



# Escaping Barcelona

*Henry Martin*

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## **Escaping Barcelona** Henry Martin

Having left behind his childhood town full of dead-end jobs and bleak prospects for a future, Rudy, a nineteen-year old runaway, arrives in Barcelona.

Two days later, he finds himself outside a subway station half-naked and robbed of all his possessions.

Trapped in a city whose language he doesn't speak, without a passport or anyone to turn to, Rudy is plunged into a world of hunger and homelessness. Yet, fighting off the ravages of slow starvation proves far easier than the struggle to maintain his own decency and humanity when he is forced to befriend a hostile thug who holds the only key to Rudy's escape.

Unconditionally realistic, *Mad Days of Me: Escaping Barcelona* explores the conflicted ideology of youth and society's indifference to suffering in a harrowing tale of survival. This is a story of perseverance. A story of anguish, dignity, madness, and redemption.

## **Escaping Barcelona Details**

Date : Published December 2012 (first published 2007)

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Author : Henry Martin

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## From Reader Review Escaping Barcelona for online ebook

### John Rachel says

This book kept me riveted to the very last page, a nail-biting ending, I might add. Author Martin writes excellent, clean prose, presents interesting characters, and fashions a twisted but certainly believable story as he explores the underbelly of Barcelona. His knowledge of "street life" and what it takes to survive among the sordid losers and criminals who sustain themselves as beggars and predators in the bottom-feeding underworld \_\_ which exists from my own experience in every city, especially the most-acclaimed tourist hot-spots across the globe \_\_ is impressive. If this chilling adventure is at all autobiographical, we should join him in being grateful he is still here today, and able to write such an exciting and insightful novel.

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### Gregor Xane says

I don't read literary fiction that's much concerned with realism very often. I usually like a bit of the absurd, the surreal, or the fantastical mixed in. The "straight n' *serious*" stuff usually isn't for me. So, when I was asked to read this book in exchange for an honest review, I was a bit hesitant. But I'm glad I took a chance on it.

This is a story about the down and out, and I'm generally pretty fond of some grit and grime. Martin does a good job of getting inside the head of a 19 year-old runaway named Rudy and exposing thought processes and observations that are often embarrassingly earnest, wildly idealistic, and excruciatingly naive. Rudy thinks a lot of the same shit I was thinking when I was that age, the kind of shit that I can only shake my head in wonder at now.

Rudy isn't a sympathetic character, but he's a compelling one. I wanted to keep reading to find out where he would end up. But my lack of sympathy for Rudy was something that kept nettling me while I was reading this. After being sexually assaulted (and having his passport stolen) in a strange land where he can't speak the language, Rudy steadfastly refuses to reach out to his family for help. The reason why he never reaches out to his family for help is never explained. There is no hint at an abusive home life or anything of the sort. It just seems like he'd rather live on the street and risk starvation than simply swallow his pride.

Another thing that nettled me a bit was that it was never clear what language Rudy spoke (and I believe this was intentional). He visits Spain on a lark and it's made plain that he can't speak Spanish and that he only knows 50 or so words in English, yet it seems that he's able to communicate with a good number of street people (and the police) without much difficulty. This wasn't a huge issue. But I do think the vagueness of Rudy's native language served to over-complicate things, and it became somewhat distracting for this reader.

Aside from these two nettling bits, I found *Escaping Barcelona* pretty engrossing. The writing is smooth and draws you through the story. I read it in just a few sittings. Martin does a fantastic job evoking a sense of place and the people who inhabit the streets of Barcelona. It reeked of verisimilitude. I'd be surprised to find that the author hasn't spent a good deal of time in that city.

This book is the first part of a trilogy called *Mad Days of Me*. I've already decided to pick up the next one in the series. I'm still pretty curious about where Rudy will end up.

## Elyse Walters says

Whew..... "Sometimes the burden we place upon ourselves is far greater than the burden placed upon us by others. Society is mean and cruel, but the fear we have of society is punishing in itself to a far greater extent". [I read --and re-read that line several times]>>> powerful, don't ya think?/!!!

