

# Shoot the Piano Player

*David Goodis*

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## **Shoot the Piano Player** David Goodis

Once upon a time Eddie played concert piano to reverent audiences at Carnegie Hall. Now he bangs out honky-tonk for drunks in a dive in Philadelphia. But then two people walk into Eddie's life--the first promising Eddie a future, the other dragging him back into a treacherous past.

**Shoot the Piano Player** is a bittersweet and nerve-racking exploration of different kinds of loyalty: the kind a man owes his family, no matter how bad that family is; the kind a man owes a woman; and, ultimately, the loyalty he owes himself. The result is a moody thriller that, like the best hard-boiled fiction, carries a moral depth charge.

## **Shoot the Piano Player Details**


Date : Published October 3rd 1990 by Vintage Crime/Black Lizard (first published 1956)

ISBN : 9780679732549

Author : David Goodis

Format : Paperback 158 pages

Genre : Mystery, Noir, Crime, Fiction, Pulp

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# From Reader Review Shoot the Piano Player for online ebook

## Stephen says

Loved this one - the atmosphere of impending doom, the strong/silent character of the piano player and the way that the different storylines all came together to create a very satisfying ending.

Supposed to be the April read for the Pulp Fiction group but once I started it a couple of days ago, I couldn't put it down and I couldn't wait that long to finish it. Got better and better the more I read - one of my all time favourites.

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## emma says

this is a very dark, kind of cool, super noir book that does some cool things with perspective. got a pretty strong female character for the time it was written.

i'm more excited to watch the french new wave adaptation (also for class) than i was to read this book. i know! it's like, who even am i? revoke my bookworm card already.

bottom line: yeah i have very few feelings about this. sure. it's fine.

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## Janice says

Existential angst, alienation, paranoia, disillusionment, hopelessness, tough-as-nails femme fatales, seedy dive bars, fate and the haunting effect of the past on the present. These are some of the most common tropes of the noir genre. Basically, it is a bleak and joyless genre; therefore it naturally follows, that I adore it. I gravitate towards noir because it is seemingly consistent with my grim view of the world (which, some could argue, is through a profoundly warped lens). That is, the view that it often seems that this is a world bereft of meaning and purity, where people are inherently pernicious, and that maybe some are better than others at repressing their innate capacity for evil.\*

This book was pretty much universally rated at 4 - 5 stars on this very website, and I am incredulous as to why. I either have adult ADD, or this book was painfully flat, boring and insipid. David Goodis is inexplicably renown for this novel, which was adapted for the screen in 1960, by François Truffaut. Apparently he was extremely popular in France. The book tells the story of Eddie, a former concert pianist stuck playing piano at Harriet's Hut, a seedy dive bar owned by a rough around the edges, zaftig blond. Eddie unwittingly becomes involved in his brother's criminal conspiracy, while his brother is on the lam trying to evade his associates. Honestly, recalling and summarizing the plot is too much of a bore to bother with it.

Although Goodis employed the above referenced conventions of noir, he didn't successfully execute them in a compelling way. Unlike some of his pulp colleagues, such as Raymond Chandler and Cornell Woolrich, Goodis wasn't particularly adept at creating an atmosphere. This was especially Chandler's forté, as he was celebrated for his depiction of 1930's/40's Los Angeles, a portrayal which evoked a kind of sleazy glamour. Also, whereas Chandler was a talented wordsmith with respect to his tough and witty dialogue, Goodis also

fell short on this end. In fact, there was such an excessive amount of dialogue, that it created an imbalance in the narrative and contributed to the overall flat, bare feeling. The bio in the back of the book indicated that Goodis had a brief and unhappy fling as a Hollywood screenwriter. This is surprising to me, it seems like Goodis could have thrived as a screenwriter.

