



The House of Wolfe: A Border Noir

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On a rainy winter night in Mexico City, a ten-member wedding party is kidnapped in front of the groom's family mansion. The perpetrator is a small-time gangster named El Galán, who wants nothing more than to make his crew part of a major cartel and hopes that this crime will be his big break. He sets the wedding party's ransom at five million US dollars, to be paid in cash within 24 hours.

The only captive not related to either the bride or the groom is the young Jessica Juliet Wolfe, a bridesmaid and close friend of the bride. Jessie hails from a family of notorious outlaws that has branches on both sides of the border, and when the Wolfes learn of Jessie's abduction, they fear that the kidnappers will kill the captives after receiving the ransom—unless they rescue Jessie first.

Gritty and exhilarating, *The House of Wolfe* takes readers on a wild ride from Mexico City's opulent neighborhoods to its frenetic downtown streets and feral shantytowns, as El Galán proves how dangerous it is to underestimate an ambitious criminal, and Jessie's blood kin desperately try to find her before it's too late.

The House of Wolfe: A Border Noir Details

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From Reader Review The House of Wolfe: A Border Noir for online ebook

James Thane says

Billed as "A Border noir," this is a testosterone-driven wild ride of a novel. As it opens, a group of audacious kidnappers grabs several members of a wealthy wedding party from a mansion in Mexico City. They divide the members of the party into two groups and take them to separate run-down houses in the city's slums. The man in charge of the operation is an young gangster named El Galan, who has ambitions of using this kidnapping as a stepping stone to climb up the ladder of organized crime in Mexico.

El Galan contacts the parents of the young people he has kidnapped and demands five million American dollars for their safe return. He gives the parents very careful instructions about how to raise and deliver the money and gives them twenty-four hours to pay up. As one might expect, he warns the parents that if they contact the authorities, he will kill the kidnapped victims.

El Galan warns the parents that he will be monitoring their every move and insists that he has contacts within the police department who will alert him if the parents should violate his mandate not to call the police. This being Mexico City, this might well be the case, and the parents insist that they will follow El Galan's instructions to the letter. They simply want their children back safely.

What the kidnappers do not know is that one of members of the wedding party, a bridesmaid named Jessica Juliet Wolfe, is actually unrelated to any of the others. She is a close friend of the bride-to-be and belongs to a criminal family known as the House of Wolfe, with operations on both sides of the border. Jessica is from the American side of the family and when the Wolfe's get word that she has been kidnapped, several members of her family fly south to join the Mexican side of the family in an effort to rescue Jessica.

The Wolfes realize that, in all likelihood, once the kidnappers have their money, they will release the victims unharmed. But, of course, maybe they won't, and that is the fear that drives them to attempt the rescue. Jessica herself is no passive victim, which further complicates the situation.

The result is a story that hurtles from the kidnapping to a surprising climax. Blake has created a believable and very scary vision of Mexico City and populated it with a cast of well-drawn and intriguing characters. The Wolfes, in particular, make for compelling protagonists. This is a great read that will appeal to anyone who likes dark, hard-charging crime novels.

Paul says

Fans of Cormac McCarthy's 'No Country for Old Men' or Don Winslow's 'The Power of the Dog' may enjoy this book and the two preceding it. IMO it's not as good as McCarthy's No Country, but perhaps comes closer to Don Winslow's Dog.

Craig Pittman says

In the opening chapters of this book by James Carlos Blake, we see a robbery gone awry, a grisly body disposal, a mass kidnapping, a sex scene and enough double-crossing and violent deaths to rival the first two "Godfather" movies. For the most part Blake keeps his complex narrative jumping, switching from character to character as he depicts what's going on, and that's what keeps it enjoyable. It's when he slows down to fill in the backstory that he slips a bit, and left me wishing he had Elmore Leonard's ability to cut to the chase.