And the story continues ...

And continues....

And continues....

Basically 'our guy' lives through pure hell -- in a hellish city --starving!!!

--Money and passport have been stolen --

His 'dignity' is stolen (Most painful rectum any human being should ever have to experience) --etc.

"OUR GUY" keeps going --and going -and going..... (can't call home). Oh, how I remember! (I lived that experience myself)

On the streets with **\*\*Mr. Hungry-down-and Out\*\***, are the city cops, and hookers, dogs, rats, sailors, photographers, jugglers,.....etc. etc.

Lots of smoking and drinking in this city! --

Just trying to survive --one day at a time!

Will he ever get his damn passbook back? (and at what cost)

I kept wanting to 'help' this young character ---(I've been in his shoes) --

Can't we get him a massage --a warm water soak?/! lol

While reading about this 'journey-one-never-forgets' ---I'm reminded of the time I left the country --'alone' at age 18/19 ...for 2 years myself --- I went to Israel -then overland to India -- (single white female --off season-- in the 70's) -- I was never raped thank God -- --but I went without food for long periods --and I got 'picked' at way too often --- I started to swing back!

I once slept outside in the ICE COLD HARD RAIN --in GREECE -- with no cover --It was one of the hardest nights of my life --

READING this story brought back memories ---45-something years ago -- (I must say ---Its a blessing to be reading about it --rather than living it).

Page turning storytelling from this author ---

Yet be prepared --this is the 'other' Barcelona .....

Don't expect the 'fantasy' story of fine wine -gourmet meals --and fancy ballroom moonlight dancing!

Its a good book --and RAW!

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## Vicki Wilson says

The title says it all. This book really is about escaping Barcelona. I'd always had an idyllic idea about what it

must be like to visit Spain. This book burst my bubble and opened up an underbelly in Barcelona that proved to be quite emotional at times.

Get ready for a shocking start and an emotional journey from beginning to end.

I will be reading the sequels.

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### **Underground Book Reviews says**

Rudy, the main character in Henry Martin's "Escaping Barcelona," falls down the rabbit hole and keeps spiraling deeper and deeper into trouble. He arrives in Barcelona through a random choice at the train station while trying to escape his dead-end life and his own past mistakes. He starts his journey full of optimism, only for the adventure to quickly turn into a nightmare. Within days, Rudy is raped and robbed of all his possessions.

While Rudy's nationality is never divulged, he doesn't speak Spanish and only some English. Stranded in a city where he can't speak the language, without a passport or anyone to turn to, Rudy soon becomes one of the invisible street people the world tries not to see.

With its realistic, graphic depiction of homelessness, "Escaping Barcelona" reads more like a memoir than fiction. Martin deftly conveys all the horror of Rudy's predicament and the terror of being completely vulnerable to attacks by everyone, from predatory gangs to the police. The vivid, gritty descriptions of the physical ravages of near-starvation and a lack of hygiene, recorded through the detached observations of Rudy (who is most likely suffering from PTSD) are both repulsive and heartbreaking.

...read more at [UndergroundBookReviews\(dot\)com](http://UndergroundBookReviews(dot)com)

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### **Michelle says**

This was a well-written story in first person narrative. It tells the story of Rudy, who leaves his hometown and travels to Barcelona. While there, an unfortunate incident leaves him trapped. With no passport and very little money, Rudy is soon homeless, living on the streets among drug addicts and thieves.

The vivid descriptions of Barcelona will have you feeling as if you are there with Rudy. Henry Martin captures the despair of life on the streets, the grime, the hunger, the struggle to get food and a warm place to sleep, the toll it takes on the body and the mind. Amid all that though, there is hope and friendship. There is an array of characters, some you will like, others not so much.

Although a hard story to read, I enjoyed this and will be reading the next book in the series. I'm eager to find out what comes next for Rudy.

