



The First Rule

Robert Crais

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When Frank Meyer and his family are executed in their home, the police begin investigating the secret life they're sure Meyer had. Joe Pike's on a hunt of his own: to clear his friend's name, and to punish the people who murdered him. What starts out as a simple trail gets twisted fast by old grudges, double crosses, blood vengeance, and a crime so terrible even Pike and his partner Elvis Cole have no way to measure it.

The First Rule Details

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From Reader Review The First Rule for online ebook

Darcy says

It is official, I am in love with Joe Pike. Sure he is one very scary dude, who has his own rules for right and wrong.

Right - Once you have cracked his outer core and become a friend you are a friend for life, even if you haven't talked to him in years and years.

Right - If you try to pull one over on him, he will mess you up.

Right - If you are an innocent, you will be protected at all costs.

Wrong - If you kill a friend for no reason he will come after you until he gets you.

These are the major rules in Pike's life that apply to this book. A friend he worked for 10 years ago dies in a home invasion. Due to the criminals who did the crime, it taints Pike's friend and Pike needs to clear his name and lay his friend to rest.

While investigating the crime Pike enters into the Serbian underworld of LA. Pike has a way that makes people talk and he gets things done faster than the police or FBI, which brings him to their attention. I also thought the female FBI agents actions at the end were great, what a classic move to get what you wanted without it coming back on you.

I found it interesting how Pike went about getting the Serb's attention. I think when he was doing this he was having fun. I also loved Pike with the baby. It surprised me how much he took to him and protected him. I loved the end and the name that he gave him.

Freda Malone says

Frank Meyer and his entire family are killed and his family isn't the only one dead. Someone is targeting corrupt families and Pike doesn't believe his friend Frank was one of them. Something else kept Frank's family from escaping the hit. Pike is pissed and he's gonna find out what really happened. Unfortunately, the feds are involved but that doesn't stop Pike from avenging his combat buddy. A prostitute and a child are involved and she is Pike's only link to finding the madman who ordered the hit.

I just LOVE Pike and his personality! He's one that makes jokes with straight face. His smile is a 'twitch' of his mouth and his mentality is justice prevails. Hard core from the service, Pike's only weakness is his heart for the little people. Non-verbal but a big teddy bear. I love the crime story in this one. Subtle twists not available until you're heading toward the end. Pike and his buddy Cole, together, have an incredible relationship. This book made me wish I had a friend like Pike.

Kemper says

A retired mercenary and his entire family are brutally murdered in what appears to be a home invasion robbery. This wasn't just any ex-merc though. He was an old buddy of professional kicker of asses Joe Pike, and Joe promptly sets out on a revenge rampage. I do so love a good revenge rampage!

Robert Crais has done something off-beat in his modern PI series that usually stars Elvis Cole as the first person hero of the story with Joe Pike featuring as the bad ass buddy that might as well be put in a glass case with the words **BREAK IN CASE OF EMERGENCY** stenciled on it. Crais has always done a good job of creating the sense of a real bond between Pike and Cole without explaining it, but by occasionally doing a book from Joe's third person POV it adds a new wrinkle to the series that sheds light on Cole as well as the relationship between the two men.

An internalized no-nonsense character like Pike works best as a weapon to be deployed, and this is the kind of plot that utilizes him well with him instantly picking up a trail that leads to Serbian gangsters and going after them with the subtlety of a brick through a windshield. Then we get Cole coming in at the edges of the story to do the detective work and back Joe up as needed. Not that he needs much of it.

My favorite part was when Pike starts to systematically hit the gang in the pocketbook by going after their sources of income, and that seems like what he's best suited to do. When the story started adding twists and turns it started to feel more like an Elvis Cole book that could have used more of his point of view rather than just being the support staff. Frankly, I expected to see Joe Pike mowing through ruthless gangsters John Wick style in this and was a little disappointed I didn't get more of that.

It's still solid work by Crais, and an entertaining crime story overall. However, I would have preferred a bit more rampaging by Pike and a little less plot.

