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A gripping debut work of crime fiction, from the author of the bestselling memoir about life as a New York City cop, *Blue Blood*. (“May be the best account ever written of life behind the badge.” —*Time*)

In *Red on Red*, Edward Conlon tells the electrifying and suspenseful story of two NYPD detectives, Meehan and Esposito: one damaged and introspective, the other ambitious and unscrupulous. Meehan is compelled by haunting and elusive stories that defy easy resolution, while Esposito is drawn to cases of rough and ordinary combat. A fierce and unlikely friendship develops between them and plays out against a tangle of mysteries: a lonely immigrant who hangs herself in Inwood Hill Park, a serial rapist preying on upper Manhattan, a troubled Catholic schoolgirl who appears in the wrong place with uncanny regularity, and a savage gang war that erupts over a case of mistaken identity.

A literary thriller about the twisted dynamic of a successful police partnership—the tests of loyalty, the necessary betrayals, the intersections of life and work—*Red on Red* tells an unrelenting and exciting story that captures the grittiness, complexity, ironies, and compromises of life on the job.

Red on Red Details

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Author : Edward Conlon

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From Reader Review Red on Red for online ebook

Bibliophile says

I loved this a moody love-letter to New York City that also is kind of what The Wire might be like if it were a novel and set in NY and if McNulty were more philosophical and less of a horndog and Bunk were Sicilian.

Kelly Roll says

Be warned, those readers thinking that they are about to read a straightforward “this is the crime committed, this is how the crime was solved” type book will be disappointed. This book is really about relationships, particularly the relationship between Nick Meehan and his partner, Esposito, but to a lesser extent the other cops in their precinct as well as the criminals they encounter.

I really appreciated Conlon’s depictions of the life of a cop. He spotlights not so much the excitement of what we, the readers, assume is a cop’s life but rather the banality and drudgery that these individuals deal with. At times I felt exactly as if I were sitting at a table eavesdropping on these men’s lives. What was also so fascinating to me is how grey a lot of their decisions are. We definitely do not have the “noble knight of justice” version here but neither do we have the intentionally dirty version of a cop either. Rather we have two men who have valid reasons, at least in their own minds, for the actions they commit.

Nick and Esposito are markedly different. Nick is an introspective somewhat depressed man while Esposito is very much the live wire who prefers the hustle of a good case. Throughout the book they encounter a variety of cases – a suicide; killings of one gang member by another; a young girl who refuses to go home; a serial rapist. Ultimately these cases and the decisions made around their resolution will strain the friendship that Nick and Meehan have built.

My one quibble with the book is that the pacing could have been tightened up. It seemed to meander on a bit too much when circumstances forced a separation between Meehan and Esposito. Also, in the latter half of the book Nick’s depression began to be just too much. I felt that both he and I would have been better off popping a Xanax. The end of the book begins to pick up but abruptly stalls and, for me, the ending was confusing.

I do think the book worthwhile reading for the relationship aspect portrayed in the book. I would not recommend reading it on a cold drizzly day or the reader too may sink into a depressive state.

Samantha says

'Red on Red' is a gritty, introspective mystery that takes readers into the mind of detective Nick Meehan and his partner, detective Esposito, whom the Internal Affairs Bureau (IAB) has recruited Meehan to keep an eye on. I found it slow to get into but ultimately quite rewarding, with a few points of note that make it a departure from other mysteries I've read.

First of all, unlike most books in the genre, there isn't really one central mystery that the detectives devote all their time to solving, but several different ones, some of which turn out connected and some of which don't. It's interesting to follow the pair as they shift from case to case even in the course of a single day.

Secondly, the book devotes a lot of time to Meehan's thought processes and emotional challenges. Between

his relationship with his estranged wife, his guilt over his IAB betrayal of his partner, and assorted other hangups, he's got a lot going on, and it takes his toll on him as the novel progresses. It's not so simple as snapping, so much as his mental state gets worn down. It feels very real.

Other little details, like office banter between the various detectives, feels genuine as well and adds charm to the story. Conlon's a former detective himself; it's interesting to imagine a similar camaraderie may actually exist in various departments.

Conlon's extensive time in New York comes through in his descriptions of the various neighborhoods. New York's as much a character in the book as Meehan or Esposito. As someone who's lived near New York all my life, I found it charming, but I expect the extensive descriptions might bore those less invested.

The only thing that bothered me was one of the characters switched from dubious to outright illegal behavior. I wasn't sure I really bought he'd actually cross that line.

Still, overall it was a great read - a different sort of mystery, with a very human feel.