OK, so it's pretty apparent that I didn't particularly enjoy reading this book. And there were moments when I debated abandoning it. But I have a problem with discarding books once I've read past a certain point, depending on the length of the book. I just can't give up on a book, no matter how much I hate it.\*\* According to Tim Parks in an article for the New York Review of Books blog, the compulsion to stubbornly proceed with reading a book for pleasure, when the experience ceases to be pleasurable, is rooted in immaturity and the sense of achievement received by completing the loathsome tome. (<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/...>). I disagree (although my maturity level is obviously questionable). Firstly, it is inherently problematic to ascribe such a narrow rationale to a broad issue. Secondly, for me it's less about achievement, or even receiving closure from the story, but about the time investment. I'm stubborn. I hate to give up once I've put in the time. Moreover, once I've finished the book, only then do I feel I can fairly express an informed opinion.

\*Is it possible to plagiarize yourself? If so, I just did. I applied the same analysis of human nature during a recent discussion of *Breaking Bad*, in my defense of Walter White. And yes, I know I need to "lighten up."

\*\* Except for the two books on my "do not resuscitate" shelf, *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and *Bad Behavior*. I'm not exactly sure what possessed me to read such trash, therefore I will invoke the defense of temporary insanity. Also, it was easier to walk away from *Bad Behavior*, because it was a collection of short stories, so there is less of an implied promise to commit.

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### **Andrew Smith says**

Written before I was born, this hardboiled novel shows its age a little (don't we all!). It's not so much the story - which is timeless - as the conversational language used, which I found a little off-putting until I got into the flow of it. The tale itself is of a gifted tinkler of the ivories who finds himself in a skid row bar knocking out tunes for the lowlife clientel. How and why he got there we find out as the story unfolds.

Of course, given its genre, there's crooks and guns and fistfights... and girls. There's also the quirky way the story is told, with the piano player regularly having his thoughts laid out on the page, often as questions posed but not answered. But it's a satisfying tale of its type with a classic denouement.

A quick read, at under two hundred pages, I'd happily track down more of the author's tales of haunted men of the night.

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### **Stenwjohnson says**

"The answer's on page three...thing is there ain't no page three."

David Goodis is part of a growing number of noir writers from the 1940s and 1950s who have been enshrined in the Library of America's catalog. But don't mistake it for belated canonization-- There's always been fashionable, nagging intellectual respect for vintage crime novels and their redolent aura of jazz, cinematic menace, and images of poetically hard-bitten urban America. It's especially true in France, where Goodis' 1956 novel "Down There" served as the material for Francois Truffaut's 1960 film "Shoot the Piano Player." Later editions of the book often use the Truffaut title.

But is Goodis good? The reader's tolerance for "Down There"/"Shoot the Piano Player" will depend on their affection for the timeworn features of the genre; those who enjoy the requisite diet of doleful melodrama, hard-as-flint dialog and affected toughness will also likely be able to appreciate the moments where Goodis rises beyond pulp into something original and bleakly lyrical. Most will be familiar with the story from Truffaut's film: A down-on-his-luck classical pianist finds himself embroiled in criminal danger in the slums of Philadelphia after one of his criminal brothers seeks him at the gin joint where he squanders his prodigious musical talents.

"Down There"/"Shoot the Piano Player" is compulsively readable, as the titular pianist is carried along on an existential tide of nightmarish bad fortune. Scenes are often mysteriously attenuated, sometimes unfolding in a kind of boozy approximation of real time. The tough-as-rawhide dialogue teeters precariously towards irony. Goodis likely gave his pulp paperback audience far more than its money's worth in 1956, but this novel endures as merely above-average noir, an evocative pop culture artifact.

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## Michael says

Haunted by his past, Eddie plays to forget. Hiding from life, he plays nightly at a small joint on Skid Row; a place for hookers, lowlifes and crooks. A washed-up classical pianist, he finds himself bottoming out — he's only care in the world is stroking the keys in this dive bar. When his brothers get in trouble with some gangsters, he finds himself being dragged into the chaos of his no-good family.

David Goodis really knows how to create a bleak world, which I did find myself being sucked into from the very start. Yet I tend to think that maybe Goodis missed the mark a little with this novel; there was something missing and the end result was not as compelling as others in this genre. I think the narrative was a bit flat; do not get me wrong, I love the existentialism, alienation and angst that were coming from Eddie but I think it failed to be as melodramatic or psychological as I would like from a noir novel like this.

