



Laguna Heat

T. Jefferson Parker

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The debut novel from T. Jefferson Parker

Laguna...

Where every day the sun makes a promise the nighttime breaks, while the super-rich live out expensive fantasies in posh beach houses and drown their memories in Cuervo Gold margaritas...

Laguna...

Where trouble has swept in like a Santa Ana wind, blowing the cover off a world of torture, murder and blood-red secrets

Laguna...

Where a crazed killer has turned paradise into a Disneyland of depraved violence--with a fiery vengeance--and where homicide cop Tom Shephard unravels a grisly mystery that reaches back across forty years of sordid sex, blackmail, and suicide into the dark corners of his own past, and sweats out a deadly truth in the sweltering..

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Laguna Heat Details

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Author : T. Jefferson Parker

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From Reader Review Laguna Heat for online ebook

Eric_W says

No one does delving into the sins of omission and commission in the old gentry like Ross MacDonald who seemed almost to have a patent on the genre. Parker does a successful emulation in Laguna Heat.

Tom Shephard, recently retired from the LAPD where he was a decorated detective, but also the subject of widespread vilification for shooting a sixteen-year-old, has been hired to work as the homicide detective for Laguna Beach (annual homicide rate 0.5). His first case finds him looking for the killer of Tim Callahan who died with blue cobalt in his hair, \$1000 waded up and stuffed down his throat, and a 32 oz piece of basalt smashed into his forehead. The trail leads to events that had occurred many years before with interlocking motives and actions that came back to haunt all of them decades later.

It's an engaging story if unrealistic. The idea that a homicide detective could just take off and follow his instincts and a suspect down to Mexico struck me as bizarre. Apparently, this was Parker's first novel and it doesn't have the polish of some of his later work, but with that caveat it's better than a lot of other stuff being published.

Lisa Farley says

Excellent

Didn't want to put it down! Kept me going right to the end; I'm glad it ended the way it did.

Diana H. says

Listened to this book while driving. It was hard to keep my mind on the road - I got that caught up in the story.

James Thane says

Tom Shephard is the new homicide detective in swanky Laguna Beach, California, and he's come to town from L.A. after killing a boy in a justifiable homicide. But the rep and the psychological baggage has followed him to Laguna Beach. Shephard has barely found his desk when he's called to the scene of a particularly brutal homicide in which the victim has been doused in turpentine and set ablaze. Shortly thereafter, a second victim is dealt a similar fate, and Shephard finds himself drawn into a complex mystery involving sex, blackmail and murder that stretches back forty years and that also involves members of his own family.

This is an earlier novel from T. Jefferson Parker who even then was writing intelligent plots filled with interesting characters and demonstrating his command of the southern California landscape. Those who have enjoyed his later books will do themselves a favor by searching out this one as well.

Kristen says

In T. Jefferson Parker's mystery debut, *Laguna Heat*, he really brought on the heat in this stellar mystery. For Tom Shepard, he was a disgraced LAPD detective from a shooting of a young black teen, he moved to Laguna Beach. From there, he investigated a trail of fire murders, a path that led him back to his darkest past of his mother's murder. When he finally encountered the man who destroyed his family, all bets were off, when he discovered the cold truth on what led to it and what happened beyond it. Now he had to make his peace and deal with it with a shocking ending.

Kathy says

My favorite (along with "Silent Joe") of all Parker's novels. This guy can write!

Valerie says

Although I have read a lot of T. Jefferson Parker's novels, somehow I missed this one (published in 1985) and it was even made into a movie two years later! I didn't see the movie either. The story is captivating. A young police officer in Laguna Beach (transferred from L.A.) has baggage from his former job, and also from his family life. His mother was killed when he was about three. During the course of this novel, two other people involved in Shepard's past are murdered, and one is attacked. It all stems from incidents that happened over 35 years previously. The "whodunit" and why were as mysterious as they were difficult to fathom. I thought Parker did a great job of writing an ending to this story that could probably be the only one possible. I also loved the description of the scenery along the Pacific Coast Highway, and Mexico. Parker's descriptions are just marvelous.

Lukasz Pruski says

"For a brief moment Shephard felt that rare emotion, the opposite of déjà vu: not that he had been there before but that he would never be there again."

Laguna Heat (1985) is the debut novel by the three-time Edgar winner T. Jefferson Parker. It does not quite rank with *Silent Joe* or *California Girl*, two outstanding works, which - although technically a mystery and a procedural - clearly transcend their genre and belong to "real" literature, but it still is a solid, extremely readable crime novel.

Detective Tom Shepard is the sole member of Laguna Beach Homicide Division transferred there after his "trouble" in Los Angeles where he spent 12 years on the force. In contrast to LA Laguna Beach has had little need for homicide detectives. This picturesque wealthy little seaside town in Orange County and a Mecca for artists boasts little crime, perhaps one murder a year. But the statistics are to be spoiled now: Shepard is on a crime scene where a badly burned body of a well-known resident has been found. Before death the victim was tortured, then had his brains bashed out with a rock, and then was set on fire. Shepard's investigation will widen and will eventually touch events from over thirty years ago.

Shephard is still in psychotherapy after an "officer-involved shooting," a deplorable, vile euphemism for a police officer killing a person. The incident, quite relevant for today's readers particularly because the detective's victim had been a black teenager, has resulted in Shephard's deep trauma, rather plausibly portrayed in the novel. A bit less plausible are the detective's personal connections with the event of the past. His father had been a police officer before becoming a television preacher and the relationship between the two Shephards constitutes the most important motif in the substantial non-police-procedural layer of the novel.