Randall says

Remember in your college comp class when you had that one story read aloud that seemed like the author had a checklist of literary conventions and worked tirelessly to hammer each and every one of them into the ground throughout the piece to where you wanted to scream, "OKAY! WE GET IT! YOU'VE PAID ATTENTION!"

Yeah. Well, imagine if that short story assignment was extrapolated into a fairly lengthy novel!

Fun?

No.

I got to a point with this book where I was tired of all the heavy-handed allusions and allegories and parallels and foreshadowing and and and and...Just tell the story.

When it comes down to it, there's not much story here.

It funny that I read this immediately after "Blood, Bones and Butter" by Gabrielle Hamilton. Both books are dominated by a narrator/protagonist who can't get out from under their own shadow of self-pity and largely self-inflicted misery.

Personally, I can barely take the people on facebook or twitter who use their daily sentence or two to complain about some unhappiness in their lives, so you might can imagine how enjoyable I might find a few hundred pages worth of it while trying to get to what I thought was going to be some bit of an insightful police thriller or some such.

I grew to resent this book, its author and its protagonist as battled through piles and piles of whiny words, hoping we'd get more action on the crimes sprinkled throughout the pages.

I will say the relationship between the uber-sad Nick Meehan and his partner Something Esposito was interesting enough. Probably the best part of the book, in fact. When the story focused on the two of them

and their pursuit of solving crime or their relationship as partners and potential friends, Conlon is at his most-readable.

Unfortunately, you know it's only a matter of one of them exits the room so Meehan can mope and reflect more on the misery of his existence, interspersed randomly with lengthy descriptions of New York scenery.

Probably I should have just put this book down at some point and walked away. Seems obvious now, but...yeah.

This writing style clearly works for some. There were enough kind reviews of this book to prod me to pick it up in the first place. However, if Conlon someday discovers the value of words and brevity, rather than just puking as many letters on the page as possible, that might actually be interesting.

Zack Becker says

A solid, skillfully constructed police procedural. Conlon gets the cops right: the artificially induced intimacies between partners that grown into real relationships, the merciless pranks, the petty gripes, the betrayals large and small, the dumb luck that is oftentimes better than skill. The action is somewhat slower than a page-turner, but the artful character studies carry the book along with the steady pace of a strong current.

Dindy says

This is a slow book- it develops slowly, drawing out the various cases assigned to two cops, and rising to a slow conclusion. As a study in character development, it is impeccable. And it can serve as a model for young writers on how to carefully draw out a plot to the very end.

Nick Meehan is a young cop who is going through the motions of his job and of his life. He and his wife are separated, with neither of them having the energy to either try to get back together or to take the final step toward divorce. Nick is stuck with a supervisor who steals the credit for Nick's work, and it appears as though his life is stalled.

Then he is transferred to the precinct where he lives and partnered with Esposito, a larger than life cop who is under investigation by internal affairs. Esposito pushes the boundaries, a lot. He understands that there are rules and there is reality and that sometimes the two don't always match up.

Nick is asked by internal affairs to go undercover and report on Esposito's activities to help them build a case against him. As the two of them investigate cases involving a suicide, and the murder of a gang member, Nick finds that he and Esposito are becoming more than partners, but they are becoming friends.

This is a complex book with many, many threads. Some of the threads are personal, involving Nick's relationship with his wife and a young woman he meets at a flower shop, and some involve the cases they are investigating. Still another thread involves a teen-aged girl who is the daughter of a witness in the suicide case.

I listened to the audio version of the book, and at first I thought it was really slow. As I continued to listen, I realized that even though it was slow, almost every single word was meaningful and important to the overall

story. By the time I got to the last couple of hours of listening, I was unable to turn the book off, so enrapt was I in the story.

My only complaint about the book is that after drawling out the plot in such a tortuous fashion, it ended very abruptly. I was left wanting to know what happened to the characters who had really worked their way into my head.

I definitely plan to look for more books by Conlon as this was a masterpiece of characterization and the relationship between Esposito and Nick.

If you are wanting a fast paced mystery, this isn't it. But if you are willing to take the time with this one, the payoff will be huge.

Tony says

The title of this debut novel by a NYC cop refers to what happens in wargames when the oppositional or attacking side (ie. the "red" team) turns on itself. It's a very apt title for a story that features plenty of blue (police) vs. red (criminal) activity, but also plenty of blue (regular police) vs. blue (internal affairs), and red (gang 1) vs. red (gang 2) drama. Indeed, as in many of the better crime stories, there are all kinds of moral shades of gray flickering across the pages.

