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The River City emerges as a hot spot for unseemly noir.

Brand-new stories by: Dean King, Laura Browder, Howard Owen, Yazmina Beverly, Tom De Haven, X.C. Atkins, Meagan J. Saunders, Anne Thomas Soffee, Clint McCown, Conrad Ashley Persons, Clay McLeod Chapman, Pir Rothenberg, David L. Robbins, Hermine Pinson, and Dennis Danvers.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO *RICHMOND NOIR*:

"In *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, Henry Miller tosses off a hard-bitten assessment of the City on the James: 'I would rather die in Richmond somehow,' he writes, 'though God knows Richmond has little enough to offer.' As editors, we like the dying part, and might point out that in its long history, Richmond, Virginia has offered up many of the disparate elements crucial to meaty noir. The city was born amid deception, conspiracy, and violence . . .

"These days, Richmond is a city of winter balls and garden parties on soft summer evenings, a city of private clubs where white-haired old gentlemen, with their martinis or mint juleps in hand, still genuflect in front of portraits of Robert E. Lee. It's also a city of brutal crime scenes and drug corners and okay-everybody-go-on-home-there's-nothing-more-to-see. It's a city of world-class ad agencies and law firms, a city of the FFV (First Families of Virginia) and a city of immigrants--from India, Vietnam, and Africa to Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey. It's a city of finicky manners (you mustn't ever sneeze publicly in Richmond) and old-time neighborliness, and it's a city where you think twice about giving somebody the finger if they cut you off on the Powhite Parkway (that's pronounced Pow-hite, not Po-white, thank you very much) because you might get your head blown off by the shotgun on the rack . . ."

Richmond Noir Details

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Author : Andrew Blossom (Editor) , Tom De Haven , Howard Owen , Tom Robbins , Laura Browder , Anne Thomas Soffee , Clint McCown , Clay McLeod Chapman , more... David L. Robbins , Dennis Danvers , Hermine Pinson , Brian Castleberry , Yazmina Beverly , X.C. Atkins , Meagan J. Saunders , Conrad Ashley Persons , Pir Rothenberg ...less

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From Reader Review Richmond Noir for online ebook

Woody Chandler says

Another Akashic Noir series entry bites the dust for me. I am finding that I generally like the stateside collections better than the overseas compendiums, but no matter. There was the usual buncha hair-raising stuff that keeps me coming back for more in this one. Some stories seemed overdone & left little to the imagination while the really memorable ones were understated, especially towards the end of the anthology. More, please!

Benjamin says

Maybe I'm biased, because I've stood on all the physical locations named in the book. Maybe I'm biased because I know two of the contributors. All of the stories left me wanting more, which is not to say they were incomplete, but effectively created a world that brought me in and wrung me out like a wet washcloth.

Amy says

I love mysteries. I love noir. I'm just not a short story fan. Despite that, I gave this a good try, ultimately skipping through to read the ones GoryDetails highlighted. The Red Rose Vial and Midnight at the Oasis were ultimately my favorites (and yes, I am a Poe fan and belly-dance). Still, I think this series is an interesting project, and I suspect each volume holds great delight for people more familiar with the cities involved than I am with Richmond (which I know mainly through reading or driving through on I-95). Off to the bookshelf today!

Diana says

These dark stories are each set in Richmond's different neighborhoods. A great collection of stories!

Duke Haney says

Wanting to re-familiarize myself with Richmond, in my home state of Virginia, for a novel that I'll likely never write, I picked up this book, which is part of the Akashic noir series (*Los Angeles Noir*, *Brooklyn Noir*, *Las Vegas Noir*, etc.) and as uneven as expected. A few of the included stories are poor; none are masterpieces, but I especially enjoyed Clint McCown's "The Apprentice," which is set in Richmond's famed Hollywood Cemetery, where Jefferson Davis, among other Confederate luminaries, is buried; Howard Owen's "The Thirteenth Floor," a murder mystery solved by a veteran staffer of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (one of two newspapers I grew up reading); and Pir Rothenberg's "The Rose Red Vial," about the theft of a bottle of perfume allegedly given by Edgar Allan Poe to his bride, Virginia, in 1836. The stories by Dennis Danvers, Tom De Haven, and David L. Robbins are also worth mentioning, while Clay McLeod Chapman's "The Battle of Belle Island" contains perhaps the book's most memorable description, of the

body of a sixty-three-year-old woman discovered by a friend in the James River: “Now she’s naked. I’m noticing all the bruises I’ve never seen before, the abrasions. All the liver spots and melanomas that were hidden from me. Her wrinkles are full of mud, as if river has tried washing the years away. I’ve never seen her face so smooth. I can almost imagine what she looked like when she was a girl, like in that photograph. The mud in her hair has dyed the white right out, back to natural brown. Chestnut eyes to match her new brunette curls.”