Harry says

Ok, a few rambling thoughts on Robert Crais. Who is this guy, where'd he come from, how'd he get so popular? Well the first thing to know is that Crais is not from California at all. He is a native of Louisiana, grew up in a blue collar family, and read his first crime novel *The Little Sister* when he was 15. And that's all it took. Chandler gave him his love for writing. Other authors that have inspired him were Hammett, Hemingway (seems like that's true of all the crime writers), Parker, and Steinbeck (huh?).

How'd he get so popular? In short: television and L.A. Requiem. Robert Crais has a very impressive resume as a screenwriter for such television series as *Hill Street Blues*, *Miami Vice* (damn, I loved that show too!), *Cagney & Lacey*. But what hits home the most with Crais himself is his work on the 4 hour mini series *Cross of Fire* which is about the Ku Klux Klan and is probably more relevant to his home state of Louisiana than it is to Hollywood. Following a growing dissatisfaction of a screen writer's constraints, Crais began writing novels. *L.A. Requiem*, which is the 8th Elvis Cole novel, is what landed him as an author that defied all genres and in it outsurpassed even the legendary Ross Macdonald.

Enough about Crais, the guy's good. So, what about Elvis Cole? Naming someone Elvis had to have been a fairly deliberate decision. To me the name seems iconic, Warholish, Disneylandish, a bit theatrical if not cynical. In fact his novels and trinkets therein are suffused with cultural icons: Spider Man mug, Jiminy

Cricket (latent fantasy of wanting to be Peter Pan?), and his yellow Corvette. Even his slogan seems hamstrung with Hollywood's obsession with icons: Elvis Cole is *The world's Greatest Detective!* But in reality there's nothing ridiculous about Cole: he's tough, honest, ponders morality and ambiguity and hypocrasies while staring out the balcony window in his office. Yes, he's cynical, a smart ass, a comic relief in many ways...but behind the seeming humor lies a Dan Wesson .38, the Vietnam War, martial arts and his biggest gun of all: Joe Pike.

Joe Pike, the avenging angel, is a tool used sparingly by Crais. Use him too much and you wonder why he isn't the main character (we know Crais has struggled with this as he produced 4 separate novels featuring Pike as the hero); use him too little and you start wondering why the big guns aren't being pulled out by Elvis. What you want to do is increase the anxiety level of the reader towards the hero, not get the reader frustrated with him. Crais handles this expertly...and uses Pike to increase the anticipation in readers.

The Elvis Cole novels should be considered hard boiled detectives primarily in that Crais deviates from the traditional Romantic tradition found in detective stories and crime fiction by introducing Cole as a detective with a decidedly cynical attitude towards the emotions (i.e. apprehension, horror, terror, and awe such as are found in other crime and thriller stories). And yet, we find sprinkled throughout the books insightful observations of the world as seen through Elvis's eyes. In the following passage, Elvis observes the effects of dry brush fires raging through L.A.:

Picture the detective at work in his office, fourth floor, Hollywood, as the Devil's Wind freight-trains down from the desert. Though dry and brutally harsh, the desert wind is clean. It pushes the smog south to the sea and scrubs the sky to a crystalline blue. The air, jittery from the heat, rises in swaying tendrils like kelp from the seabed, making the city shimmer. We are never more beautiful than when we are burning.

Like I said, it really came together following the publication of his 8th Elvis Cole novel. Pike his side kick, Lou Poitras (Cole's detective friend) gruffy as ever, shifting view points, a relaxation of Cole's zany character...it all came together following L.A. Requiem. So, believe me. All in all, you will not be disappointed with the Elvis Cole series. There are a lot of these novels so sit back and enjoy! I most certainly did.

As with all series reviews, this one covers all the Elvis Cole books. So if you've read this review of mine than you've read 'em all.

Stephanie says

Another Joe Pike ass-kicking - very fun!

In this one Joe's former brother-in-arms, Frank Meyer, is murdered in his home along with his entire family, wife Cindy and two young sons, Little Frank and Joey. The only survivor of this home invasion is the family au pair, who later dies in the hospital of the gun shot she took to the face. Joe wants to find out what happened because the police are making it sound like Frank was into something nasty, illegal arms trading, and Joe knows this can not be true. He tries to get in to see the nanny before she passes away and is confronted by the girl's older sister at the hospital. Rina tells Joe that the reason the Meyer family was killed is because her sister was helping hide Rina's baby, the child of a Serbian mobster, and the father of the child wanted to get him back and take him back to Serbia. She asks Joe if he can help her get her son back and punish the killer, Michael Darko.