The plot concerns a Mexican gang leader who wants to move up in the world. With a childhood friend he concocts a plan to kidnap an entire wedding party, 10 people in all, and hold them for 24 hours, releasing them in exchange for \$10 million, with the ransom split between the two families. El Galán will then use part of that money to buy his way into a much bigger, more famous gang.

He believes his plan is foolproof. But chance takes a hand, as does his poor decision to include among the hostages a young American redhead named Jessie Wolfe. She is, as it turns out, a member of the American side of the notorious Wolfe family, gunrunners and outlaws dating back decades. When they hear what's happened, they mobilize and join forces with the Mexican side of the family to get her back intact -- no matter what.

Jessie is one of two strong female characters in this book -- she keeps trying to escape, unlike the other hostages -- with the other being her best friend and Mexican cousin, Rayo, who turns out to be the key to tracking down the bad guys and taking them out. When the two women are center stage is when the story really shifts into overdrive.

Less successful is Blake's effort to show off how smart and sophisticated the Mexican side of the family is. He spends several pages on their complex system of information gathering, which sounds like something the CIA might concoct -- and yet, in the end, yields nothing of interest to the plot. That whole section could've been cut without doing any harm to the novel. He also takes pains to show how El Galán turned from a gutter rat to a well-tailored, classical-music-loving villain. The background on him doesn't really make him come to life quite as much as his memories of growing up in the slums of Mexico City, in an area constantly lit by the fires of a hellish garbage pit.

When I picked up this book, I did not know it was the third book in a trilogy on the Wolfe family. Blake's ability to construct an action-packed scenario that twists and turns in ways you don't expect will send me in search of the first two books in the series.

Dan Downing says

James Carlos Blake has produced several stories about the House of Wolfe, all top notch. This outing falls a bit short of his norm but has many good points. Keeping it from 4 Star territory is the flat writing in at least the first half. His plot is fine and well developed via several points of view. We do find several characters---especially the featured women---to be engaging. While I can't give it an all-around recommendation, I do bolster it for heist fans not too concerned with prose style.

Laura Jean says

Wow, again just a gritty action filled crime family drama. One of the Wolfe family is taken hostage along with an entire wedding party by a Mexican gang looking for ransom. They messed with the WRONG family.

Larry says

The Wolfe family operate as gunrunners for the most part, but they have other skills, as well. One of those skills is protecting members of the family. When a young female member of the family is kidnapped as part of a the mass kidnapping of a wedding party made up of young members of two wealthy families, the American "house" of the Wolfe family goes into action. Two Wolfes, Harry Fortune and Rudy Max, connect with the larger Mexican half of the Wolfe family and track down the deadly kidnappers, who are seeking to impress the Las Zetas cartel with their bravado and entrance fee money. The kidnappers are a nasty bunch, and the threat to those kidnapped is high, but the Wolfes are grim and determined. This novel is the third in the Wolfe series and, hard and grim as it is, it's worth reading.

Nancy Oakes says

In my case, book does not match reader at all -- I thought by the description of the novel that it was going to focus on Mexican cartels along the border (a topic that actually interests me), since its subtitle is "A Border Noir." The cartels that work along the border are sort of sidelined except in terms of one man's ambition to get a foot in the Zeta door, and with the exception of the first chapter, the action takes place in Mexico City, which is nowhere near the border. Nor is it "noir" ... it's an action-packed thriller that, when all is said and done, comes down to a story of family justice and revenge -- and it's a showcase for mega amounts of violence. Basically it's a case of one of ours has been taken -- screw the cops, we'll go get her ourselves. Viva la frontier justice, Texan style.