The complex plot is extremely interesting and well paced. The portrayal of Pacific coast locations, my home for the last 34 years, is first class and the characters, at least in some scenes, resemble real people. Most of the book is well written: I like the long passage where Shephard ruminates on his life while in the background his father drones his empty and meaningless "spiritual" phrases on TV. Alas, Mr. Parker decided to include a truly cringeworthy sex scene. There is nothing more obscene than a badly written depiction of a sex act, so I will refrain from quoting the nauseating or giggle inducing complete sentences, but allow me just a few atrocious phrases: "mingled, locked, released," "slick abundance," "spilling in a rush," "he churned harder," and on and on. I am happy that I do not remember any such pearls of prose in the author's later works.

If we forget the debuting author's utter failure in the sex scene, *Laguna Heat* is a good psychological procedural and a very readable thriller.

Three and a half stars.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

LOVE LOVE LOVE T.J. Parker. This is one of the earlier ones, and I really like it.

Bettie? says

3* The Blue Hour
2* Iron River
TR Red Light
3* Laguna Heat

Solid.
:O)

K says

This was a mixed bag for me. Parts of *Laguna Heat* were really well written and compelling, while other sections of the novel seemed scattered and uneven. The bad actually slightly outweighed the good and I kept wondering what I was missing considering all the glowing reviews I'd read.

Sure, we have all the right ingredients: Det. Tom Shepherd, a recent transplant from the LAPD, now heading up a significant investigation into two homicides in the usually quiet enclave of Laguna Beach, carries the requisite baggage of a divorce and a guilty conscience over shooting a suspect back in LA.

We have a number of bad actors, a love interest, and a complicated relationship between Tom and his father, Wade, a former LBPB cop who is now a preacher. Whew!

Yet, despite a fine set of ingredients, the dish seems to lack something; the characters seemed a tad too one dimensional, making me apathetic towards them, and at times the author went on about meaningless peripheral elements that failed to add anything substantive to the final product.

So I'm left with a bit of a conundrum insofar as I enjoyed the plot and some of the scenes, particularly towards the end and denouement, on one hand. On the other hand, however, I thought the thread of the story became looser and looser, causing me to lose interest and look forward to finishing (rather than savoring) this novel. A generous 3 stars, no big regrets, but looking forward to my next book.

Lee says

I read somewhere that when Michael Connelly moved to Florida, T J Parker was the best mystery/thriller writer living in California. I would pretty much agree to that. This was his first novel ('85), and a very good setting in southern Calif, with a homicide cop digging into a mystery that goes back some forty years.

Carolyn (in SC) C234D says

I liked this first novel a lot. Tom Shepherd is a good cop who had bad luck. He solves a crime but has a big dilemma at the end. He winds it up in a satisfactory manner.

I read this almost fifteen years ago and don't remember details. I've read about five books by this author and didn't care for a couple of them at all, but really liked the others. Kind of unusual for me.

Judy Bee says

I saw Jeff at Warwick's books last week. He is charming, accessible, and erudite. Loved this first book of his. Descriptions of Laguna and Newport are spot on, his ability to express emotions outstanding. Well worth the time.

mark says

Laguna Heat is Parker's first novel, which is my favorite read--first novels. I did this backwards, becoming a fan of Parker, then searching out his first work. Yep, maybe his best. Fitzgerald said of Hemingway: Something happened to him when he was twenty, he wrote about it, and then just wrote the same story over and over. Well, that's true of most fiction writers and it's true of Parker. (That's why I like First novels - they usually represent what it is an author has to offer. Many people (most?) find an author they like and keep reading him or her - essentially reading the same thing over and over. That says much more about the reader

and the publishing world, than it does about the content of the work. Okay, I'll get off my high horse.) Before reading Laguna Heat, I read Hardball by Paretsky. Funny, both are novel's about crimes that took place forty years ago. Heat takes place in SoCal, HB in Chi-town. Heat was Parker's first novel and written in 1985. HB is Paretsky's latest. Parker was the same age as the protagonist, Laguna PD detective Tom Shephard, when he wrote the book and grew up in the locale. Paretsky is close to her protagonist's age, V.I. Warshawski, and grew up in Chicago. Parker's writing captivated me. He describes the beach towns, the scenery, and the characters accurately and poetically. (I was there often.) It's 1985 and everyone smokes and drinks a lot. Parker's plot line is so interesting, however, that I often struggled to read the descriptive narration because I wanted to turn the page and find out what happened. That's some good writing. To Fitzgerald's point: Yes, the themes in Parker's novels are the same as are the characters. Protagonist Shephard is Silent Joe is Charles Hood. The women (love objects) are all similar. The family histories are similar. Yes, it is the same story told over and over. "Manly Man" (L.A. Outlaw's heroine's word for Charles Hood) solves crimes that involve his father, corruption, and ambiguous, powerful men; has issues with his mother (dies prematurely), loses and finds and loses - strong, independent, beautiful lovers; likes dogs, hot cars, speed (the driving kind) guns (but not killing), children, and drink. Questions authority and is not particularly intellectual, a somewhat bemused personality is he. It's good stuff.