Lots of twists and double-twists in this one. Elvis Cole is on hand to help Joe (and for comic relief, I think Elvis is funny) and they also have the help of Joe's old cronies from they were all in mercenary business together. If you like tough-guy action thriller mysteries, these are for you.

Dan Schwent says

A retired mercenary Joe Pike used to work with is murdered along with his family, seemingly by a home invasion crew. Joe Pike springs into action. When signs start pointing to an arms deal involving Serbian organized crime, Pike starts wondering if his old friend was mixed up in something he shouldn't have been...

The First Rule was another exciting outing featuring Joe Pike and Elvis Cole with Pike taking center stage and kicking ass. I can't say too much about the plot without blowing too much. Pike gets caught between the ATF, and two rival Serbian crime lords. Chaos ensues. Pike comes out on top.

The second Joe Pike solo adventure was better than the first, The Watchman. While I still never felt Pike was in jeopardy, the story had more twists and showed that Joe Pike has a softer side. Pike taking care of a baby was surprisingly touching.

That's about all I have to say, I guess. It was a fun read and a nice way to spend a couple hours. Three easy stars.

Michael says

A satisfying thriller featuring Joe Pike, a man of action who draws on his skills as an ex-mercenary special ops soldier and ex-cop and his drive to achieve justice within or outside the constraints of law. What puts him on the path to war this time is the murder of his friend from his mercenary days along with the man's family by a set of home invaders. Step by step, Pike homes in on Serbian organized crime figures, aided by the sister of a nanny who was killed in the crime, another ex-mercenary, and his detective friend and partner Elvis Cole. Pike's courage and crafty boldness are a pleasure to experience. A kidnapped baby becomes a compelling part of the plot, as does his chess game with police and FBI interested in keeping Pike from messing up their investigations of the illegal arms trade.

This one was close to 4 stars for me, but the bad guys weren't fleshed out enough as real people. I liked it about as well as another Joe Pike tale *The Sentry*, but not as well as *Taken* (one that features Pike and Cole on a nearly equal basis). I like a lot of the Cole dominated novels more because of their infusion of humor.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Pike and Cole live interesting if somewhat morbid and difficult lives...

Here a good friend of Joe Pike and his entire family are brutally killed, this is something (predictably) that Joe isn't about to walk away from.

I like these books, but I've got to say Joe is an unusual guy...maybe unique. He's probably the only ex-cop, ex-mercenary, partner in a P.I. firm, tough as nails adventurer...bodyguard....etc. who's also a zen vegetarian. It can kind of give you whiplash. Still, I think I'm more a Pike fan than a Cole fan, but that's just me. LOL

Anyway we've got another good entry in the series here with Pike facing nasty odds and (again) emotional wounds (though he'd never talk about it or show it...of course). Lots of action some pretty good story telling and characters that stay true to themselves (pike and Cole so far have always been Pike and Cole, this is a good thing). I can recommend these as enjoyable junk food for the mind, what I usually call brain candy. You'll get your required dose of shootouts, brutality, unfair death, righteous retribution and all sorts of other goodies, enjoy. 4 stars.

(view spoiler)

LJ says

First Sentence: Frank Meyer closed his computer as the early winter darkness fell over his home in Westwood, California, not far from the UCLA campus.

Joe Pike receives word that, Frank, one of the members of his former mercenary team has been murdered, along with his entire family and the nanny, in a violent home invasion. The police and FBI want to know what Frank was into.

Pike knows he Frank was clean but, along with the other members of the former team and his friend, PI Elvis Cole, are dedicated to find the killers and elicit their own form of justice. This becomes particularly true when Pike realizes Frank wasn't the target, but only collateral damage.

In general, I am a big fan of Robert Crais and the Elvis Cole/Joe Pike series. I liked "The Watchman" which gave us more information about Pike's past. But I don't think Pike works as a lead protagonist.