Eddie was supposed to be an empty shell, not even closely resembling his former self and I think here is where I had the problem. There was no real character development for Eddie as there was nothing really there. He wasn't hard-boiled, he was not witty or intelligent in any way; he just seemed to not care at all. Sure he tried to survive but as a character I thought of him as flat and boring. Lena, on the other hand, seemed like there was so much hidden from the reader but she never really got enough time in the book to explore that.

Another issue I found was the book was jammed back with dialogue and I feel like David Goodis was better at building atmosphere. I am not saying this is a bad book or that I did not enjoy it; I had a lot of fun reading this book. I just wanted to look at what let me down with the book as well as what worked. Shoot the Piano Player moves at a frenetic pace and if it wasn't for the over use of dialogue to slow it down, this could of been a real page turner. This novel also feels really different to other noir novels; the style feels the same but

there is something about this novel that makes it unique, possibly the execution of the plot but I cannot put my finger on it.

I have mixed feelings about this novel, at times it is amazing then you turn the page and it almost flat lines. Almost like it had it's own emotions and suffers from severe mood swings. This balance never felt right; I get the impression this would work a whole lot better as a movie. In fact I think the movie French noir classic directed by François Truffaut and starring Charles Aznavour in 1960 was what held this book firmly in place with the other great noir novels. I wonder if the movie was not a success would this book fade into obscurity like the rest of David Goodis' novels.

I did not intend to be so hard on this novel, I wanted to enjoy it and to some extent I did. Just in the end the cons far outweighed the pros. I have yet to see "Tirez sur le pianiste" but if I get my hand on it I think I would be correct in assuming that it is better than the novel. Add more angst, existentialism, melodrama or psychological elements and fix my issues; that would be the perfect pulp novel. Although then you will be more likely be reading a Raymond Chandler, James M Cain or Jim Thompson novel.

This review originally appeared on my blog; <http://literary-exploration.com/2013/...>

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### **Sharon Barrow Wilfong says**

I find Crime Noir hard to get into. This one took a little warming up, however, I did find myself caring about the characters as their personalities developed and we begin to see them as humans with vulnerabilities as they yearn to matter to other people and to themselves.

A man named Turley staggers into a bar bleeding and dazed. He grabs a chair and pulls it up to a man playing the piano. The piano man's name is Eddie and a disheveled, injured man sitting near him and trying to talk to him, does not seem to disturb him.

That is because Eddie has had a lot of experience shrugging off uncomfortable experiences. In fact, he has chosen to shrug off tragic experiences. Which explains his indifference to a man sitting next to him who is in trouble and also his brother.

Granted he hasn't seen his brother in many years and for good reasons. Both his brothers are selfish louts that can't stay out of trouble. Turley is currently trying to escape two mobsters he cheated. Before long, the mobsters arrive at the bar. Turley runs out the back with the mobsters in hot pursuit.

Without knowing exactly why, Eddie stands up, walks over to a pyramid of beer cans and topples them directly into the path of the mobsters. Now he is on their radar. Eddie becomes involved in a dangerous drama he did not anticipate or desire.

He does not have to go it alone however. Lena, the waitress comes to his rescue, much to Eddie's annoyance. He likes being alone and does not want to be rescued by anyone, much less a waitress, even if she is beautiful.

She is also dumb as we find out. Not that she is meant to be viewed that way, but I found her to be dumb and I don't care if Lena doing stupid things was a device to move the plot along. It did not make her look tragic, it makes the reader think, "What did you think was going to happen?"

The strength of this story is the psychological analysis we receive by reading the inner thoughts of certain of the characters. It is what ultimately makes the story poignant.

The author, David Goodis, is as interesting as his stories. His life is somewhat of a mystery. After a brief period of popularity in Hollywood and pulp fiction magazines, he returned to Philadelphia to live with his parents and care for his schizophrenic brother. He spent nights prowling the boweries and ghettos of Philadelphia where he got much of his material for his fiction. He died, probably due to injuries sustained a couple of days prior while resisting a robbery.

If you like Crime Noir, you may like this one, especially if you are someone who wants to care about the characters.