Bill Glose says

A sick, disoriented, homeless woman is kicked out of a hospital and dumped on the side of the road like trash. A stripper considers prostituting herself so her friend can film it and blackmail the John. A battered body washes up on the shores of the James River and the police go through the motions but show no real interest. This is how three of the fifteen stories in *Richmond Noir* begin—like a hard blow to the reader’s solar plexus.

Violence and injustice reverberate throughout *Richmond Noir*, but the disenfranchised main characters, from drug addicts and prostitutes to lonely retirees and unemployed bankers, somehow maintain an air of dignity. In the introduction, the three co-editors mention how 19th Century Richmond was “a-crawl with slingshot- and shotgun-toting gangs” and how in the 1990s it earned the label of Murder Capital of the United States; they go on to state, “Richmond is a city of winter balls and garden parties on soft summer evenings. ...It’s also a city of brutal crime scenes and drug corners and okay-everybody-go-on-home-there’s-nothing-more-to-see. ...When you accept a city not only for its strengths but also for its weaknesses, when you realize that the combination of the two is what gives the place true beauty...well, that is love.”

“Love,” in this case, is of the bittersweet variety. Tender moments, when they appear, are not to be trusted. When a man wanders back to the dusty baseball diamond where he used to play Little League games, you can’t help but wonder how long it will take for his wistful reminiscence to turn tragic. Not long at all. The man is now a drug addict, and after everyone else leaves the baseball diamond he crosses the street to his former third grade teacher’s house with the intention of robbing it. He discovers the teacher has had her share of hard knocks. She is blind and poor, but that doesn’t stop him from blaming her for his troubles and slapping her around.

Each story follows the general parameters of the noir genre (crime stories that typically feature tough, cynical characters in bleak settings), but the individual authors were encouraged to experiment. While many of the stories are set in typical noir settings (project apartments, trailer parks and run-down houses with sagging porches and machine parts in the yards), others are staged unusually in such places as marble-floored museums and hydroelectric plants. The end result is taut and tense writing throughout, peppered at times with details of the city’s architecture and appearance.

This book serves as the editors’ and authors’ love letter to the city. Richmond, they assert, “is a hell of a place to live.” Judging by the book’s body count, it’s also a hell of a place to die.

J.A. says

I don't typically delve into noir, but where Kelly Justice and Dennis Danvers lead in Richmond, I will follow! Even if that means skulking down the alleys "colored with seamy urban romance and suave big-city vice, the twin elements most responsible for the seductive throb at the murky heart of *noir*," as described in

the foreword by Tom Robbins (an author I've been meaning to read). Edited by Andrew Blossom, Brian Castleberry, and Tom De Haven (who also contributed the story "Playing with DaBlonde"), *Richmond Noir* takes a street-level view of a city steeped in mystery as well as history. Richmond is a pivotal setting in my novel-in-progress *Grandpa Art*, and I was grateful for this glimpse at the underside of the various regions of this great city. My characters will likely hail from the suburban counties mentioned by the editors in the insightful introduction rather than the city proper, but overlooking this aspect of the city's complex character would rob my story of a much-needed local flavor!

Tess says

I didn't think I would like noir as a genre, but wanted to give this a read just because its focus is on Richmond. I felt like most of the stories were melodramatic tales about seeing the negative in everything. I will say that I thought most of the stories were at least well-written, but I tend to judge books not by vocabulary but by how they make you feel. This book made me feel annoyed and misunderstood (on behalf of Richmond). But I'm sure that lovers of noir will enjoy it.

Ken Hohman says

A much stronger set of noir stories than the Pittsburgh Noir entry in this worthwhile series, *Richmond Noir* offers tales that dig deeply into the crusty underside of iconic Richmond settings and neighborhoods. Most memorable for me were:

Clay McLeod Chapman's "The Battle of Belle Isle," a touching story of two homeless people living among the ruins of the old hydroelectric plant on the James River.

Hermine Pinson's "Mr. Not," which tells the story of a small boy's ultimate revenge in the Devil's Half Acre.

Dennis Danver's excellent short story entitled "Texas Beach," which involves the death of a Hispanic tree worker and cuts open the divide between native Richmonders and immigrants.

And also David L. Robbins unusual and carefully crafted "Homework," a tale of a lost soul revisiting his past and an retired school teacher in the East End.

I didn't quite see the point of Tom DeHaven's voyeuristic porn story, "Playing With Dablonde." But maybe that one's an acquired taste.

Less-noirish but nevertheless rising well above the pack, though, is Anne Thomas Soffee's wonderful "Midnight at the Oasis," which plunges the reader into the gritty life of a wanna-be bellydancer who is living in a trailer park along Jefferson Davis Highway and struggling to escape her debts.

All told, *Richmond Noir* is an excellent compilation that makes an impression on many different levels, ultimately creating an multi-hued urban canvas where a dead body can turn up literally anywhere.

Noah says

It's hard to give an unbiased review of a book about my beloved hometown! The stories are quick, fun reads and filled with glimpses of life in this town that rings true to a native like me. Needless to say if you know and love Richmond you'll enjoy this literary tour through its underbelly.