I don't care for thrillers, but anyone who loves them will find House of Wolfe irresistible. It's filled with action: kidnapping, daring escape attempts, chases, explosions, lots of gunplay, death in fiery pits, feral dogs, even torture -- everything a diehard thriller reader could possibly want. It speaks to the need to be self-sufficient and to have enough money to buy your way into positions of power and control -- in that sense, both bad guys and "good" guys have the same goal, the "good" ones having achieved it long ago. And to his credit, the author had one major storyline and didn't go off the rails (unlike so many current authors do) trying to incorporate everything under the sun in this book.

plot, etc can be found here; I still can't get over the fact that a woman who has just saved the butts of a group of men gets called a "cooze."

K says

The premise of The House of Wolfe is good enough, and I could easily envision the story being an action packed screenplay. So that's the good news. For me, however, the bad news was that I just couldn't connect with any of the characters in this story that spans two families, the Wolfes, residing on either side of the Texas / Mexico border. Both families share successful legacies in the world of criminal activities (e.g., gun running), but have been careful to build legitimate empires to front their less than ethical money generating endeavors. Both sides present characters that vary from wise and veteran to young and rookie.

As countless reviews have already laid out, the story moves rapidly from a well plotted kidnapping of a wealthy Mexican wedding party that inadvertently includes an American woman who just happens to be part of the American Wolf clan, to the underbelly of Mexico City. It's easy to predict what's coming thereafter--especially since she is subject to some nasty treatment and her kin are going to look very dimly on the perpetrators.

Perhaps it is the relative predictability of the action surrounding a common "recover the kidnapped girl theme," or the author's style of alternating perspectives from kidnappers to hostages to rescuers and back, but the entire book just had a quality that, despite being very well rendered, left me feeling unmoved or uninvolved. Kind of like watching a pretty good movie on TV, but one that, upon concluding, is soon forgotten.

I realize I might be in the minority here-- lots of great reviews, but this one just doesn't stand out for me.

Peter says

The House of Wolfe (2015) by James Carlos Blake is a well-written wryly humorous story of a Texas family in Wolfe Landing, population 66—all Wolfes. The Wolfes are not your normal law-abiders. Their primary gig is gun-running, but they have other less exotic ways of making money.

Wolfe Landing is on a tidal river that serves the family well. Many a body has floated off, never to be seen. And so it is when three ornery guys walk into the Wolfe Landing bar, armed with brass knuckles. Their goal is to take the money that Charlie Wolfe, the family bartender, has taken that evening from aunts, uncles, father, mothers, nieces and nephews in the clan. Yes, every evening this transfer occurs.

But the three hombres are out-of-towners, as are about seven billion other Earthlings, and they don't know that brass knuckles don't compete well with 12-gauge shotguns loaded with #9 buckshot at a range of five yards. Yes, the three dudes are last seen floating down the river in a swarm of alligators. (I know, alligators are fresh water creatures not usually found in tidal waters. But these are *Texas* alligators, and they can live wherever they want.)

The scene shifts to south of the border, where a Mexican branch of Wolfes runs a parallel gun-running operation along with many other shameful activities; they call themselves *Los Jaguарos*. Many of them are gathered at the wedding of the daughter of a zillionaire. Unknown to the celebrants, a team of baklava-covered Mexicans infiltrates and kidnaps the owner's security guards, whisking them off to be executed at a burning land dump. A second team kidnaps the bride and groom, their parents, and six members of the wedding party. Among those six are Jessie Wolfe (an American guest, and beloved of the Texas Wolfe Clan) and her Mexican cousin Rayo Luna Wolfe. These two girls will make the kidnappers regret their actions.

The ransom is set at \$5 million per person, which the bride's father promises to pay within 24 hours. Then the four parents and Rayo are returned to the estate under strict orders to tell nobody about their plight, on penalty of the deaths of the remaining captives. The remaining five captives are kept under guard in two houses.

Rayo overhears a conversation among the parents, intuits the situation, and gets word of the kidnapping to the Texas Wolfes. They are under no vow of silence and are sure that the gang will kill Jessie anyhow. So they hie very quickly to Mexico City to track down the kidnappers; the two leaders are Charlie Fortune

(great name!) and Rudy Max.