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### **Ben Winch says**

David Goodis is possibly the most frustrating writer in history. When he's good (as he is here) he's untouchable, but when he's bad (as in most of *Nightfall*, for eg) he's pitiful. What's so good about this? It's *dark*. Intense. Dripping with atmosphere. The interior monologue is something unique too, in this context. An existential noir. A loser condemned to lose again who knows it but can't help fighting. Man, it's deep, while also seeming so close to its own parody that it's like a cartoon - or better, a woodcut. Grainy. Primitive. You can see the joins. It's the work of a craftsman - not a master, he's too undisciplined for that, but a guy who knows what he's doing, and through sheer willpower is really doing it, after however many years on auto-pilot churning out pulp for a paycheck. And that's why it's deep - it's the transcript of a struggle. A spiritual struggle, I suspect, given the raw power of this unique masterpiece. Beyond even Hammett, I think, for the sense of danger we get at seeing this beast of a writer unbridled. Unbridled and struggling to stay on track.

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### **Algernon says**

WOW !!! I have seen *Tirez sur le pianiste* by Francois Truffaut two or three times but I never bothered to check the writing credits, and didn't expect the book to be so much more devastating than the movie.

I would not say Goodis is as good as Chandler or Hammett when it comes to wisecracks and plot twists, I would rather compare him to James M Cain in the focus on characters rather than mystery.

**Shoot the Piano Player** is a straightforward story of a man dealt a cruel hand of cards by Fate. The scene is Philadelphia in 1956, a claustrophobic maze of dark alleyways and dingy rooms, beset cold and snow squalls. Eddy is a WWII veteran, former concert pianist, now reduced to making pretty arpeggios in a seedy bar. All he wants is to be left alone, to avoid making waves or to get involved in messy relationships.

The world has different plans for him, and into his quiet life enter first a lost brother, followed by a femme fatale, a pair of violent goons, a golden hearted prostitute, a peanut brained bouncer : all rather staple characters of every noir movie made in Hollywood in the 40's and 50's. There is a sense of inevitability in Eddy's story, of being tied to a runaway train without brakes accelerating into the night. He wants to escape, but his every move is predetermined by the first action he took in the opening of the novel (view spoiler)

Goodis strongpoint I think is in the dialogue, in the things left unsaid, in the hesitations and the silences between people who have taken some hard knocks and are wary of their fragile hearts. Another highpoint is the background story of Eddy, told in jagged, raw flashbacks like the shards of a broken mirror. The pace is quite slow in the beginning, but when the moment of action comes, it's quite explosive and convincing.

This is my first novel by David Goodis, and I plan to search for more of his work. I understand he was a bit uneven in output, but I'm willing to risk it.

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## **Rebecca McNutt says**

Consistently fast-paced and gripping, *Shoot the Piano Player* is a very original and unforgettable book, with a really surreal writing style.

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## **Mark says**

June 5, 2013: Little book, I don't do you justice. I will finish you (hopefully this week), but I owe you a reread

June 6, 2013: Seems fitting that the last thirty pages of this were read in a state somewhere between consciousness and sleep. Because that's how it read. Like some kind of nightmare you wish someone would wake you from. Goodis' material is usually dark (that's why he's up there with the big boys in the noir field) but this one felt especially so. Goodis is capable of creating characters you would swear he pulled from real life. But he outdid himself here. I wanted to cradle the two main characters in my arms and invite them into my tree-house and tell them, Hey, you guys, it's not so bad. Look: cookies. Milk. Soda, if you want it. We'll live that mean ole world behind and just hang out here for a while. Eh? Eh? But these characters, these *people* know better than that. They could hide with me in the tree-house and still the world would be waiting for them when they climbed down again. Even if they waited forever, it would still be waiting. So, fuck it, they said, we'll meet you head on. Oh, they did some running, their own version of it. And I cringed and cowered and said, No, no, no, don't do that, that's not gonna go well at all. But this is noir, and a lot like real life noir doesn't pull any punches. So you walk blindly - well, not so blindly; you have your eyes wide open to catch a glimpse, if only a fleeting one - you walk not-so-blindly in and take your licks and hope you come out on the other side. But what if you have someone tagging along behind? Someone you were unready to give yourself to but somehow they managed to whittle a hole in that block of wood you called a heart, the one that turned into a block after the last time something bad happened and in order to prevent it from ever happening again you simply said, Alright, that's enough, I'm out, I'm not doing this anymore. But then this new one came along and you said you wouldn't get involved and you wouldn't let the person in but somehow they kindled a little fire around that block of wood and it began to spit and his and without your being aware of it the other person was adding stick and twigs and the fire was getting bigger and you wanted to put it out but the more you wanted to put it out the bigger it got and the harder it got and by then it was too late anyway. You were in too far. But life's always creeping up behind, maybe just a step or two or maybe it's two or three blocks away, but it's always following and it's waiting on the chance to cut in. And when it does, you'll dance. And you'll dance. And you'll dance. You'll get seasick and you'll swoon and if you're lucky before it really gets rough you'll be thrown free, thrown overboard; or you could be lucky and hang on for the entire ride and what a ride it'll be. There's music somewhere. It may be music you yourself are playing or