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### **Lisa Marie Gabriel says**

I came to Henry Martin's book following a discussion of literary fiction in the modern day. I mentioned the

cult novel *Trainspotting* and pointed out that difficulties with the heavy Scottish dialect did not override the fact that it was totally realistic in its handling of drug addiction. *Escaping Barcelona* also has a form of gritty realism dealing as it does with uncomfortable and unpleasant issues like statelessness, homelessness, exploitation and homosexual rape. It is however a much more approachable book.

The quality of the writing here is excellent and it is not written in dialect or the vernacular which makes it easier for the general reader to get into. To me, the language of evocation and description is vital. One of my favourite poets, for example, is the war poet Wilfred Owen because he brings a talent for visual description to things we don't consider poetic subjects. In this way Owen gives the horror of war a striking and vivid reality. Henry Martin, for me, achieves something similar on a smaller scale in *Escaping Barcelona*. In an era where increasingly readers have little time for description, characterization or exposition, he allows us more than just a glimpse of his protagonist's world. The author is not just content with what his character does and what happens to him; you feel Rudy's initial sense of awe and excitement on arriving in Barcelona, you smell, taste and see his surroundings. Later the same skills are applied to his physical deterioration, how the fabric of his unwashed socks becomes embedded in the skin of his feet for instance.

Rudy starts out, as many young people do, by feeling trapped at home. He longs for freedom and adventure and leaves the safety and security of his home to seek that freedom on the road. Ironically his search leads to virtual imprisonment in a world where everything is reduced to the absolute basics of survival and where it is hard to trust anybody. His interactions with young women on holiday draw attention to this irony. They too seek freedom and adventure through travel, but unlike Rudy they have not been victimized; they have not lost the physical means of escape and they are still in control of their own destinies. He envies them and he fears for them too. His eventual escape is almost a very final escape, the significance of which was not lost on me.

The novel *Escaping Barcelona* deals with issues on the underbelly of society; issues of criminality, exploitation of the weak, powerlessness, hopelessness and the all too convenient invisibility of the poor and the homeless. Its premise that this can happen to anybody young, innocent and trusting is sadly built on truth. Your hopes rise and are dashed along with the young protagonist, you see life at its most fundamental, learning survival skills and dealing with frustration and fear along the way.

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## **Rakhi Dalal says**

Much of what transpires obscurely on streets stands a remote chance of being considered worthy of attention. With the ever occupied mind, always attentive to own entreaties, it is imperative that the obscure remains just that--obscure. Moreover, things unpleasant and unwarranted are the least to be paid any attention to while vacationing. No dearth of things visible and exciting, why even bother for those shadowy. Adventurous places, thrilling experiences, luxury of soft bed to sleep, more than enough to eat and drink without having to think of next meal. Hunger, deprivation or loss of identity - not even to trouble in dreams.

But, what if ?

What if stuck in a place, having lost everything, even the identity? How to survive? How to escape?

Rudy, a nineteen year old, leaves his home and wandering from country to country, finally lands in Barcelona, Spain. Youth and independence; a heady combination for adventure. Dreamy eyes and vigor for the unknown, added with a lure of the forbidden.

This lure wears off when Rudy is not only mugged but also sexually assaulted on his last day in the city. The robbers take away all, his money, even his passport. He is left only with the clothing he wears. Trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, he faces starvation and scorn. His inability to procure an employment in absence of a proof of identity, adds to his woes. Does he survive hunger and destitution, the walking evil on the roads; men dangerous and degraded? Does he finally escape?

Escaping Barcelona by Henry Martin is a gripping story of the escape of Rudy from the sin city. But it is not just that. It is also a thought provoking narrative, which makes you contemplate the most unfortunate state for a human being i.e. the state of hunger and also what it leads to. In a way it brought to mind Knut Hamsun's "Hunger". The work is also a satire on the so called developed world where it takes only the opposite sides of a single road to separate the wealthy from the poor, where abundance and deprivation co-exist, where the youth is plagued by addiction and where the Police personnel are as hardened as the hard core criminals.

