



Even the Wicked

Lawrence Block

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An anonymous letter writer, the self-styled 'Will of the People', targets prominent criminals and evil-doers that the law cannot reach - and kills them. All of them are dubbed by the Will 'society offenders who might as well be in the ground' - and he sends his hit-list to a tabloid newspaper columnist. His latest target is a criminal defence attorney who's got one too many killers off a murder charge. Given the failure of New York's finest to protect his predecessors, DA Adrian Whitfield wants the most stubborn PI in the Big Apple watching his back.

Even the Wicked Details

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From Reader Review Even the Wicked for online ebook

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: PI Matt Scudder

SETTING: New York City

SERIES: #13 of 18

RATING: 3.5

WHY: Matt Scudder is investigating 2 cases. The first focuses on a serial killer who is following the "will of the people" and killing those who clearly deserve it. The way this plays out is very interesting. The second involves a man dying of AIDS who is shot in the park while reading the paper. The dialog is excellent. However, there were too many digressions which didn't add to the plot and some rather lengthy letters that I ended up skimming. However, I do love to see the recurring characters of TJ and Elaine and appreciated the ending.

Brandon says

At the urging of an opinion piece, a vigilante takes to the streets of New York knocking off an accused child molester who up until now, has escaped the hand of justice. Succeeding in his mission, he dubs himself "The Will of the People" (or "Will" for short). Shortly after, he writes into a prominent New York newspaper threatening the lives of several other less than savory citizens.

It isn't until a particularly well known lawyer finds himself in Will's crosshairs that Matt Scudder is brought into the fold. Hired to track down and uncover Will, Matt enlists the assistance of his sometimes employer, Reliable Security to keep an eye on the frightened barrister.

If that isn't enough on Scudder's plate, he's also recruited to look into the murder of a friend of a friend; a man named Byron Leopold, who had been shot in cold blood while sitting on a park bench. With Matt unsure of where to begin with Will, he concentrates his time tracking down this other killer. With such a heavy workload on his shoulders, can Matt juggle both cases?

While I was disappointed Mick Ballou's small role, Block shines the spotlight on both TJ and "Hard Way" Ray, hoping they can hold their own as the supporting cast. A relatively new addition to the world of Scudder, "Hard Way" Ray provides a great wall for Matt to bounce theories off of and offers a distinctly different viewpoint that no other character can offer – what with being a criminal defense lawyer and all. TJ makes strides as Scudder's right hand man as the two grow closer than ever; further developing a father/son relationship.

While I enjoyed the case surrounding "Will" and the payoff was surprising; it's the case that involves Byron that I found most compelling. It's hard to really talk about how interesting it was and how it unraveled without getting heavy into spoiler territory but given my chosen profession, I thought it was an intriguing angle (even if it is a common staple of the detective fiction genre) and brought to light a practice I wasn't even aware of.

Even The Wicked is another strong entry in the Scudder saga that clearly shows that despite being the

thirteenth entry in the series, Block still has plenty of gas left in the tank.

Also posted @ Every Read Thing

Connie says

Ahhh TJ

James Thane says

I've said several times here now that I believe Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder series to be the best PI series ever written. Some of the books individually stand with any of the classics produced by people like Raymond Chandler et al., but Block has produced far more books in this series (sixteen and soon to be seventeen) than any of the other "Masters" of the genre. The books are consistently very good if not great, and in addition to writing a number of inventive and absorbing plots, Block has created a cast of memorable, fully-drawn characters in addition to Scudder, the main protagonist. He has also allowed them all to age and become more complex through the years, so that reading one of these books is like returning to visit a group of old and very interesting friends. If that weren't enough, Block has also built a lushly-drawn set--Scudder's New York City--in which these stories take place.

Even the Wicked is the thirteenth book in the series. Scudder is in his middle fifties, now, happily married and domesticated. He's a much more mellow character than he was in the early years, and this particular book is also a bit tamer than some of the earlier entries. The violence is not as gruesome and doesn't seem as threatening; the sex is not as hot and bothered, and Scudder doesn't have to get really nasty and violent with anyone.

Which is not to say that this isn't a very enjoyable read. Scudder is forced to deal with a series of complicated crimes, perpetrated by at least three separate characters. In the main case, a vigilante, inspired by a newspaper columnist, is ridding NYC of despicable characters that the legal system is unable to touch for one reason or another. After claiming three scumbag victims, he announced that his next target will be a criminal defense attorney who has won a number of high profile cases. The attorney hires Scudder to try to find the killer, even though the police are working night and day to catch him.

Scudder arranges protection for the attorney and gets on the job. At the same time a friend asks Matt to look into the shooting death of an AIDS victim who was killed in a city park. The police are not pursuing the case very aggressively and are apparently ready to write it off as a random act of violence in the big city. Matt, of course, will not dismiss it so easily.

Scudder works the two investigations in and around evenings with his wife, Elaine, and again engages the services of TJ, the street kid who first appeared as Scudder's semi-sidekick a few books earlier. It's fun to watch him work and it's also fun to listen to the banter among the characters. And inevitably, Matt's dogged persistence will pay dividends in the end.