it may be piping in from that gaping rent in the sky, the one where all the darkness is coming from and maybe someone's just turned out the lights for a while, that's all it is, someone's turned out the lights. Say, would you mind turning the lights back on? But the one who turned on the lights may no longer be there to turn them on for you and you have to figure out how to turn them on again yourself. Click. Click.

Click.

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## **Glenn Russell says**

This gritty, hard-boiled novel by David Goodis opens with an action scene where a bloody-faced Turley Linn is running for his life through the alleys of a Philadelphia slum, fleeing from two professional hit-men. Turley ducks into a run-down neighborhood bar called Harriet's Hut and finds his brother Eddie (the novel's main character) who he hasn't seen in over six years. Eddie acknowledges his brother but remains cool and doesn't stop playing his sweet honky-tonk music on the joint's piano. Remaining cool, detached and emotionally uninvolved is the key note (no pun intended) of Eddie's threadbare, solitary life.

In the first few pages we also come to know there is another side to cool Eddie, that is, some years ago Edward Webster Lynn, a concert pianist trained at the Curtis Institute, toured Europe and performed at Carnegie Hall, captivating and mesmerizing audiences with musical talent bordering on genius.

Then why, we may ask, is one of the world's greatest pianists tickling the eighty-eight at a rundown bar? It isn't until midway through the novel that we are given Eddie's backstory. Turns out, Edward was once deeply in love and married to a beautiful Puerto Rican woman named Teresa. One evening at a midtown Manhattan party, Teresa confesses to Edward that she had an affair with his high-class concert manager. Completely unhinged, Edward stomps out of the room. Seeing herself as unclean trash, Teresa jumps out a window.

Thus, we are given yet again another side of Eddie the piano player, the cool guy with his soft-easy smile, when, after the funeral, Edward goes ballistic. Late at night in Hell's Kitchen NYC, he gets himself mugged, robbed and beaten up, enjoying every minute of the violence. He then seeks out more violence again and again and gives as good as he gets, including mauling two policemen.

So violent is Eddie that a strong-arm specialist in the Bowery tells his buddies the next time he fights with the guy he'll need an automatic rifle. The author conveys Eddie's reflections on this period in his life, "Now, looking back on it, he saw the wild man of seven years ago, and thought, What it amounted to, you were crazy, I mean really crazy. Call it horror-crazy."

With this background and insight into Eddie's character, we have a more complete overview of the violence taking place one afternoon at Harriet's Hut. The bar's bouncer, Wally Plyne aka the Harleyville Hugger, admits to taking money for giving Eddie's address to the two hit-men. This causes Lena, the young, attractive waitress and friend of Eddie, to erupt with a torrent of verbal barbs and insults aimed at Plyne. Plyne tells her to shut her mouth but Lena keeps it up.

Plyne explodes, smacking Lena in the face. Lena keeps up the insults. Plyne smacks her again. Lena spits out more insults. More slaps and punches from Plyne. At this point Eddie steps in. Eddie and Plyne exchange punches. Plyne picks up a chair leg to use as a club and then, in response, Eddie grabbing a long, sharp bread

knife. Fearing for his life, Plyne races out the back door. Eddie follows, knife in hand. Several minutes later, squeezed in one of the Harleyville Hugger's lethal bear-hugs, Eddie goes for Plyne's arm with the knife but Plyne suddenly shifts position and the knife sinks into Plyne's chest. Plyne slumps over, dead.