It's clear that there will be blood—Oh, Joy! It begins when an overpowering stench wafts from the basement of one of the captive houses. Upon investigation a guard flips on a light switch and the meth lab in the basement explodes; Three captives and their guards are *Finito*.

It's a well-told story of bad intentions and terrible consequences. Blake has written a taut tale with interesting characters and fun dialogue. Keep your eye on Jessie and Rayo. These girls are a hoot, and you don't want to be on their wrong side. And don't ignore that Mexico City landfill!

Four Stars plus!

Paul says

The House of Wolfe – A Fitting Finale

James Carlos Blake returns with the final part of the Wolfe trilogy with The House of Wolfe and what a fitting end to this border noir trilogy. The more you read of the Wolfe family they are likable villains who will do anything to protect their family and what a shame to end this fine series of books, but as they say go out while you are on top.

Charlie 'Fortune' Wolfe's former ward Jessica Juliet is attending a wedding in Mexico City with her cousin Rayo having the time of their lives. Jess is leaving with the wedding party when it is kidnapped and they are separated into different groups. The parents are sent back home and are under instructions not to tell anyone of what has happened and that a \$10 million ransom needs to be paid.

Rayo has heard what has happened to her cousin and informs her family in Mexico who in turn inform the Texas Wolfe family and the three Uncles send Charlie and his two nephews down to get her back. They realise that as the only captive not related to the kidnapped wedding party she is in the most danger of being killed.

Nobody knows who has kidnapped the wedding party as it has been set up by a small time gangster called El Galan, who is aiming to be part of a cartel but needs to prove his worth to them and bring in a 'membership' fee. He has set it up so that the party are separated and being held in the slums where nobody can help the victims or tell the police.

Jess being a Wolfe does not make life easy for her captors with two escape attempts and has to be punished. Things do not go the way they have been planned by El Galan especially once the Wolfes and their Mexican cousins are out on the streets looking for Jess and those holding her.

This is a good old fashioned chase and fight to the end, where the Police and the law are nothing but a minor sideshow, completely irrelevant. The Wolfes are a likable family that will do anything to protect that family whether it the Texan or Mexican family. They are not afraid to hurt or be hurt where failure is not an option and even willing to bend their own beliefs if it means finding Jess.

This is a wonderful and fitting finale to the Wolfe Trilogy and I for one will miss them and this border noir

series. If I could have one request to make of the author James Carlos Blake would be to have at least another book about the Wolfes let us see how the two families develop and work together against others.

This is a wonderful and gritty thriller that gives an excellent ride through the wild side of Mexico City as a tour of the Shantytowns becomes a race to survive.

Esther says

Gritty, mean, dirty, fast-paced. There is no fluff here, just a great story about some really bad guys doing some really bad stuff. Now I want to catch up on the Wolfe books I haven't read yet. Very entertaining.

Nina Fitzgerald says

For me, this book defines the term "noir." There is no fluff here - it is down and dirty, dark and gritty. No one lives happily ever after. Threads are left hanging. The lines between the bad guys and the good guys blur. The suspense is tangible. The evil makes you cringe. Everything is real.

As a rule I don't like stories about mindless violence. However, I find the writing of James Carlos Blake so tight, so enthralling, that I (easily?) become absorbed in his novels. No words are wasted. The story is told and we move on, shivering in its wake.

Wiz says

Fans of grisly crime with a large dose of literary substance should flock to devour *The House of Wolfe*, the third in James Carlos Blake's "border-noir" trilogy centering on the exploits of the Wolfe family Clan. Unlike the first novel in the series, however - the sprawling epic *Country of the Bad Wolfes*, *T.H.O.W* is an altogether smaller tale, its narrow focus concentrated on a kidnapping gone awry. Yet its ostensibly slim plot-line belies the vast range of themes simmering beneath its surface, testament to both the comfort and control Blake wields over this familiar fictional territory.

