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What—or who—could turn a gifted little boy into a murderous thing that calls itself "Satan's Child"? In search of an answer, a man named Burke travels from a festering welfare hotel to a neat frame house where a voodoo priestess presides over a congregation of assassins. For this vigilante and unlicensed private eye has made it his business to defend the small victims whom the law has failed—even a child who has been made into a killer.

Gripping and chillingly knowledgeable about the mechanisms of evil, *Sacrifice* is a thriller of savage authority from one of the best crime writers of our generation.

Sacrifice Details

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Author : Andrew Vachss

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John Culuris says

There have been quite a few ups and downs over the novels leading to Burke's sixth outing, *Sacrifice*. Some of the downs include an overwhelming sense of loss inundating his second novel that the reader did not experience as the character lived the actual events in his debut. And then in the third novel there's the same unending emotional clash between lovers without any significant variation, repeated again and again and again. Also there's Andrew Vachss' preceding effort where he left behind a supporting cast he had spent considerable effort introducing and defining. And, lastly, through all his work so far--with the possible exception of Burke's debut novel *Flood*--Vachss has proven not to be the most streamlined of plotters. He actually acknowledges this in *Sacrifice*. After several days spent staked out in a park, Burke learns that a female jogger he has been talking to semi-regularly is an undercover cop. This may or may not have something to do with him and why he is there, but Vachss quickly makes it clear through the first person narrative of his protagonist that we are not going to find out:

Belinda was a cop. In books, people are fascinated with mysteries. Can't let them slide. Books have plots--life has plotters.

She is irrelevant to the plot of *Sacrifice*. Does that mean she should not be there? No. She is significant to the mindset of Burke.

I suspect Vachss to be a very self-aware writer. He has taken care to correct previous shortfalls like the ones mentioned above. The next time Burke suffered a loss Vachss made sure we felt it, going so far as to open the next novel with the punishment of an ancillary character who was responsible for much of the damage endured. He also seems to be expanding his supporting cast, making them so much a part of Burke that it does not seem feasible to leave them out of future stories. As there are eighteen books in the series, I guess I'll find out eventually.

So, yes, the **downs** are noticeable. Their significance is lessened considerably by the **ups**. The first of two in particular is Vachss' character work. His people have become more realistic with each appearance, often without the aid of overly dramatic situations but rather through the skill of Vachss' presentation; a major accomplishment granting that they began life almost comic book-ish in construction. Max the Silent is an unbeatable warrior. The Mole is a mechanical genius. All the characters have evolved away from their initial designs. There is no longer mention of the fanciful booby traps Burke has built into his office and car.

The other strength in Vachss' work is his superior skills as a storyteller. It's why readers gladly follow an unhappy man with no joys in his life and whose only purpose is his work. It's why some unwieldy plotting becomes merely a blip on the radar. With each book we are given a swatch of an intriguing life, the middle of which happens to contain a case.

In regards to *Sacrifice*, it's two cases. The first involves an eight-year-old boy who woke up traumatized next to his little brother, who had been hacked to death with a butcher knife. Both children had been abused. The second case is a search for a four-year-old boy who was taken by father, presumably to hand over to a cult. Yes, both cases are about children. With Vachss it's always about kids. The exposing of pedophiles and the protecting of children. He cares about the other elements of fiction--characters, story, etc.--and he is very good at it, but it has never been the ultimate goal. He has always been about dragging depravity out into the open. Subjects the world would not let him publish as nonfiction has been repackaged as entertainment.

With Andrew Vachss and Burke, there's one question readers always have to ask themselves: How dark are

you willing to go? There are never detailed descriptions of child abuse; that would defeat the purpose. But Vachss views everything surrounding such abuse with an unflinching eye. Even scenes in broad daylight are tinged with gloom. Perhaps not as gloomy as when *Sacrifice* was published in 1991, as some of this subject matter has since come out. The characters, however, are living it in their present, so the reader still feels it.

The entertainment value in *Sacrifice* is superior and a return to form for the series. As always, it is meant to contrast with the arena in which it takes place, which is disturbing. Heightened maybe, in some cases magnified for effect and exaggerated for that very entertainment value. Its basis remains very real.

But that was always the point.

Nate says

Another black-as-night Burke tale. This one really delved into the psychology of abused children with seriously chilling results. These books usually end with a severe kick to the balls but this one was more like unceremonious castration with a cold knife.