This book certainly doesn't have the hard edge of some of the earlier Scudder novels, but you wouldn't expect a fifty-five-year-old PI to be wrapped as tightly and to act as fiercely as the young, alcoholic ex-cop

that we first met in *The Sins of the Fathers*. After a very long wait, we are about to finally get a new Matthew Scudder novel, *A Drop of the Hard Stuff*, which is set earlier in Scudder's career. I would expect this new book to resemble much more closely in tone some of the best books in the series, and I, for one, can hardly wait.

Mark says

Matthew Scudder in his thirteenth novel, he is now in his fifties and happily married with his Eileen when he gets asked by a lawyer how he can be protected by the cities apparent moral knight. This character seems to be a response to the injustice that is experienced by the people of New York when certain persons cannot be punished simply because there are no grounds or evidence to convict. Only this time the target of the proclaimed "Will of the people" communicates his intentions and targets high profile people who then die.

Scudder gets asked to protect this lawyer and he knows he is out of league and is honest about it. He still gets a retainer and advises on the use of a certain protection agency. Still it does not stop the demise of the lawyer. So Scudder does start to look into the matter to find this so-called "will of the people" to stop him before he targets another person.

At the same time Scudder is looking into the assassination of friend of a friend who suffered AIDS and was hot on a bench in a park while enjoying the sun and his paper. The murder walked in, shot the victim and walked out again. The police has no leads to follow. Scudder decides to follow the money due to the lack in leads and finds a whole new industry that depends on the life insurances of terminal ill people.

Both cases involve some moral issues of our modern times and perhaps in dawn of his life this would be cases best suited for the PI who has seen terrible acts already. This book is not bloody at all and there is no real action. But the stories get told as good as Block always manages and they make sense and you wonder about the moral compass of our society.

A very satisfying read.

Dan Schwent says

A vigilante calling himself The Will of the People is killing undesirables and gloating about it in the Daily News and Matthew Scudder is one the case. But what, if anything, do these killings have to do with man afflicted with AIDS being gunned down in broad daylight?

Block lead me around by my nose through most of this one. It took me forever to figure out what was going on with Will and what was behind Byron Leopold's murder. I liked how TJ kept trying to drag Matt into the computer age. As in most of his cases, Matt struggled with ethical dilemmas.

Matthew Scudder and the supporting cast continue to grow as characters. Matt quits seeing his mistress, the bond between Matt and TJ continues to grow, coming to a point at the end that I saw coming books ago. Hard Way Ray makes strides as one of Scudder's supporting cast and the ever put-upon Joe Durkin makes a welcome appearance as well.

If you've stuck with Lawrence Block and Matthew Scudder this far, you'll want to devour this one like the rest of them.

Kathy says

I did not have a great deal of spare time to devote to reading this 374-page book, and while I was enjoying parts of it I became impatient with the length of it because it did have two legitimately separate areas of inquiry that could have been split into two books. But then...Block has to tie a big Christmas bow around it in one of the sweetest imaginable endings and all is forgiven.

One focus: "Will of the People" pronouncements to OpEd writer that garners attention of all of NYC that leads to several executions and one assignment from a threatened attorney for Matt.

Another focus: shooting of a friend of one of Matt's AA connections that he investigates involving insurance policy purchases held by AIDS patients.

Pam says

Matt Scudder is one of my favorite characters. Lawrence Block always tells a great story.

Melissa says

3.5 stars. Wasn't one of my favourites in the series but I loved the ending.

Kemper says

And you thought the tabloids were bad when they were just bugging phones....

After a child rapist and murderer gets released on a technicality, a New York columnist writes a piece openly wishing for the man's death. Someone helps make this become a reality by stringing the pedophile up and then writes to the columnist taking credit and calling himself the "Will of the People".

Apparently murder is just like eating potato chips because Will can't stop after just one and begins writing more letters identifying other targets like a Mafia don and a violent anti-abortion advocate and then making good on his threats. Will becomes a media sensation as New York is both captivated and horrified by his actions.

When a prominent defense attorney is named as Will's next target, the lawyer hires Matt Scudder to try and find the killer before he's the next victim. Matt helps arrange some personal security, but isn't sure what he can do that the police can't to find the killer. He also finds his attention drawn to the case of a man in the late stages of AIDS who was murdered.

As usual, I find any of the Matt Scudder stories compelling reads that are some of the best crime novels that money can buy. This rereading of the series has definitely convinced me that Scudder deserves to be in The Detective Hall of Fame along with the likes of Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade. This one isn't quite up to the creative high that Block was on from *Eight Million Ways to Die* through *A Walk Among the Tombstones*, but it's still an intriguing mystery.

It's also a bit of a departure because for the first half of the book, we don't really see Matt do his usual detecting thing which usually consists of him wandering all over New York talking to various people. Instead, a lot of the legwork is glossed over, and it focuses on Matt thinking about a previous case and having dreams that leave him trying to figure out what he already knows on a subconscious level that hasn't registered with him yet.