It is also a rumination on humanity, hope for a better World.

*"Perhaps, some day, humanity can start afresh, a new world, a tabula rasa, a world with a mind without prior experiences. No memories and no pain. A day when the ones with abundance do not look down at the poor and the needy, a day when we learn to care for the victims, the fallen souls of civilization and advancement, a day when the world will be pure."*

*"Yet no one realizes that the vital always remains unspoken: Be human, be open-minded, and be willing to learn. Nothing could be simpler than that, yet it is the hardest lesson to accept or teach. We raise our progeny with vanity and prejudice. We doom future generations and ourselves; we have destroyed the idea of simplicity."*

But more than that, it is also Rudy's escape from the sin itself. Though he is an addict (view spoiler) but not even the most desperate of states make him indulge in crime i.e. rob or kill. The beauty of the work lies not only in its spellbinding narrative, which never slacks anywhere, but also in the introspection it calls for. This is one of the best literary fictions I have read this year.

Highly recommended.

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## Andrea says

Where have you seen Rudy before? You wonder, while reading Escaping Barcelona. You've seen Rudy walking around aimlessly in the plazas and train stations and dark alleys of every big city. A lost, homeless, dirty young man, suspiciously provoking feelings of disgust, distrust and even fear from the passersby. The invisible scum of society, the runaway, the bum. But that's all there is for the eyes to see. What no one sees, is a tortured soul, a man in search of his destiny, questioning rules, normalcy and desperately trying to find meaning in all of it.

In Escaping Barcelona, we find a traveler - not totally comparable to the traveler in Damon Galgut's "In a Strange Room", but nonetheless possessing the same unsettling feelings when one is restless to leave, searching for what can't be found at home, and, not knowing what to expect, finding misery, horrors, the disdain of society and the cruel madness of a life without boundaries.

Interesting read, food for thought, creative and fast paced, with vivid descriptions of the city of Barcelona. I'm looking forward to reading the rest of the trilogy to find out Rudy's redemption.

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## **Edward Wolfe says**

At the top of this review composition window, Goodreads prompts, "What did you think?"  
My first reaction to that question is: Wow!

This book is pretty damned amazing. It's very different than what I normally read, or even see available on the market. It has a classic feel as if it was written by some great author 50 or 75 years ago, but it takes place in modern times.

I can't compare the actual writing to any author that I know, but I can compare the feeling from reading it to the feeling I've gotten from Charles Bukowski, J.D. Salinger and John Steinbeck.

If someone gave you this book and didn't tell you until after you'd read it and fallen in love with the main character that it was written by an indie author, you'd probably say, "Yeah, right."

I almost never describe what a book is about when I'm reviewing it because I think the book's description should do that, but I will say that in addition to what you've already read in the description, just consider that the narrative is from a young man who is very intelligent and comes from at least a middle-class background and finds himself being homeless in a foreign country.

Just that alone would make the book interesting, but it goes past that, drawing you in deeper and deeper to Rudy's predicament and getting to know him and like him more as you read his thoughts and philosophical observations on the state of man and modern society.

Final thought: I'm so glad this is a trilogy. I'm going to be sad when I'm writing a review for the third book.

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## **Lucie Novak says**

I liked this book. Who would think I could get hooked on a story of a 19 year old accidentally homeless foreigner in Barcelona?

But I did get hooked, following the young man around the city, hungry, dirty and rather desperate, I do not want to put spoilers in, so won't tell you the story.

In a way, it is hard to tell what was it that kept me interested. Despite it being thrilling, nothing really happens. I could summarise the story in three paragraphs.

But that is not the point. The characters are alive, I care what happens to them- the reason why I am going to read the other two parts of the trilogy.

In my annual appraisal as a doctor, in the case studies or educational activities, there is a "claim impact" tick box. If you can prove you have a good reason to claim impact, your points are doubled.