The protagonist of the story is Nick Meehan, a typically Irish-American cop (although thankfully not an alcoholic), separated from his wife (their marriage broken by the trauma of multiple miscarriages) and living with his father up in the Bronx. He's an unusual cop, introverted and wry, with a genuine fondness and eye for the absurd. He's just been partnered with Esposito, a sharp-dressing, smooth-talking, married-with-kids-ladies-man who has a genuine jones for the action from murder cases. The two have enough quirks to set them apart from the rest of the guys in their squad, but somehow form a comfortable new partnership.

Their story sprawls across a series of plotlines, opening with the investigation of a woman hanging from a noose in Inwood Hill Park. But the big running investigation is a spate of tit-for-tat gang warfare that Esposito is happy to encourage and use an informant to leverage, as it results in plenty of "exceptional clearances" of open cases (ie. the people killed are the top suspects in other pending murder investigations, and thus the police can "clear" the old cases). There's also a strange Catholic schoolgirl who keeps popping up from time to time, and lurking somewhere in the background is a serial rapist. But as much as the book revels in the the moment-to-moment policework of all these various cases, its eye is more concerned with the strange and strained tones of this oddish couple of partners. And the elephant that lurks in the room is that Meehan has agreed to "keep an eye" on Esposito for NYCPD's hated Internal Affairs.

This is a police novel that's much more meditative and structurally loose than most I've read. This leads to some genuinely moving moments throughout, but it can also at times drift into too much navel-gazing. There's enough going on with the various storylines to keep one glued to the page, but sometimes Meehan's interior life just gets a little too overwritten for my taste, especially when drawn out over the course of 450+ pages. Is it good? Definitely. Is it great? Not quite. But I wouldn't be surprised if Condon's next book is, especially with the right editor to reign in the few excesses. If you're a fan of Richard Price's work, you should pick this up.

Laura says

Very much enjoyed this book, its a crime novel that is more about the shades of gray in the relationship between the two detectives, as well as legal shades of gray, than it is about the crime aspect.

Rusty says

Two most unlikely NYPD detectives work to solve cases. Meehan is by-the-book and is to spy on his partner, Esposito, who is known to take liberties to solve his cases. Rumor has it that he even accepts bribes. What is the truth? As the relationship develops between them, one begins to understand both men who are unpopular with the rest of the squad.

Meehan's marriage is falling apart but his partnership with Esposito is strengthening as the two find that they work together well. Their cases include a young woman found hanging from a tree, a drug-related shooting and a missing daughter. As they investigate the shooting, they find a group terrorizing a man they have wrapped in cellophane tape. The youngest member of the group is killed.

Nick Meehan is having a tough time. Both he and Esposito are injured in a stakeout at a funeral that turns violent. While he stays with Esposito and his family his father dies quietly and alone in the apartment. His wife consoles him but acknowledges that their life together is over. He pursues Daysi, a flower shop owner, when he can and thinks that he may be in love with her but her son, Estaban, hates the idea of anyone replacing his father.

As Nick struggles with depression and contemplates suicide. When someone shoots at him and misses, he realizes that he doesn't want to die. His breakup with his wife and Daysi depress him. When he thinks that Esposito has had sex with Daysi he is so angry believing that even his partner has let him down. The relationship between the two deteriorates even more and the squad wonders what will happen next. The climax is sudden and surprising as cases mesh and are some are finally solved but not as either man envisioned. It's a read that investigates the inner feelings of two policemen who work together and how it affects their work and their lives. I rather enjoyed reading this on.

Caitlin says

Red on Red is a cop book, but not in the traditional police procedural vein. While there is a thread of related and unrelated crimes none of these take precedence in this novel. Instead, Mr. Conlon offers us a lyrical look at the city he loves and reveals what it's like on the job.

Throughout this book we get to ride along with two homicide detectives - Meehan and his new partner, Esposito (Espo). Theirs is an unlikely pairing - Meehan, Irish, withdrawn, dragging himself through the days; and Espo - Italian, family man with many women on the side, a taker of risks, filled with flash and charm. As we ride along with them, the true complexity of a police partnership is revealed.

Conlon has written believable and whole characters with real problems in a real city. Even his minor characters are unforgettable - Sister Agnes, the tough and scary Indian nun; Raul da Costa - potential murderer and rapist in red women's underpants; and Daysi - Meehan's impossible love.

Mr. Conlon moves through all the extraordinary parts of an ordinary day as a cop and takes us along for the ride. With beautiful prose and lyrical descriptions of New York (that often reminded me of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood*) *Red on Red* doesn't sensationalize events, but lets them unfold of their own accord each moving to each as the days are melded together.