Ian Cockerill says

Burke continues in his miasma of misery, but the books are compelling, even if the horrors they depict are more commonly known nowadays. This one involves a highly intelligent child who has been so badly abused as to shatter his personality into multiple parts, and Burke's quest to get the DA to recognise that his crimes are not his own, but those of his abusers.

Also, of course, Burke's own desire to bring the perpetrators to justice or something like it.

A good read with all the usual posse of supporting characters.

Lynn says

The people are emotionally dark and the issues are always ugly, but there is a kind of bounce to the characters somehow....it kind of reads like rap lyrics.

Harry says

What did I think? This guy's the king of "Noir", is what I think. Andrew Vachss, a lawyer and author with a penchant for the welfare of kids and women - especially the kids - has created Burke to let some steam escape.

Burke's world is not the world you and I live in. Burke exists in NYC but he is not seen in it. When society mentions the name "Burke" it is in the fashion of a legend: a myth, someone who is not real. Burke likes it that way.

With unforgettable characters fully developed over a long series of books, we dive into the seedy, underground realm of the city. The rules are different, alien to someone such as myself. Life is very physical

but full of kick ass psych ops aimed at evil.

These books are dark, very raw...and not easily set aside.

Usual disclaimer. There's no need to discuss plot. The books are excellent, period. And if you've read this review, you've read 'em all (save you some time)

James Kidd says

I re-read Flood a few months back. Read some other stuff and then started on a Vachss/Burke fest. I have whipped through the next 5 books in this series in a few weeks. A real trip down memory lane for me. I first read Sacrifice in the early nineties. My abiding memory is of reading it whilst on a short holiday with a good mate. We were camping and had some kit, but not enough. I remember sitting in a chair near the tent, Snoddy was cooking and I was reading. I found Sacrifice compelling then and it has lost none of its fire in the intervening 20 years or so. So Burke, unlike most of the previous books, is not involved in a quest for cash, this is purely of his own sakes. A revenge tale, for what has been done to a boy by freaks. The climax, when it comes, is quick, but with consequences. Another writer would have drawn out the action at the end into an explosive finale. Vachss treats it as he writes the rest of the book - sparse, direct and efficient. There is no main love interest for Burke either in this book. Which is refreshing. He still mourns Belle, seems to be coming to terms with Flood's absence, but is a damaged and therefore more interesting character. Great stuff.

Lee says

Burke - the anti hero - doing his best to save abused kids, while living off the grid.

I really liked this - "I flicked on the all-news radio station. A human beat his baby to death, cut the kid up, fed the parts to his German Shepard. The authorities took charge. Killed the dog.

They say when a dog tastes human flesh, it'll always seek more. A dog like that, you have to put down, When humans get the same way, we give them therapy." **like how Burke thinks...

Hard-boiled, lean prose and the gritty streets of New York, I have joined the others, following cult favorite Andrew Vachss.

Kimsandara says

Sometimes, I pick an Andrew Vachss book out of boredom. I really liked the first one but now, I can't help but be disappointed whenever I read another one in the series.

What Burke and Andrew Vachss though he try to do is laudable. Fighting for endangered children, revealing how sordid and cruel adults can be toward the vulnerable is crucial. However, I have a problem with the writing style, a problem that detracts me somewhat from appreciating the book. I don't know if it's because I am not a native speaker but sometimes I feel like the vernacular is so thick I don't understand what is going on.

I also found the psychology of the characters lacking. I think that may be explained by the fact that we're dealing with people that are street-smart and that don't really care about the hows and whys as long as they

get the job done. In the story, once they understood roughly why the child was like that, it was time to act but I would have been interested to learn more about his psyche.

That being said, it's not a bad book, just too shallow to hold my interest for long.

Larry Bassett says

I have not had much experience reading series so this is a relatively new experience for me. I started with book one and expect to read through in order to book eighteen. I have all the books at ninety-nine cents each from Alibris.com. This is book six and I am now familiar with and fond of the regular supporting characters including Pansy, the dog. This is the first book of the Burke series where the title is not the name of a woman.

Liking Burke was not a sure thing for me since violence has been pretty low on my priority list. I was introduced to him on GR and thought I would give him a try since he deals with social issues, especially child sexual abuse, and has an interesting, to say the least, moral and ethical code. Most of the series is set in New York City, one of my favorite places. But he is not from the upper west side!

