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Cincinnati, 1927: a sensational murder trial captivates the nation. At stake: the lives of three men. There's the defendant, lawyer, and legendary bootlegger George Remus, whose crime of passion may seal his fate. Against him is the ambitious son of a former president, whose future rests on this monumental case. And then there's the federal agent whose obsession with taking Remus down started the entire tragedy. Three men separated by law and fate, but connected by something more seductive than either justice or corruption -- the impassioned, untamed heart of an enigmatic woman known as the Jazz Bird. Based on a true story, "The Jazz Bird" is an exquisitely written novel of love, betrayal, money, and power in an age of American innocence.

The Jazz Bird Details

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Author : Craig Holden

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Random says

I liked this book much more than I expected to. It's a historical procedural drama, set in Cincinnati and based on a true story. I've rarely read a book so screen-ready; this would make an excellent film. Although I appreciate a sense of detail, the descriptions of roads in Cincinnati, what they used to be called and where they go, were a bit much. The information about the architecture and buildings was more interesting, though. At times, when the prosecution and defense were arguing about what makes a tidy story versus the shades of gray and randomness of real life, you feel like they're arguing about how the book should or will end.

Jannelies says

De waanzin van whisky speelt zich af tijdens de Amerikaanse drooglegging in de jaren twintig. George Remus, belangrijk en gevreesd illegaal drankverkoper, schiet op een mooie oktoberochtend zijn vrouw Imogene dood. Aangezien er vele getuigen zijn, wordt hij spoedig opgepakt. Openbaar aanklager Charlie Taft valt de eer te beurt Remus aan te klagen. En dat is geen gemakkelijke klus. Remus staat er op om zichzelf te verdedigen, maar laat zich bijstaan door een gehaaide advocaat. Het proces tegen Remus is lang en ingewikkeld, niet in de laatste plaats door de enorme woedeaanvallen waar hij onder lijdt. Verder blijkt gedurende de loop van het proces dat vele betrokkenen geheimen met zich meedragen.

Dit schijnbaar eenvoudige verhaal (man schiet echtgenote dood en wordt opgepakt) wordt verteld vanuit een aantal standpunten, waarbij ook nog gebruik wordt gemaakt van flashbacks. Schrijver Holden neemt hierbij heel duidelijk een alleswetend standpunt in. Elke handeling, elke gedachte van de in het boek voorkomende personen wordt welhaast afstandelijk door Holden neergezet. Dit geeft het verhaal een zekere kracht, maar ook een zwakheid. Kracht, omdat de schrijver de lezer langzaam maar zeker meevoert in het verhaal. Zwakheid, omdat het bijzonder moeilijk is voor de lezer om zich met ook maar een van de medespelers te identificeren.

Voor lezers die geïnteresseerd zijn in het tijdperk waarin het verhaal zich afspeelt, is dit een interessant boek. Immers, de achtergrond en de daden van de medespelers worden gekleurd door hun tijd, een tijd die naar ik aanneem door de gemiddelde lezer van thrillers niet bewust is beleefd.

Donna says

When I first saw this book and read the reviews I wasn't really expected there to be so much complication and intrigue. There is tons of it, and it's worth the read! While this story settles mostly around bootlegging in Cincinnati, it is at the heart a love story. Or actually a love story that ends up going wrong. It goes spectacularly wrong, and it's heartbreaking to read the miscommunication between the husband and wife. And it leaves you thinking if only they could talk, if only they had more time, or if only they hadn't settled down this path. But alas none of these questions are answered and it really leaves you sad to see the story end. Great read that I highly recommend!

Judi says

"No good lawyer remains unaffected by his emotions, Your Honor."

On October 6, 1927, while on the way to the divorce court, the one time wealthiest bootlegger in the country, lawyer George Remus, has his chauffeur follow and harass the taxi in which his wife is riding. When the cars finally stop, he goes to the door of the cab, Imogene flees, and George follows and shoots her dead right there in Cincinnati's Eden Park. Remus, apparently aware enough of what he has done, turns himself into the police.

It is up to Charlie Taft, the youngest son of William Howard Taft, former president and the then Chief Justice, to try this shocking case as Chief Prosecutor. At first it seems that he's handed an easy win, a political benefit to his new position. During the arraignment proceedings, George Remus declares he is not guilty and can prove it was a morally justifiable homicide. Furthermore, George Remus will represent George Remus. Naturally, the state has no objection to this since they think they are being handed a gift.