There is nothing particularly unique about the novel's premise - the trope of criminal cartels vying to maintain supremacy in an increasingly ambitious underworld is a well-worn one. Yet whilst acknowledging its roots in the fiction of McCarthy and Leonard, Blake manages to make the story and its voices wholly his own, with both character and detail that spring to life off the page and into the mind of the reader. Filmic is definitely a word which springs to mind when reading this. Nor is this quality confined to the more visceral episodes within the book (which includes a wonderfully terrifying coup de grace involving feral dogs), but in the more quiet episodes of contemplation, the nuanced expression between characters, or the non-verbal tics and gestures of shame or resignation.

In Mexico City, the pomp and spectacle of a society wedding is about to fall foul of a band of nascent petty criminals and their plot to kidnap ten members of the assembled party. The intention behind the attack is not merely financial. For the gang's head man, the fiercely ambitious El Galan, has aspirations to use a percentage of the five million dollar ransom to ingratiate himself into a larger and more prolific underworld

cartel and thus fuel his own gang's advancement through the criminal ranks. The plan is at once audacious and brilliantly planned, El Galan presenting as a sort of "gentleman thief" of the underworld, with his pristine suits and softly spoken voice, who assures the families that he wants nothing more than to collect the ransom and release the captives safely back to their families. What Galan doesn't realise, however, is that one of the kidnapped party is the outlier Jessica Juliet Wolfe, beloved ward of Charlie Fortune, one of the established heads of the Wolfe family. If we don't already know it we soon learn that the Wolfes are a large and expansive clan of outlaws who not only operate numerous legitimate concerns but also the most prolific and illegal gun-running business across the Texas-Mexico border. When surreptitious yet immaculately plotted word gets out to the Wolfes about the kidnapping a chain of events is set in motion that one suspects can only end in the kind of violent, bloody denouement Blake has become famous for.

Yet aside from a brief and largely unrelated opening vignette which foreshadows the violence to come, Blake makes his readers wait until two thirds into the book before the story really ratchets up the pace wherein it speeds to its terrifying denouement in a dizzying display of hard action scenes. Prior to this readers are asked to take the scenic route through the book's narrative, admiring the "scenery" of Blake's characterisation, their motivations, and their relative histories. It is interesting to compare the pace of this novel to *Country of the Bad Wolfes* which displays a similarly relaxed attitude in the interests of world building but intersperses this with frequent episodes of high drama. As a much longer novel, however, these shorter intervals become necessary in order to keep the pace of a book which would otherwise become bogged down in seeming exposition. Given the relatively short page count of *The House of Wolfe*, Blake displays much less "nervousness" about allowing the tension to build slowly, although some hard core thriller readers may feel cheated by this device and ultimately disappointed that it's only the last third of the novel that truly epitomises their expectations.

As in all of Blake's work setting plays a pivotal role in casting a wider light on his themes. Thus, in *The House of Wolfe* we travel wide of the borders, the author frequently juxtaposing the higher echelons of privileged society - characterised by a love of classical music, exquisite tailoring and fine dining - against the slum shanty towns of Mexico City with its perennial stench of the fiery garbage pits. It's no coincidence that the houses where the kidnapped parties are taken are set among the worst of these slums, the endurance of which one suspects is as terrifying and alien to those concerned as the situation that find themselves in. The fact that most if not all of El Galan's men hail from such circumstances themselves adds another layer to the thematic concern of mutability in the novel and the tenuous position any one of us holds on our current position in the world.

Even to a greater degree than in *Country of the Bad Wolfes*, Blake's language remains lean and visceral throughout; another homage to the greats of the genre, but also due in part to the more modern-day setting of the novel with its verbal idiosyncrasies and contractions. The overall impression this gives is of a mission-driven narrative that only occasionally lapses into detours of contemplation, unhindered by the purple prose which might drag similar subject matter into the realms of melodrama. Emotional connections are implied rather than ever fully explored, the tightness of familial bonds more likely to be evident in the moments of silence and physical expression than in conversation. The Wolfes are a family so perfectly integrated within themselves that words have become almost superfluous beyond the purely functional.