Pike works as Cole's backup, sometimes known as the "psychopathic sidekick," because he is an enigma. He doesn't do friendship, in the classic sense of the word but, by heaven, he does loyalty and he has a code by which he leads his life; and that makes him work as a character.

I appreciate Crais wanting to stretch the character of Pike, but it just didn't quite work because of problems with the story and the writing. First, if Pike has said "Sh." one more time, I'd have taken out whatever virtual weapon—I am so NOT a gun person—and shot him. Second, Pike formed a relationship with a baby that, even allowing for the metaphysical, stretched credulity beyond the point of belief. But third, and most important, Pike broke his own rules. The situation did not call for it and it didn't make sense. The one thing that did hold true, was Pikes tribute to his fallen comrade, which I appreciated.

Crais did give the story an element of place, but there also seemed to be a large assumption that the reader is familiar with the environs of Southern California/Los Angeles. I do find it interesting; i.e., unbelievable, that whenever there would be a car chase, there was no traffic to slow them down.

It was, as always, an exciting read with lots of action and some good twists to the plot, but it was far from Crais best work. I'm certain I'll read his next book, but I may not buy it in hardcover.

THE FIRST RULE (PI-Joe Pike/Elvis Cole-LA-Cont) – Okay

Crais, Robert – 2nd Joe Pike

G. P. Putnam's Sons, ©2010, US Hardcover – ISBN: 9780399156137

Rex Fuller says

A Serbian home invasion crew kills one of Pike's guys and his family because they were just there when the crew comes to steal a child the family's nanny is protecting. They leave no prints or DNA. When Pike hears of it the crime scene is fresh. It is just a matter of time before Pike chews through the police investigation, the Serbian mafia, and double-crossing from his sources. Superbly paced. And with a good dose of Jon Stone included. A great read.

Ryan Mishap says

I've turned to Crais before when I've been wishing I could read a Micael Connelly, but the last couple books I've read have been terrible. This is little more than a Bruce Willis action/revenge movie. The character Joe Pike is a cipher; an impossibly adept killing machine who kills without compunction and will do anything to achieve his goal--oh and hey, it is all justified because he saves the kid in the end and the bad guys get it.

I love mysteries and can enjoy crime fiction, but books like this make me despair as an anarchist. I firmly believe that the stories a society tells itself help shape not only the character and ethics of that society but inform or even justify the actions taken in that society. So what effect has the tens of thousands of cop shows, books, and movies where the "ends justify the means" and violence against the "scum" isn't worth an ethical qualm? Do you get a country with the more people incarcerated than in any other country? When a disproportionate number of the bad guys in fictional stories are black or other people of color, does this lead to a society where blacks and other people of color are locked up at disproportionate rates? Do you get cops that will gun down people like Sean Bell or Oscar Grant? A country that will invade two countries and slaughter tens of tens of thousands with little protest or reaction from its society? After all, Saddam was a "bad guy" right?

Sigh.

Hobart says

Robert B. Parker did many things to revolutionize as well as revitalize the hardboiled detective novel. One of

those things was to introduce a character who would work alongside the detective/detectives and handle the more violent/thuggish aspects of the story, as well as watching the back of those doing the sleuthing. These characters do a lot of their work "offscreen", keeping the more reputable portion of the duo free from the stain of their violence; they're mysterious, usually not given to talking a lot, and tend to wear sunglasses more often than necessary. For Parker it was Hawk, for Robert Crais, it's Joe Pike.

Back in '07 with *The Watchman* Crais did something that Parker couldn't do -- he wrote a novel from the point of view of Pike. Honestly, I didn't have high hopes for it, and really would have rather Crais had spent his time on another Elvis Cole novel (for the record, that was my reaction to all his non-Elvis novels, even those that I ended up liking). *The Watchman* turned out to be a fun read--re-readable, actually; and Pike was able to carry a story with Elvis functioning as his sidekick. So when it was announced that Crais' 2010 novel would be another Pike novel, I wasn't nearly as disappointed as I would've been if it had any other non-Elvis book.