Read the rest of my review on MF:
<http://mostlyfiction.com/history/hold...>

Emily Crow says

As with many best sellers of yesteryear, this one had me scratching my head (metaphorically) and wondering what all the fuss was about. Normally, I enjoy courtroom drama, and adore anything to do with the 1920s, so I should have loved *The Jazz Bird*. It's the unraveling of how and why a successful bootlegger murdered his wife in cold blood, in full view of everyone at a park. The story proceeds through flashbacks and courtroom segments. My verdict: it was just OK. I didn't get a true 1920s "vibe" from the story, and I never really connected with the characters. It was a quick read, though, and kept my interest, so...two and a half stars.

Uwe Hook says

Heard about the real-life story during Ken Burns' "Prohibition", terribly disappointed how the author muddled this intriguing story and bored me at times.

Jazz Bird takes place in the 1920's in the midst of the prohibition. The story starts off with the murder of Imogene Remus, the wife of a convicted bootlegger. Her husband, George Remus, confesses as the killer but he seems like an unlikely suspect as he's always been deeply in love with his wife.

During the trial their story unfolds a twisted and complex tale of betrayal and manipulation...until the end when you find out the truth about what happened to their relationship and the day of Imogene's murder. How the author could disappoint so much is unfathomable.

Marybeth says

I enjoyed the story, for the most part. The author is obviously well-versed at writing in the murder/mystery genre and I felt that he did a very good job at the character development. I did, however, find myself

disappointed with some of the liberties that he took with certain scenarios. There was too much in the way of gratuitous sexual detail that had nothing at all to do with the story and was a very unnecessary distraction from the main theme of the story. Without adding that, I would have enjoyed the story much more and feel that it would have had a much better flow.

Kyle Murway says

*George Remus is the suave, James Bond character from the Jazz Era. He had intelligence, presentation, the ability to manipulate individuals as well as the system, and above all, gain the attention of others while doing a service for society. Although what George was doing might not have been legal, everybody supported him. This story is about a court case in which George Remus is being prosecuted by Charlie Taft, son of President Taft. Remus shoots his wife in Eden park and immediately proceeds to the police station where he turns himself in. So. Why does 2/3rds of this novel cover a long,thrilling hearing? George Remus's sanity is up for debate. It's not until much later, the audience is exposed to a detrimental plot, planned by his wife, to assassinate George to save him from himself?

*The prohibition era is neatly contained within the confinements of the novel. New emerging members of the social class being tested by those of old money. From the attire of the "hired hands" who run routes to and from the distillers on the back roads of a descending rural community, to the lavish, disgustingly wasteful dinner parties of the rich. The setting captures the entirety of hilly Cincinnati and geographical modifies very few landmarks and features to fit the context of the text. There are the new mansions of price hill and the industrials of convention that boarder the river. The attitudes of the general public support that of the prohibition, everybody drank, nobody asked. Not George though, he was too focused on love, a love based on power and community. Power with one goal in mind. It seemed like George was always trying to do what he knew was right: putting people before himself.

*Interested in a novel that speaks of the loopholes of the law, society, and life in the early 20th century? Pick this. A truly enjoyable epistolary novel with strong imagery, and truth.

Vlady Peters says

A fascinating look at one of the weirdest experiments in world history. Go as far back in the history of the Western World and you'll never see anything like it.

As early as 1500 BC the ancient Greeks worshipped their Dionysus and his capacity to spread the good cheer.

According to the Bible, from the beginning of time a man liked to celebrate momentous moments, such as a wedding for example, by toasting the health and wealth of the newly-weds with a fine wine.

Back in 1500 when the great nations of England, France and Spain flourished, the English drank their imported French wines and beer; Spanish sailors continued to drink their wine while floating over the oceans, and the French made an art of their alcohol which continues to this day.

Then in 1920, after drinking their wine and whiskey since the 1700s, America passed a law prohibiting the making and selling of alcohol.

As my daughter often exclaims about various happenings in the world, 'What were they THINKING!'

Yes, what were they thinking?

Had they forgotten the early Pioneering days when the first port of call of any passing cow poke was the saloon? And when that same cow poke breasted the bar, it wasn't a glass of milk that he asked for.

And here was this nation suddenly, after being allowed for hundreds of years to seek their happiness in their own way, including drinking themselves to oblivion, deciding to go dry.