Emily says

I picked this up solely because I live in Richmond. I enjoyed it more than I thought I would- it was good Southern Gothic. I've been almost all of the places named in this collection of short stories and it was nice to have those jolts of recognition. I recommend for anyone who lives or has lived in the area. I think "The Battle of Belle Isle" and "The Thirteenth Floor" may have been the ones that I liked the most.

Janet Flora Corso says

Good collection of stories from the many nooks and neighborhoods of RVA. The city already reeks noir, so the settings are more important to many of these stories than the characters. A few stories stand out, but pretty sure everyone who loves that big small-southern-town will find one or more appealing. Highly recommended to any resident, past or present. You will read of a person, place or thing that brings back memories. I have to admit to laughing out loud at the last one set in one of my old favorite haunts. Bonus: Forward written by Tom Robbins, one of the finest literary gifts this city has offered the world.

Katharine Herndon says

I bought this book because I grew up in Richmond and because I've met, heard of, or listened to many of the authors. I knew all the ones I'd heard of were excellent, and I am now happy to have been introduced to the others. It's contemporary Southern gothic at its best: creepy, dark, violent, sexual, and disturbing. Each area of Richmond is represented. I loved that it started with a Poe-related tale in the Fan district, and the last story, "The Apprentice," had me laughing out loud. (Though I was, of course, ashamed of myself. There is absolutely nothing funny about a story involving a bull dozer and one of the South's most famous cemeteries. Nothing.) I was sad that I didn't care much for the story that took place in the West End, since I've spent a lot of time there. But it was the most disjointed and least Richmond of the stories. My favorites were the first and last stories, "Texas Beach" (because I thought the references to the dog made it a deeper story) and "A Late Night Fishing Trip" (because my brother used to live in Oregon Hill, and that was one crazy ass story). Thumbs up!

Rishonda says

This is an great collection of stories, and perhaps I'm easy to impress, but I really couldn't get over the novelty of having the same streets I walk on, the same buildings I pass by and visit several times a week, being mentioned in literature. I guess this little bit of fame gives us a taste of what it must be like to live in New York City. So, yes, I definitely want to proclaim my support for the entire Akashic Noir Series.

Some of my favorites:

"The Battle of Belle Isle," by Clay McLeod Chapman- This story, about a homeless man and woman finding family and companionship after their shelter is closed, was both bittersweet and touching. The story starts after the death of the woman, and the man must come to terms with both how she died, and how he ended up in his situation. The appeal of this story comes from it's exploration of Richmond's underground, and how it takes care of it's most vulnerable citizens. Like much of America, anything more than the most basic safety net for our neediest citizens is thin.

"Playing with DaBlonde," by Tom De Haven- This has got to be one of the craziest openings I've read in a while. The rest of the story is good, and it ends not with a call to adventure, but the realization that perhaps adventure isn't all it's cracked up to be. I wasn't a huge fan of the "alternative reality" hallucination in the middle, but yeah, the story starts off at full speed and keeps going.

"Untitled," by Meagan J. Saunders- This story made me cry. Good tears, but still. Great character development, I really got a feel for Jayden right away. It did feel a bit quick though- I wonder if the idea of Jayden overcoming his troubles would have been better stretched into a novella or actual novel? There is just so much potential for growth there- a lot of story left unfleshed.

"Mr. Not," by Hermine Pinson- Can we talk about how great a name Hermine is? Okay, so as for this story, it's not my usual read- I'm probably not mature enough to relate to children. But the language here is just wonderful. The way Tug relates to the world reminds me of The Chronicles of Narnia, or the Wizard of Oz- that kind of fantastical wonder at the everyday. Even the description of him wetting the bed was lyrical (a zig-zag line circling your stomach and squeezing?). There's so much going on here- this is the kind of story that deserves a second (and perhaps) third read.

"The Apprentice," by Clint McCown- The best for last, right? This story was a ride from start to finish, and the ending literally dropped my jaw. All I'll say is it takes place in Hollywood Cemetery. And what's the worst, most disrespectful thing that can possibly happen in a cemetery? And if you're a Richmonder, you know who is buried in Hollywood. Yeah, this story is shocking, but it's also great fun. I loved it.

Overall, I enjoyed the diversity in this collection. Not in terms of kinds of ethnicity (Richmond is still very Black and White, and there aren't any Latino, Asian, or Native American contributors) but of the 18 contributors, about 30% were African American. (It could have been a bit higher, considering Richmond is about 50% African American, but the collection was not lacking for diverse perspectives, so I won't belabor the point).

I also noticed that many of the contributors still live in Richmond, or Virginia. Only about 4 or 5 seemed to have left the state, which speaks to our small, but dedicated creative community.

Overall, this a great read- especially for anyone even marginally familiar with the "City on the River."

Peggy says

Like catching up with an old friend and reminiscing. Hard to pick a favorite from this collection, and introduced me to some writers that I plan to dig deeper into.