Well, I can claim impact with "Escaping Barcelona".

I ever used to give young homeless men begging on the street money. Now I do. Yes, some of them might use it on drugs, but some of them will get food. I do not want somebody like Rudy go hungry if I can help it.

If I see and smell someone dirty on the underground, I wonder what happened to them. I am thinking about helping as a doctor in those homeless shelters medical facilities next year, when I retire.

I will most likely forget all those good intentions like people forget their New Year's resolutions to lose weight , stop smoking and exercise more. But it is a start.

I do not know if Henry Martin was ever homeless. But even if he wasn't, he made me understand it better.

One criticism, in some parts of the book, Rudy sidetracks us with preachy, philosophical musings, not really relevant to the book or character. There were only about three pages of that, a minute part of the book. But it seemed a bit artificial As if the author wanted to make his book more worthy.

He did not need to do it. The book is very good, unusual, well written, and moral. Rudy for me is alive, and I will carry on caring about his fate and fate of others like him long after I have finished the book.

That is what good art does to you.

Impact. Well done!

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## **Debbie "DJ" says**

Yup, I'll be reading this series!

Henry Martin creates a harrowing story focused around the main character Rudy. Rudy is 19 years old, and has left home seeking freedom, and escape from his family. He has no real destination and is following his heart. His desire is to live a life of simplicity. This leads him to Barcelona, where a horrific event leaves him penniless, and without a passport. Interspersed throughout this book Rudy's views of society, materialism, the media, and the cruelty of today's world echo my own. Rudy states, " Fortunately, I do not belong to this world; fortunately, I have no intentions of complying and conforming to the 'mainstream'; fortunately, I am my own person. So while you sit in front of your television set, worrying about the newest and latest gadget that you don't have, I will concern myself with my own struggle - my struggle to survive." Unfortunately his desire for simplicity leads to a serious struggle to survive. Sadly, without money, there are few options, and the cruelty of today's world become all to real.

Miller's portrayal of the underbelly of Barcelona, and his description of the empty eyes of tourists being led from place to place like sheep are deeply felt. Rudy finally realizes however, that there is no perfect place. He states, "It took Barcelona to make me realize that I was chasing my own shadow, running from my own issues, uncomfortable in my own skin. I now know that there is no perfect place, and there never will be, unless I embrace who I am. The story left me wondering just what does lie ahead for Rudy.

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## **Florence Osmund says**

Mad Days of Me – Escaping Barcelona by Henry Martin was a very interesting read. In part what made it so interesting was Martin’s vivid development of the main character, Rudy.

Teenage Rudy flees his home in Rome to Barcelona, leaving his family and girlfriend behind, looking for freedom. He realizes he needs to embrace who he really is in order to find peace within himself and joy in his life, but he doesn’t know who that is. For months, he spends his days on the streets of Barcelona interacting with an pitiful array of junkies, criminals, drunks, street performers, stray dogs, and other lost souls, adapting to the backdrop of the day like a chameleon. Occasionally Rudy has a bout of philosophical thinking, but that soon dissipates as soon as a new situation presents itself. After squatting in an old

abandoned building with a Romanian thug, a deaf Columbian, and a heroin addict, he focuses on leaving Barcelona, but that proves more difficult than he ever imagined.

This book was extremely well written with intense drama and beautifully executed scenes. It is well worth the read.

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### **Glenn Russell says**

Ah, to be a college-age student traveling free and easy through the cities of Europe, soaking in all the color and vitality of the peoples and culture. You hit Barcelona, walk the broad tree-lined streets, visit the Picasso Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. What a dream come true. But, then, one evening leisurely strolling down the wrong street in the wrong neighborhood, you are attacked, brutally raped and then robbed of all your money, identity cards and passport. Other than the cloths on your back, you have nothing. And going to the police is out of the question, since you are pulled down very quickly into a complex web of crime. And to make matters even worse, you don't even speak the language. Does this sound like a dream instantly transformed into a living nightmare? Well, welcome to the world of American author, Henry Martin's Escaping Barcelona.

