

Introducing author
Dennis Lehane

Review by David Eaton Mauk

Carver and Banks. Raw. Chandler, Hammet. Gritty. Authors all, whose books draw upon society's underbelly. Add Lehane to the list. He is not just another crime writer, regurgitating clever plotting or franchising detectives' careers beyond their useful lives. This guy flat out brings his hard-boiled characters into our home, where in any other circumstance we wouldn't otherwise want them.

It's not that his crime-busting sleuths aren't likable. Most readers will bond with Sean Devine, Patrick Kenzie, Angie Gennaro and Bubba Rogowski. They just aren't your pedestrian cop-types. Gun-toting, bomb-making, law-bending, if not breaking. We're talking fully developed dark-sides here. Persons earlier tormented by poverty, substance abuse, abandonment. Crumbled shells of damaged lives sucked into a vortex of vacant dreams and lost hope, colliding with self-destruction.

Readers have discovered James Patterson and made best sellers of his portrayals of twisted madness. I recoil from the depravity of his vile villains. You ain't seen nothing yet. But somehow through Lehane's unwashed delivery, I found myself turning the pages even faster. After all, the Bundy's, Berkowitz's, Dahlmer's and McVeigh's really lived among us, as other perverted souls and terrorists still do. By comparison, Lehane is merely bringing a disturbing reality to us.

Like previous volumes, *Mystic River*, his most recent book, is set in Boston. It's not the Beantown many of us know, but the corroded decay of cold, forlorn project housing, freeway underpasses and biker bars. Scenes of despicable crimes humans commit against themselves. Unspeakable child abuse. Heinous kidnappings. Where knives settle conflicts. The sick unraveling of psychotic evil.

A child's disappearance launches *Gone Baby Gone*. This story of a child's kidnapping reveals the tormented hearts that are ripped from our nation of family values and bountiful prosperity when it loses one of its children. In *Prayers for Rain* the life of a young woman striving for simple happiness is utterly destroyed. The theme of innocence lost to violence is recurring. Lehane shows us the sick madness that perpetrates evil. He brings to life the compassion clinging to the crevasses of human decency. The obsession that drives investigators into confronting the dark side of human existence. The pictures aren't pretty, but they're haunting and vivid. We are compelled to read them.

Here's a quick break down of the latest three novels of Dennis Lehane, and a list of all his books that can be found at the Calais Free Library and throughout the inter-library loan system:

Mystic River: A teenage girl is murdered on the eve of her planned elopement. Usual rich assortment of people more likely to be found in prisons than pews. Three childhood friends, who took different paths into adulthood, are re-acquainted under the tension of solving the crime. Story anchored by a repeated reference to an incident where one of them was abducted as a boy. Cover-to-cover chills.

Prayers for Rain: Suicide fall of one-time prom queen off Boston's Custom House roof prompts an investigation by the reunited Kenzie/Gennaro team. Nobody seems to care about the quick turn of self-destruction the victim's life took. The question of who could have driven a delicate woman to ruin, and the buried secrets preventing her family from rising to her aid runs through the story.

Gone Baby Gone: Child kidnapping. Unconscionable parenting. Dirty cops. Conflicting motives. This book rushes from filthy taverns to grimy apartments, drug lord prison cells, and a horrific shoot-out at the Quincy Quarry. You can practically smell the stink coming from the scum of the drug trade.

Sacred; *Darkness*, *Take My Hand*; *A Drink Before the War* are other titles.

Go to the library and read Dennis Lehane. You will be gripped by his gritty, grim world.