criminal investigation in the book is Carella's investigation of the apparent suicide, which is not all that exciting. The crisis in the squad room should be filled with tension, but it seems so implausible that I had a hard time taking it seriously.

Committed fans of the 87th Precinct will certainly want to read the book, but more casual crime fiction readers who want to sample the series have any number of better books from which to choose.

Colin Mitchell says

This series gets better as they go on. This one sees Virginis Dodge walk into the squad room with a bottle of nitro -glycerine and a .38, saying she is going to kill Steve Carella. Meanwhile, Steve is looking into an apparent suicide. The story revolves around the hours that tick away as Virginia keeps the squad detectives hostage and their attempts to overpower her. Great descriptions of Grover Park in the October sunshine and the night skyline of the precinct as night approaches. A good read which passed the time on a sub-zero afternoon and evening.

Michael says

As I read this series in order, this was definitely one of the better ones. An angry women holds the squadroom hostage as she waits for one particular detective to return. She intends to kill him as an act of revenge.

Thus was a fairly suspenseful story. McBain has already proven in earlier volumes that he is not afraid to terminate characters, no matter how integral they might seem to the series overall. So this book keeps you in the edge of your seat in fear that one of your favorite detectives might find himself on the wrong end of the gun. Do one (or more) of the boys take one for the team? Find out! Read the book!

Melki says

A few days away from reading this book and I've decided to up the rating by one star.

True, it was not the best in the series. The widow of a slain criminal holding the precinct hostage with a gun and a bottle of nitroglycerin? Yeah...that's pretty far-fetched, to say the least.

BUT, the suspense was great and I tore through this book. There is always great drama to be mined by tossing a group of people together to face a major crisis, and this one was no exception. The tension builds as different detectives try various schemes to separate the woman from her weapons.

McBain also does a great job of delving further into some of the characters' backstories. I love that in only a few paragraphs, he manages to convey what makes someone tick. The repartee between the men of the 87th is getting sharper, and they actually *seem* like a bunch of guys who've been working together for a while.

Plus, I loved the ending where (view spoiler)

AndrewP says

Another of the early 87th Precinct books. Some lists show this as #7 in the series, and some as #8. As it follows the other two books with 'Killer' in the title I am reading it as #7.

A crazy woman, bent on revenge, invades the 87th Precinct squad room and holds everyone she finds there hostage. Meanwhile, Detective Carrella is out investigating an obvious suicide. However, it's just to cut and dry and he begins to have suspicions. It's only near the very end of the book that you discover what the title refers to.

Not quite as good as some of the others but I am going to go straight on with the next in the series.

George K. says

"Ο ντετ?κτιβ πρ?πει να πεθ?νει", εκδ?σεις Bell

?βδομο βιβλ?ο της σειρ?ς του 87ου Αστυνομικο? Τμ?ματος και απ? ?ποψη ποι?τητας μου φ?νηκε στο ?διο καλ? επ?πεδο με τα προηγο?μενα βιβλ?α που δι?βασα. Δεν π?ρασε και πολ?ς καιρ?ς απ? την τελευτα?α φορ? που δι?βασα βιβλ?ο της σειρ?ς, ?θελα ?μως να διαβ?σω κ?τι ευκολοδι?βαστο και ξεκο?ραστο και τα συγκεκριμ?να βιβλ?α ε?ναι τα πρ?τα που μου ?ρχονται στο νου για κ?τι τ?τοιο.

Λοιπ?ν, το μεγαλ?τερο μ?ρος της ιστορ?ας διαδραματ?ζεται μ?σα στο 87ο Αστυνομικ? Τμ?μα, στο οπο?ο ?να απ?γευμα εμφαν?ζεται μια μαυροφορεμ?νη γυνα?κα. Που λ?τε, αυτ? κατευθ?νεται προς την ομ?δα των ντετ?κτιβ που βρ?σκονταν εκε?νη την ?ρα στην μεγ?λη α?θουσα, και τους απειλε? με ?να 38αρι. Επιπρ?σθετα, μ?σα στην τσ?ντα της χει? ?να μπουκ?λι γεμ?το νιτρογλυκερ?νη και φων?ζει ?τι θα τα τιν?ζει ?λα στον α?ρα ?τσι και κ?νουν τ?ποτα. Τι θ?λει αυτ? η γυνα?κα; Μα να σκοτ?σει τον ντετ?κτιβ του τμ?ματος, Στιβ Καρ?λα, που συν?λαβε τον ?ντρα της, ο οπο?ος πριν λ?γες μ?ρες π?θανε στην φυλακ?. Θεωρε? τον Καρ?λα υπε?θυνο για τον θ?νατο του αγαπημ?νου της συζ?γου. Ο Καρ?λα ?μως ερευν? μια υπ?θεση αυτοκτον?ας (που μπορε? να ε?ναι και δολοφον?α), οπ?τε λε?πει. Ε, η μαυροφορεμ?νη γυνα?κα θα περιμ?νει μαζ? με τους αστυνομικο?ς την ?λευσ? του στο τμ?μα. Η συν?χεια... ?νας κακ?ς χαμ?ς!

Κλασικ?, το στιλ αφ?γησης δεν αλλ?ζει ο?τε εδ?. ?χουμε μια ωρα?α και καλογραμμ?νη ιστορ?α, ρεαλιστικ? και με ?νταση, με τον συγγραφ?α να δε?χνει για ακ?μη μια φορ? το ταλ?ντο τους στις περιγραφ?ς των προσ?πων και των διαφ?ρων καταστ?σεων, καθ?ς και στους ιδια?τερα φυσικο?ς διαλ?γουνς. Εδ? που τα λ?με, αυτο? οι δι?λογοι κ?νουν την διαφορ? στα ?ργα του. Σε σχ?ση με ?λλα βιβλ?α του ?χει λιγ?τερο μυστ?ριο και ?χι τ?σες εκπλ?ξεις, αλλ? κακ? τα ψ?μματα προσφ?ρει λ?γη αγων?α και αρκετ? ψυχαγωγ?α.

Eric says

Were it not for Kindle discounts, I never would have started Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch series, Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder series, or this series. In all three cases I am grateful for them highlighting and discounting these genre classics down to \$1, where it doesn't make sense not to give them a shot.

The first remarkable thing about this book is its timelessness. Were it not for a very few small details -- a lack of cell phones, a mention of "the forty-eight states" -- I would have had no idea it was first published in 1959.

The second is how deftly McBain weaves three separate settings -- the precinct, the mansion, and the city -- that are almost characters themselves. While the locked-room mystery at the mansion was nothing mind-blowing, it was really just a diversion to the hostage scene playing out at the precinct. One scene at the precinct was so intense, (view spoiler), it gave me one of the strongest visceral reactions to anything I've ever read.

Anyone that likes police procedurals, especially classics like Dragnet -- which this book tips its cap to more than once -- is sure to enjoy the 87th Precinct.