I planned to read this book over the course of a week. However, when I sat down last evening and started reading, I couldn't stop. Totally engrossed and absorbed – 220 pages in one sitting. At one point the first-person narrator muses, "Hope, once more, starts to root in my heart. The hope I so desperately need, and so futilely try to fight off. Despite the thousand reasons against it, the hope thrives, even though I know that in the end the silver lining will tarnish, and instead of a strong rope my future will hang on a thin thread that cannot support my weight. How many more breaks can I endure before my heart breaks in two?"

Escaping Barcelona makes one fact very clear: the sharpest difference between people is those who have food and those who are hungry and without food. I wouldn't want to spoil a reader's experience of the ins and outs, the ups and many downs of this compelling novel, so I will end with one quote I find particularly memorable, "I clean my face the best I can and splash some water on my hair. The last time I've had a shave was at the police station, and now I am looking like a wild beast. The uneven hairline growing on my chin, a bit here and there, sticks out like overgrown whiskers. I take out the lighter and burn off the wildest parts. After few attempts it looks much better, only the smell of burnt hair is unbearable. I get out of the bathroom before I have to throw up again. How did I become such a skeleton? It is very bizarre to see one's self in the mirror after a long time. Any new changes in appearances become more severe, more frightening; I have grown almost unrecognizable from the image I've had of myself until now. When I arrived in Barcelona I weighed around one hundred and sixty pounds – the liast time I was weighed at the police station I was just a little under one hundred. That was a while ago. I don't even want to guess what I am today. It had never hit me until I looked in the damn mirror – I have become a human ruin, a sad, pathetic excuse for a man. I have to get out of this city before it claims my life."

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### **Martyn Halm says**

Henry Martin's thoughtful and intelligent discourses in the GoodReads community threads intrigued me

enough to pounce on the chance to read *Escaping Barcelona* when he submitted it for screening and reviewing in *The Source*.

And I was glad I did, because *Escaping Barcelona* is a novel that will stay with me long after I reached the last page. Rudy is an enigma. At first I thought he was ‘an American abroad’, but despite references to American measurements and valuta, Rudy’s lack of Spanish and English made me reassess my first impressions. I believe Rudy’s nationality has been left deliberately vague to avoid giving the reader any preconceptions towards the protagonist.

After Rudy gets robbed and brutalized and finds himself stuck in a city where he’s essentially a stranger, his struggle for survival on the streets becomes a poignant travelogue, where Rudy sinks deeper and deeper into a mire of betrayals and danger, with few chances of hope.

Since my own personality is more purposeful than Rudy’s, I was frequently frustrated with his passive/defeatist attitude, and his tendency to focus more on cigarettes and wine than nourishment and hygiene. Which also spoiled the infrequent intimacy Rudy had with female tourists—I wondered if these women weren’t repulsed by his unwashed smell or ‘I haven’t brushed for weeks’ breath. I can understand how a street person fails to smell himself, but other people still have noses.

Still, that’s the stickler for verisimilitude in me. And the fact that I got frustrated also means that I was emotionally invested in the character, which is a tribute to Henry Martin's penmanship.

Rudy’s ordeal—having to live on the streets of an unfamiliar city, trusting strangers and hoping to regain the means to escape Barcelona—is written with a sensory detail that rings disturbingly authentic, from the physical deterioration to the desperate scabble for nourishment and the small moments of happiness resulting from the unexpected kindness of strangers.

Henry Martin has an ability to draw memorable characters and imbue them with an ambiguity that makes the reader wary about their intentions. Although there are a few characters that lean more toward the darker side of humanity, most characters have to forego the luxury of moral superiority in order to simply survive on the mean streets of Barcelona.

Following Rudy around Barcelona was interesting and rewarding. I’m eager to read Henry Martin’s other works, and follow Rudy’s further adventures.

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