This is an extraordinary book and just what I expected from its writer, the author of *Blue Blood*, one of the best memoirs I've ever read.

Heidi says

Thanks to Goodreads for this advance copy from the giveaways! This book is about two NYPD detectives. One is secretly partnering up with the other as a narc for the internal affairs division. The story follows them through several cases that are somewhat interwoven. Their relationship grows and the IAD cop becomes disenchanted with his role and starts to feel more and more protective of his partner until he is entangled in a situation from which they both must "bend the rules". I found the book a little hard to get into at first, but with each turn of the page, I became more captivated by the story and ended up having a hard time putting it down. I really enjoyed it!

Nette says

I pulled this off a library shelf kind of at random (it fulfilled my basic criteria: nice and thick, no cats or swastikas on the cover, and it didn't seem to involve vampires). And I enjoyed it immensely. In TV terms, it's more "The Wire" than "Law and Order" -- sharp characterization, great dialogue, no neat conclusions. It's very realistic, not surprising since the author is a working detective. Don't read it if you're looking for a traditional police procedural or thriller, but if you're a fan of the great Richard Price you'll probably like this one too.

Darcia Helle says

If you want gripping suspense or fast-paced mystery, don't look here. This story does not move quickly. Instead, it forces readers to take their time, to wander the paths of the main character, to get lost with him, to feel his emotions and to see the minute details in life that many of us so easily overlook.

Edward Conlon is a cop writing about cops and his inside viewpoint gives readers something new to look at. There is some mystery, some suspense, some police procedural. But, at its heart, this book is one man's journey while finding his place in life. The words are sometimes poetic, sometimes crushing in their realism. *Red On Red* is a powerful read for those willing to set aside their expectations and lose themselves in the words.

Quillracer says

On a cover blurb, the Wall Street Journal says this book is, "Full of adrenaline." And Kirkus Reviews called it, "One of the best novels of the year." They must have read a different book than I did.

Red On Red starts off great with the main character Nick at crime scene then pace slows to a crawl with an in-depth detailing of his thoughts and feelings. And from there the book is almost a minute-by-minute recording of his life and thoughts.

On the plus side, *Red On Red* contains some beautiful imagery, giving it almost a literary tone, and. Conlon's detailed descriptions bring places to life. He also delivers good insight into how cops think, how they put pieces together, how they deal with the things they see and do. There's an old saw that says police work is eight hours of boredom punctuated by one minute of sheer terror. This book displays that to perfection.

On the minus side, Conlon's dense prose (long paragraphs and minimal dialog.) makes for slow going. The complex, free-form flow of Nick's thoughts are sometimes hard to follow, required re-reading passages to understand. Detailing Nick's every thought (he can't even answer a simple question without considering every possible nuance of what's behind it and every possible answer he could give.) grows tiring and tedious to read after a while, slows story down, and kills desire to read on. Very often, while wading through these I found myself thinking, "Enough already!" And poorly identified flashbacks break flow of story. The reader (this reader, anyway) was often halfway into one before realizing it was a flashback.

I had a hard time keeping Nick and Esposito straight and would often have to re-read a section to figure out which one was saying what. I never felt a close connection to Nick (a *must* in my opinion). Despite the in-depth chronicling of his thoughts, I never felt like I truly was inside his head, more like I was standing behind him watching them scroll across a screen in the back of his skull.

This book needed some seriously heavy editing. Did we really need a listing of Catholic churches in Manhattan and the Bronx taking up 2/3 of a page to open a chapter? Nick's thoughts should have come in for some heavy red penciling, too. Half of them—no, 60 to 70% of them—could have been cut without losing the gist of this story.

I don't feel as if I saw any growth in the main character over the course of the novel. If he did, it was so miniscule, I missed it.

And finally, the story just stopped, leaving too many loose ends dangling. Do Nick and his wife get back together? Is she pregnant? Have Nick and Esposito bonded tighter than brothers? These are just a few of the unanswered questions at the end of this book.

All in all this book did not live up to the hype of its cover blurbs.

Ellen Keim says

I really liked this book. It was a bit like watching a long episode of "Law and Order" but was much better than that. I don't usually like a lot of description, but the author handles it wonderfully; he really made "place" come alive for me. This is partly police procedural (although on the "shady" side) and partly what seemed to be an authentic look at what it's like to be a New York City police detective. Which makes sense, because that's what the author is. I'm a mystery fan, and this wasn't exactly a mystery, but I did care about the main characters and wanted to see what would happen to them. The only criticism I have was that the middle section of the book, when the partners aren't working together for a while, was kind of boring. All in all, though, I highly recommend this book.