I focus on this scene because, to my mind, what happens underscores the author's view of human nature: people are capable of extreme violence; it is only a matter of the flash point. Doesn't matter if a person is an accomplished classical musician or an attractive twenty-seven year old waitress, push the buttons in a certain way and a man or woman will erupt like a volcano. Ah, the horror-crazy buried deep within us all.

David Goodis made it a practice to routinely visit the bars and hangouts and hot spots in Philadelphia's rat-infested, poverty-stricken slums. As a writer and artist, he opened himself to life as it was lived in the urban underbelly of the 1940s and 1950s - desperate, dark and dangerous - and sat at his typewriter and wrote all about it.

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## **Melki says**

**Let's put it another way. What's the payoff for the clean ones? The good ones? I mean the ones who play it straight. What do they get at the cashier's window?**

**Well, friends, speaking from experience, I'd say the payoff is anything from a kick in the teeth to the longbladed scissors slicing in deep and cutting up that pump in your chest. And that's too much, that does it. With all feeling going out and the venom coming in. So then you're saying to the world, All right, we'll play it dirty.**

Is blood thicker than common sense?

Haunted by the past and unmoved by the present, Eddie spends his nights playing the piano in a bar. Then his brother shows up, on the run from two goons he stiffed. Though it's the last thing in the world he wants or needs, Eddie gets sucked into the whole mess.

That's basically it for the plot. What follows is suspense, drama and some swell dialogue, Set against a snowy Philly backdrop, the story is fairly classic noir with not a lot of surprises, but the writing pulls you in and keeps you on your toes.

I had one quibble, and that is my failure to understand Eddie's almost mystical power over women. His boss, Harriet, is always willing to give him another chance. His neighbor, Clarice, normally charges for her "services," but she lets Eddie have the occasional freebie. And Lena, poor Lena - I'm saying her name a lot since the author repeatedly and infuriatingly refers to her as "the waitress" even though she IS essentially the female lead. Though she barely knows Eddie, Lena is willing to risk jail time AND her own life to protect him. Perhaps pianists have magic fingers, but ole Ed's charm managed to elude me.

Other than that, this is a pretty good read with a satisfying ending.

It definitely made me GLAD to be an only child!

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## Franky says

I'm so glad this book was brought to my attention. I thoroughly enjoyed *Shoot the Piano Player*. This is an exceptional reading experience, one that will leave you thinking and reflecting long after the final page. I think it separates itself from crime novels in that it is quite moralistic and cerebral; it entertains and is dark at points, but it goes well beyond this.

David Goodis writing in *Shoot the Piano Player* is exceptionally reflective. It takes you inside characters and their situations. It is written often in an inner-monologue format from Eddie's perspective, and this gets us closer to Eddie's constant self-critiquing.

*Shoot the Piano Player* also takes on the role of morality tale at points. It has a crime novel and noir-ish feel to it, but also is an introspective and detailed look into a flawed main character. Goodis writes with a knack for the dramatic, the tragic and the comic all at once. The novel feels very existential; it makes one brood and think about how much the individual controls and governs their own existence, and we are thrust immediately into Eddie's internal thoughts from the get go when one of his no-good brothers, Turley, bursts into Harriet's Hut, running for cover. Eddie is seemingly in the middle between two worlds, the idealistic and romanticized one of Edward Lynn, child prodigy who eventually plays Carnegie Hall, and Eddie, the piano player at Harriet's Hut who has ties to brothers involved in past crime. Eddie distances himself from his rowdy brothers, tries to find a calling in life (as a piano player), but it seems as though fate intervenes and hampers many of these ideals. Eddie's inner turmoil is lyrically captured by Goodis' spot on prose:

"Why'd she have to bring it all back? You had it buried and were getting along fine and having such a high old time not caring about anything. And now this comes along. This hits you and sets a spark and before you know it there's a fire started. A what? You heard me, I said it's a fire. And here's a flash just came in—it's blazing too high and we can't put it out.