As a bonus, this one also has a bit of a Christmas epilogue with Matt giving a special gift to an old friend, and it's enough to make even a cynical bastard like me want to say, "God bless us, every one."

Lynn says

Always a good read. Matt seems like a friend after all these books (ok, imaginary friend, but still).

carol. says

A solid three star read in which Matt Scudder takes on the classic locked-room mystery. Although not one of the more memorable Scudder books, it's an enjoyable way to spend the afternoon. Let the rain begin!

We begin with a pleasant domestic scene, TJ and Scudder at Scudder's house, watching a boxing match. TJ is leafing through a spy catalog idly suggesting ideas for their business, particularly a computer system. It becomes a telling detail about moving Scudder forward into the future and his reluctance to do so, and anchors the story in time and culture. They are interrupted when Scudder gets a call from Adrian Whitfield, a lawyer who Scudder has worked for once or twice before. He's just been notified that the latest anonymous letter to show up in columnist Marty McGaw's mailbox has marked him for death. "The Will of the People" is a vigilante who has been using a columnist to share his exploits, murdering people who are untouchable, at least by the legal system. This first victim was a murdering pedophile that Adrian had defended and had been recently released. Adrian consults with Scudder for safety strategies and ends up adding a retainer for finding Will. Half-heartedly working the case, Scudder ends up taking on a second investigation when a friend from AA asks for his help. Her friend, already dying of AIDS, was murdered as he sat on a park bench.

Thankfully, the two cases don't converge, which would have stretched credulity. While the solution to the locked-room mystery was predictable, a subsequent twist surprised me and kept me interested. Block continues to have a good ear for realistic dialogue that does more than feed the reader plot points. Characters are steady, largely without significant development in this installment. Fair enough; can't have drama all the time. Scudder's personal life is solidly domestic, and a few friends return for cameos. TJ plays a larger role, as well as a police officer from a former investigation.

Perhaps the most disconcerting section is when Scudder attempts to modernize his phone investigation skills. I find I miss the days when he would drop a dime in the corner booth and sweet-talk an operator into giving

information. Block reminds of those times as he notes the disappearance of phones from the city, and the inability to accept incoming calls. It's an odd note; is it because Block missed the old days? Scudder? Is Block highlighting the difference? Maybe that's a series motif all along; after all, a few books ago, a number of mentions was made of his 'call forwarding' feature on his room's phone.

Overall, a steady entry into the Scudder series.

Bill Kerwin says

This is not a bad book. I am not sure Lawrence block is capable of writing a bad book. But it is a book in which the Block Magic—that deceptively discursive narrative style which can unite a couple of plots, a smattering of anecdotes and a few observations into a pleasing whole—just does not work.

I'm not sure exactly why. Perhaps because neither of detective Matt Scudder's cases (a series of killings by "The Will of the People" who announces his targets in advance, and one random execution of a guy who is dying of aids) is all that interesting in itself, perhaps because I guessed one of the murderers way too early, or perhaps because the book's ending (involving Scudder's faithful hip-hop companion T.J., whose "street talk" always struck me as zoot-suit corny, like something out of an old Bill Haley song) is cloyingly sentimental. And sentimental is something Block *does not* do well.

Still, I liked a lot of the book, particular the surprisingly casual way one of the murderers (the one I *did not* guess) ended up committing his crime. And Mick Ballou—the Irish criminal Scudder calls friend—is here, and I always enjoy Ballou. I especially liked the following discussion between Mick and Scudder about the motivations of "Will of the People":

"He's full of himself, isn't he? Killing and claiming credit like a fucking terrorist."

"It's like that," I said. "Like a terrorist."

"They all start with a cause," he said, "and it's noble or it's not, and along the way it fades and grows dim. For they fall in love with what they're doing, and why they're doing it scarcely matters." He looked off into the distance. "it's a terrible thing," he said, "when a man develops a taste for killing.

"You have a taste for it."

"I have found joy in it," he allowed. "it's like drink, you know. It stirs the blood and quickens the heart. Before you know it you're dancing."

Just listen to that dialogue! No wonder he can't write a bad book!

Nolan says

If you're an attorney who defends the indefensible, and if there's a serial killer out there who takes pride in doing the "will of the people," by murdering the dregs of society, you're probably pretty worried. New York city is in the grip of just such a serial killer as this book opens. Will, as he is known, writes letters to a newspaper columnist in which he announces his next kill. And by the time the lawyer calls his work associate, Matthew Scudder, to ask for help, the lawyer is among those who is being targeted.

This is a thriller that is in every way worthy of Block's reputation for unparalleled excellence in the genre. It's twisty surprise slam ending will leave you unprepared and more than a little breathless.

Add to that some fascinating subplots and truly memorable characters like Scudder's street-wise employee A. J., and you have a book that will keep you up reading as this one did me.

Gary says

Everybody's all grown up, and three plots don't save it when the voice and the attitude are no more.