What impresses about Blake's storytelling is its absolute plausibility. Unlike El Galan, the author seems to have thought through "all exigencies" and manages to inject both inevitability and yet novelty into the various narrative twists and turns that populate the novel. Part of this is derived from his immaculate plotting, part to the charm of his characters who, despite their dubious moral compasses, make us invested in their fates and rooting to see them triumph. Given the fact of the Wolfe's business interests this is no mean feat but is achieved through an unflinching and unapologetic adherence to their simple creed of "live and let

live unless one of us is threatened", a philosophical standpoint that seems universally relate-able. The Wolfes, unlike El Galan, refuse to deal in Human Traffic or Drugs, but will readily supply the arms to those who wish to do so, all the while maintaining a staunch belief that "Without the right to defend yourself — and the right to possess the means to do it — all other supposed rights are so much hot air." Nonetheless, a point comes later in the book when an indirect comparison is made between both El Galan and the Wolfes when Meliton, El Galan's mentor and self-made criminal Mastermind tells him that the mark of a top man is to "do what needs to be done", perhaps blurring the lines between our hitherto acceptance of the Wolfes as somehow morally superior to the likes of El Galan and his ilk.

Blake's characterisations are frequently the standout feature of his writing and this novel is no exception. Despite their myriad number, (of which the reader is kept abreast by chapters headed by name to establish point of view), even minor characters are elevated beyond the role of mere spear carrier, and captured in perfect miniature via card games, conversations, and, in one memorable sequence, through the expert navigation of a microbus through a busy intersection. Women are equally well represented in this regard, with more time than not spent on their resourcefulness and courage in difficult circumstances than the more obvious erotic associations of other books that characterise this genre. Indeed, two of the larger roles in the novel, with proportionate narrative time, are given over to both Jessica and Rayo, who are not only instrumental in their own emotional and physical survival but in Rayo's case, facilitating the survival of others. Elsewhere, masterful portrayals of characters such as Meliton deserve special mention, not just for their unexpected comic leverage but also their ultimate pathos in becoming representative of both a time and an industry characterised by impermanence which, like Meliton's sexual prowess, can never be relied upon to last forever, despite efforts and appearances to the contrary.

Overall, this is a competent, compulsive muscular read with the narrative chops to stand alone without reference to either of its predecessors. Highly recommended.

Chana says

Fast-paced, non-stop action. This is a crime novel about a group of people who try to steal a large amount of money through a kidnapping for ransom scheme. The kidnap victims are members of two wealthy families; a wedding party of bride and groom and their relations and an extended family member (Jessie) from Texas. The relatives from Texas hear of the kidnapping and a couple of them go down to Mexico City to see if they can rescue Jessie.

The whole story takes place in a bit more than twenty-four hours. It is tense and action-packed. Sorry for the worn clichés, but they fit.

Human life doesn't mean much in the gangster world; so many people get killed in this book that you can count on one hand, well almost, the characters who are left at the end.

What I did find disappointing is the lack of rapport between the Mexican and American branches of the Wolfe families.

All in all I thought it was very good.

On a serious non-fiction note: why is Mexico City burning their trash rather than just burying it? Their huge stinking burning trash pits sound hellish.

Thomas Todd says

Blake does it again. The House of Wolfe. We have the American Wolfe's and the Wolfe's of the southern side of the Rio. Both are involved in this thriller. 24 hours of excellent action and suspense written as only Blake could pull off. I have become very fond of the Wolfe family from Blake's previous novels. I lost track of how many people were killed and or wounded. Recommend James Carlos Blake's newest novel The House of Wolfe to all his fans, you won't be disappointed. I received this novel free from Grove Atlantic as a Goodreads first read give away.