We can't? Check the facts, man, check the facts. This is Eddie here. And Eddie can't feel fire. Eddie can't feel anything."

Goodis effectively takes you into the brain of Eddie. Snapshots of Eddie's past, some hopeful, some tragic, put the pieces together for his new predicament. The back story and flashback aspects (especially of his childhood and his piano playing abilities) as well as Eddie's running internal monologue within himself help to create an insightful and complex picture of Eddie. There's a bit of young Hamlet in Eddie: he's seemingly forever at odds within himself, and has difficulty in making decisions. Often rather than taking action, he contemplates and wavers between two choices, always thinking.

Goodis also presents some strong secondary characters essential to the plot and themes. Lena, a waitress who works at Harriet's Hut with Eddie, is a strong character who tries to spark some life into Eddie. I found that many of the other secondary characters (Harriet, Feather, Clifton, the bouncer) were not only engaging and interesting, but played central roles in the unraveling of events.

The author also holds key developments and plot realizations until late in the novel to maximize the suspense. We understand why Eddie's brothers are being sought by the two men. Eddie, while brooding over where he's been and where he's going, finds himself in a quite a few conflicts.

Very impressive novel. Highly recommended for any crime fiction fans or noir fans.

I'm looking forward to reading more from Goodis.

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### **Stephen P says**

A rickety old bar housing the lives of regulars who can meet every night in the isolation of their seclusion, while hearing in the distance the sound of the piano player. He plays in the very back, easy tempo, soft and light jazz, his placid gaze immobile and off in a dreamy somewhere else. A place where nothing touches him and he need not touch back.

This is very clear a work which by nature is noir, and seeks to be noir. However it cannot help itself to expand into something larger, universal. In the gloom of the boisterous setting where everyone speaks and no one listens, the haven of a man-made safety, Goodis creates his art through the deft weaving of the noir and universal. The fleet footed race from pain and the nagging inner need for what caused that pain; to be away from the world; to be drawn back into it. At a moment Dante appeared by Goodis' side, heads together mapping out a level of despair tiered in this genre. A dead end where the road forks.

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### **Tfitoby says**

I don't like to leave things to stew before writing my thoughts on these books, but perhaps I should in this case. I absolutely loved this novel.

From the off a bleak noir atmosphere is painted by David Goodis, the inevitable conclusion easy to see from page one. You know where this is going but you are along for the ride anyway, this is the way all good noir movies work and it is the same with this fantastic book.

The story clips along at a frantic pace, the pages flew past as I devoured every incredible detail and every incredible line. I've never read anything quite like it, the comparisons to Chandler and Hammett have been made because of the milieu but this one bears more than a passing resemblance to Hemingway whose collection of short stories *Men Without Women* I recently enjoyed. But Goodis has crafted something better.

They say that with noir it is all about the woman/women of the story and there are several women key to Eddie's story but none of them can be classed as a femme fatale or even a femme maternelle really. Eddie is Eddie, his decisions are his alone and based on his own code of ethics and behaviour. He wants a quiet life and every decision in his mind is leading back to that goal.

It's a shame that it's so hard to find Goodis in local book stores here as I am definitely in need of another of his books, despite the introduction in this copy saying he got progressively worse. Screw the introduction, I'm intrigued as to how somebody so talented could finish his life writing formulaic prose.

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### **Sam Quixote says**

Noir is one of the most well-defined genres in all literature. However, for better or worse, after writers like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett popularised the genre, it more-or-less ceased to develop any further. It was so well defined in fact that even by the mid-50s, writers could churn out a recognisably noir

novel using the well worn archetypical characters and scenarios. But few could reach the same heights as Chandler, and one of these imitators was David Goodis.

In *Down There*, aka *Shoot the Piano Player*, a honky tonk piano player in a dive bar is caught up in his criminal brother's schemes and has to help him lose a pair of gangsters who're hunting him. Meanwhile he falls for the bar waitress and has to keep her safe from his suddenly dangerous life.