You won't find any normal people in this book. I think Burke is a vigilante although he denies it and he is the good guy. He likes to say that he was brought up by the state: foster care, juvenile detention, prison. He deals with some pretty sick people, perverts. Burke calls them freaks. As far as Burke is concerned the only cure for some of them is being dead and he is willing to help them along to that goal.

(view spoiler)

Wolfe dragged deeply on her cigarette, eyes straight ahead.

The man leaned over her table. "I wish I was that cigarette," he said, flashing a mouthful of caps, white against tan.

Wolfe took the cigarette out of her mouth. Looked at it carefully. "So do I," she said, looking right into his face. Dropped the cigarette to the barroom floor, ground it out with the tip of one shoe.

Just like Wolfe, Vachss doesn't waste a lot of words. His chapters are the same way. There are 273 pages in *Sacrifice* and 195 chapters. Some chapters are several paragraphs, short paragraphs. I don't think could ever be a Broadway play: too hard on the stage crew. Take a subway ride in chapter 100. Get on at Chambers Street and watch (in words, of course) the Surrogate Ninja Body Slam. It's worth the time and token.

Burke can definitely be a wild ride. After reading the first six books in the series, the shock value has worn off but there is still a lot of drama. If you are looking for an anti-hero, Burke is your guy. *Sacrifice* is a notch below a four star book but still manages to hold its place in the series. Vachss is relying on character development in the earlier books. The regular characters are almost like cameos without much personality being added. The development of the relationship between Burke and the police character Wolfe is interesting. I thought that the event at the conclusion was drawn out without much of a boost in tension. I give the book three stars with the expectation that the next book will be back to four. And with another twelve books in the series, I am hopeful for some five star action as well.

Craig Werner says

Excellent Burke novel. This is the first in the series, which I'm (re)-reading slowly, that doesn't overdo Burke's sexual encounters. Other than that, it's a familiar mix: Burke's "family" (Mama, the Mole and Terry, Max and Mac, the Prof, Wolfe, even Michelle, who doesn't physically show up but is present); the focus on the sexual abuse of children; the presence of a New York City with its true face showing. This one centers on what may or may not be an actual Satanist cult--for Burke the trappings are a sideshow. There's a nice connection with Caribbean obeah and the first appearance of Clarence. The endgame is a bit melodramatic for my taste, but it's only ten pages or so and I don't read Vachss for the denouement. For someone who's not going to read the whole series, this wouldn't be a bad place to start.

John Grazide says

I really like Burke and the way in which they are written, but with this one I felt like there really wasn't that much of a story. Or the story wasn't the driving factor. There was still a little more peeled away of Burke's past and more development so it wasn't all bad, but I wish that there was a little more to the "title". I do love the way past characters are brought up, not in a way that you have to have read the previous books but enough to make you glad that you did. And I have to say, this being the sixth book in the series, I really miss Belle. I'm not sure Burke will, it was such a pivotal character.

Susan says

What--or who--could turn a gifted little boy into a murderous thing that calls itself "Satan's Child"? In search of an answer, a man named Burke travels from a festering welfare hotel to a neat frame house where a voodoo priestess presides over a congregation of assassins. For this vigilante and unlicensed private eye has made it his business to defend the small victims whom the law has failed--even a child who has been made into a killer.

Just discovered this author and now reading my way through all his books. Like his characters and plots. Keeps you reading.

Raegan Butcher says

Burke takes on voodoo, satanists and child pornographers in this revenge thriller. As the central character, Burke, says, his religion is revenge.

Skip says

[and multiple personalities (hide spoiler)]

Dan Schwent says

A gifted nine year old boy is a murderer that calls himself Satan's Child and it's up to Burke to find out how he got that way. Burke's also been tasked with finding a father and a missing baby. Can Burke find who he's looking for and set things right?

Right off the bat, Andrew Vachss is so bleak he makes James Ellroy look like Richard Simmons. The New York Burke lives in is a cesspool of pimps and pedophiles. Burke's a miserable loner but the men he goes up against make him look like a saint.

Sacrifice is one hell of a tale. Burke goes up against pedophiles, murderers, and gets into some heat with a voodoo cult. As usual, he's a survivor.

The thing that keeps me coming back to the Burke books is the setting and the supporting cast. New York is a member of the cast in Vachss's books and the supporting cast, Burke's family, are a well fleshed out bunch. I'm hoping Clarence and Belinda stick around for a few more books.

I don't really have any complaints. Vachss delivered the goods yet again. Now I'm going to go read something more uplifting.