No appeals of 'but Your Honour, what about the loss of revenue, loss of jobs, stagnant economy.'

No. Just like that. Time, gentlemen. And don't bother coming back.

Of course, as the book points out, while legally the land was dry. illegally the alcohol continued to flow – underneath the table so to speak. Like all laws, The Prohibition law had its addendums and exceptions, like whiskey for medicinal and religious purposes, which meant alcohol continued to be made both legally and illegally.

As Barbara W. Tuchman in her book 'The March of Folly' would point out, The Prohibition was an exercise in folly. As she says, some actions carry with them their own seeds of defeat, and The Prohibition was a flight in the face of common sense.

This is a historical novel, based on historical happenings, and, for me, would have been a much better read if it had been a non-fiction.

For starters, as I ploughed through it, I realised that I preferred books that had a beginning, a middle, and an end. This book pulled in a number of directions as it skipped from past to present, from one scene to another, from one aspect of the story to another one still.

Similarly, for the most part the characters were sketchy and the two major characters, in particular, were not convincing. The dialogue at times was just words which said nothing about those who uttered them, or the motivation behind them. Nor did it have the atmosphere of that era which I am particularly fond of.

While the great love story of the two characters didn't do anything for me, the book is a great read as far as the particular period is concerned: the wheeling and the dealing behind the scenes; the hypocrisy of the epoch, and the corruption that was being practiced from the lowest level to the highest.

Jake says

A fascinating story told in not-the-most fascinating manner. The George Reemus case was a fascinating one of power, bootlegging, corruption, love, lust, etc. Pretty much any deadly sin you could think of. Alas, Craig Holden's style of telling it makes for an easy read but is frustrating to follow. He decides to intersperse scenes from Reemus and Imogene's life together with his murder trial. It's not bad (and the payoff is grand as the last 2/3rds of the book are filled with twists) but he doesn't always make a clear distinction of when he is flashing back and when he is not. Also, the prosecution deserves more space than is necessary. This might have worked better as a "faction" piece or in the hands of a more capable author. Reemus' story is incredible and I hope I read something better on him in the future.

Alisa says

Based on a true story of an actual murder that happened in Cincinnati's Eden Park in the 1920's. Former attorney and bootlegger George Remus fatally shoots his wife Imogene while on their way to court for their divorce hearing. Author Craig Holden takes some liberties with the details of the trial, and the story itself is riveting. It was fascinating to read about Cincinnati in the 1920's, to read about streets and landmarks that are so familiar to me. This book was unanimously enjoyed by the members of my book club, and it sparked a lively discussion. Was Remus insane? Was the truth ever really revealed? A must-read for anyone who enjoys courtroom dramas, and anyone who is interested in the Jazz age.

Tina says

Interesting, mostly true story especially since it all occurred in my hometown. There were surprises and some unexpected turns though I was somewhat familiar with the history in general. It would make an interesting movie.

Laura says

I was genuinely surprised how much I loved this novel! It's got a definite Gatsby vibe with the parties in the 20s, a classic courtroom drama with enough misdirection to keep you unsure of who you really support and a kind of Romeo and Juliet feeling of a forbidden and doomed love story. George and Imogene Remus are beautifully painted characters who I loved together and apart, which I feel is a mark of great character writing. I'm so glad I picked this up in a second hand book store, I'd love to read more of Holden's work if it's anything like this one!

Ann says

Easy to read novel based on true story of love triangle among legendary bootlegger George Remus, his wife Imogene, and federal agent Frank Dodge. Good atmospheric of the 1920s. Goes back and forth in time with each character giving his/her version of the story. Who did Imogene really love?

Toocutedobs says

Interesting novel based on the real life of George Remus who made millions as the nation's biggest bootlegger during Prohibition. This story covers the murder of his second wife Imogene and his trial. It seems to me he was the OJ Simpson of the time with a jury who spent only about 15 minutes deciding his fate. You'll read about the untouchables, those lawmen who upheld the law and resisted bribes and other temptations. Also, you read about the lawmen and politicians who were bought up by the dozens it seems. This is the jazz age, the time after WW I, with new technologies and art deco. I learned that I had once stay in one of hotels that George and Imogene stayed in--the Atlanta Biltmore. The book was enjoyable and I

would be interested in ready more about this time period and those who lived the Roaring Twenties.