That's pretty much the story of *Down There*. It's not much and that's my biggest complaint: there's so little here. Take other noir novels where the protagonist is usually a hard-up gumshoe - the motivation of those kind of books is to find the killer by the end, solve the case, go home and get drunk. Wait for the next case/book and do it all over again. Here, the protagonist is a piano player and as such there's no driving motivation behind his actions. He meanders most of the novel, tries half-heartedly to avoid a couple low-level gangsters, then he does something to someone and has to leave, there's a gunfight, the end.

The lack of any plot wouldn't be so bad if the characters were there but here too Goodis is lacking. The piano player, Eddie, is a dull man who's hiding a painful past by playing piano in a dive bar. The backstory is given and it's kinda sad and also kinda silly in a way - but ultimately not very interesting. And that backstory is a big part of the novel, where you're either moved by it to care about the character or you don't. I was the latter.

The other characters are basically staples of the genre - the tough-talking women, the wise-cracking barflies, the two gangsters riffing on one another in mock bonhomie to scare others. We've seen them all before and in better stories elsewhere.

There's mood here - the dive bars, the sense of hopelessness, the mostly night scenes, death, misery and tragedy handing over everything - but nothing that really feels unique to this novel. These too are aspects of a noir novel - it's like Goodis is ticking off boxes on a list. And when a writer like Chandler established mood, he was usually being poetic about his city of choice, Los Angeles, writing about it in a way that made the reader think about it differently as they saw it through the weary eyes of the main character. I'm not sure what city Goodis is writing about but it could be any major American city and his observations are almost like a parody of noir writing.

The dialogue wasn't bad as the characters snapped back at one another and I appreciated some of the old timey phrases ("no dice") for nostalgic value but it's not enough to recommend this book when there are so many other better noir novels to read over this one. I wonder if *Down There* would even still be remembered if not for the 1960 Truffaut movie? It is the definition of a generic novel.

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## David says

Why do so many readers rank David Goodis so highly in the pantheon of noir? My theory goes like this: His best books, including *Down There*, are remarkable primarily for their restraint. Goodis does his best writing when he doesn't overtax his talent by trying to do too much. Thus, good Goodis gives you no complicated criminal plots, no overwrought sexual hijinks. He's simple and he's bleak, and therefore he gets credit for a kind of noir purity and for a corresponding artistic ambition. But in this realm, art happens only when character happens, and *Down There's* characters are thin. The most notably thin is protagonist Eddie Lynn, who is more husk than human. In fact, Eddie has cultivated his huskiness as a psychic defense against his painful past. His response to most everything that goes on around him is an empty smile. Eventually, of

course, Eddie is forced into substantially more action than this, but, as is typically the case with Goodis, as the action accelerates, the artistry deteriorates. One of Goodis' great strengths, however, is righting himself on the final page and ending on a perfect note.

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## **Maureen says**

not a review but a overwhelming yes! it's been hard for me to review shoot the piano player aka down there because i so ardently and unequivocally adore it. suffice to say, i have read it many times, and i will read it again and again and again, simply because it is one of the most visceral reading experiences i've ever had. and it just goes to show how one never knows what chord will be struck, how a character might resonate, no matter how different in experience, until you meet and absorb them as a reader. in this book, i am running down a street, and clocking my head, and coming finally to the bar, and then i meet my brother there, and then i become my brother, and i am with him in the alley, there with the hat pin, and i am entirely immersed in this life, this sequence that winds its way to the end. what a marvelous bit of music, this book.

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## **Still says**

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When we first meet Eddie, he's an ultra-cool, fatalistic piano player clocking time in a working man's bar every night from nine until two a.m.

He's aloof, seemingly unaware of events transpiring around him, and as exempt from the demands of normal interactions between human-beings and the emotional entanglements that accompany them as a bird on a wire.

As we learn almost 2/3rds of the way through the novel, Eddie has been rendered passive due to a series of unfortunate events a cruel and uncaring world has tossed him through.

Life depicted here is as bleak as any corner into which Horace McCoy ever painted one of his protagonists.

This novel sends the mind reeling with poetic passages usually associated with City Lights Books not Fawcett/Gold Medal.

Beat, near nihilistic yet not exactly negated by David Goodis' inevitable surrender to the conventions of mid-20th century crime-noir novels.

It's fascinating fiction that bravely defies labels until that inevitable compromise rolls around.

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