With *The First Rule* Crais out-did himself, crafting a weightier tome for Pike that equals the more recent Cole books for quality. After his time in the service, Pike led a small mercenary team in a variety of third-world locales. One of his team, Frank Meyer, left before Pike, opting for a "straight life"--marriage, kids, mortgage, mini-van, etc. and has no more contact with Pike. One night Meyer and his family are killed, the latest in a series of violent home invasions. The LAPD are certain that this is proof that Meyer was some sort of criminal, Pike refuses to believe that and sets out to clear his friend's name and exact vengeance.

What follows is a tightly-written, fast-paced, thriller, which fills in rather than expands our understanding of this enigmatic character. Crais doesn't use these excursions of focusing on Pike to alter his character, but to help us get a better view of what he's already created. I'm looking forward to reading this one again in a few months, almost as much as I'm looking forward to Crais' next novel, also a Pike book.

Never thought I'd say that.

Sandie says

Robert Crais is a great storyteller as is Lee Child. I am always up for anything featuring Crais's hunky creation, Joe Pike or Child's equally appealing Jack Reacher. These guys are the epitome of men's men...that is not to say that women don't find these guys appealing too. I certainly do. Both protagonists are loyal to a fault and both take care of business in that strong, silent but deadly way that I love to read about. (I must have a Bruce Willis gene buried somewhere deep in my DNA).

In *THE FIRST RULE*, Joe Pike is the star quarterback carrying the ball with P.I. Elvis Cole running interference. Pike used to be a military contractor (read mercenary) who worked with a guy named Frank Meyer. When Meyer and his family are murdered during what appears to be a home invasion robbery, Pike is drawn into the search for the culprits. As Pike races around Los Angeles following leads and bent on finding the answer to why Meyer and his family were targeted, this seemingly straightforward murder investigation becomes a convoluted case involving kidnapping, illegal arms sales, confrontations with members of a Serbian organized crime group, lies, betrayals and brutal scenes of murder and mayhem. (ALPO anyone??). Just know that when Joe Pike goes after the bad guys, he does it with a vengeance.

Under Crais' steady hand issues like friendship and loyalty are addressed and Pike's more complex human qualities are exposed. Yep, we finally catch a fleeting glimpse of the kinder, gentler side of Joe Pike and it is

heartwarming. Pick up a copy of THE FIRST RULE today. Guy or gal your sure to enjoy this action packed ride with a couple of guys named Joe and Elvis.

Carol. says

I've been enjoying Robert Crais' Elvis Cole mysteries, but apparently Crais felt the need to punch things up by featuring Elvis' best buddy, Joe Pike as the lead character. The Watchman was the first in the series to experiment with the new POV, and I found myself somewhat ambivalent about the results. The First Rule again follows Joe, with Elvis as a supporting character, with improved results.

In The First Rule, we meet a sweet domestic scene with Frank Meyer and his family, right before they are executed. I tend to dislike such an obvious sympathy-building scenario; I feel an author should use the perspective of the narrative and make us care because the protagonists care. But I persevered and was rewarded. Although the book jacket makes it seem like revenge is the only motivation, there are enough complexities and twists to it that it becomes something more than mere revenge thriller.

We learn a little bit about Joe's mercenary years--although not enough--when he worked on a team with Frank, as well as another man, Lenny. Jon Stone was one of their contacts for jobs, and he moves beyond a mere voice on the phone in this book to play an active role in the investigation. I kind of like the version of the Bad Merry Men that Crais gets to play with when he uses Pike's social (ha!) circles, and look forward to seeing more of the completely amoral Jon Stone in the Pike books. The resolution(s), for the most part, aren't ones that Elvis would have entirely supported, so I can see the appeal of the alternate POV.

On the thriller scale, I'd call it a solid 4.0 for genre. On the carol. scale, a 3.5, because they tend to be more lightweight books that don't arouse my collector instincts. But I'm more than happy my library has them.

Mike says

2nd reading - Lots more of Joe and Jon Stone, with a little of Elvis. One of Joe's former service buddies is murdered, along with his family. The au pair caring for an infant is mortally wounded, and the missing child is the key to this tragedy.

Pike lets nothing stand in the way of repaying evil for evil, but shows compassion when the baby is in the picture.

1st reading - Really good Joe/Elvis/Jon story, with Eastern European gangsters, mistaken identities, guns, drugs, Compton hoodlums, and a baby. Joe shows his tender side.
