



Caught Stealing

Charlie Huston

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It's three thousand miles from the green fields of glory, where Henry "call me Hank" Thompson once played California baseball, to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where the tenements are old, the rents are high, and the drunks are dirty. But now Hank is here, working as a bartender and taking care of a cat named Bud who is surely going to get him killed.

It begins when Hank's neighbor, Russ, has to leave town in a rush and hands over Bud in a carrier. But it isn't until two Russians in tracksuits drag Hank over the bar at the joint where he works and beat him to a pulp that he starts to get the idea: Someone wants something from him. He just doesn't know what it is, where it is, or how to make them understand he doesn't have it.

Within twenty-four hours Hank is running over rooftops, swinging his old aluminum bat for the sweet spot of a guy's head, playing hide and seek with the NYPD, riding the subway with a dead man at his side, and counting a whole lot of cash on a concrete floor.

All because of two cowboys, two Russian mafia men, and some of the weirdest goons ever assembled in one place. All because of Bud. All because once, in another life, in another world, the only thing Hank wanted was to take third base—without getting caught.

Caught Stealing Details

Date : Published May 31st 2005 by Ballantine Books (first published 2004)

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Author : Charlie Huston

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Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Thriller, Noir

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From Reader Review Caught Stealing for online ebook

Ghostsoup1313 says

I found this book to be boring, repetitive and clichéd. Neither the plot nor characters were original.

First, the premise is overused. The protagonist, a bartender, is beaten one night for unknown reasons by two guys who are obviously Russian Mob. Despite the fact that we later learn they do know who he is and do want something from him they never initially ask him any questions. Why?

The first half of the book is the bartender being beaten. 100 pages of the main character being beaten, trying to mend his wounds, being beaten, going to a drugstore to get supplies, being beaten, getting his friends killed or hurt, being beaten, going to a doctor then a drugstore etc. etc. The story does not advance, all we know is that the villains want something he has but in all 100 pages we are never given any hints as to why.

The second half of the book is a little better with less repetition. But any well-read reader will be writing the book along with the author because the action and the characters are so clichéd.

Too much of the book is filler: memories, dreams, conversations that do not advance the plot and do very little to round out the main character. They tell the reader nothing of what's going to happen next. There is no foreshadowing. The scenes and conversations are too long and pointless.

It felt as if the author sat down and made a list of what he thought belonged in a "cool" story and came up with a series of clichéd elements:

The villains: Russian mob, an Asian who dyes his hair bright red, two black hoodlums and a corrupt cop.

The language: the same overused "urban drug-world hipster" lingo we hear in every second/third generation script or novel.

The violence: violence for violence sake.

The music: too many scenes are defined by what's on the CD player.

The present tense: why do writers think this makes the action edgy? Only TV journalists and documentarians talk in the present tense. Past tense is always a better choice because it gives the reader the feel that the events of the story might really have happened.

A blurb on the back of the book compares this novel to THE MALTESE FALCON. That's like comparing TWILIGHT to DRACULA.

Jon Spoelstra says

I bought this when it first came out, but quickly put it aside. It was difficult for me to adjust to the

punctuation. You know, dashes instead of punctuation marks. Then 'Six Bad Things' was offered as a free download on Kindle. Cheap is good, but free is better.

Download it I did. I got past the dashes and thoroughly enjoyed the book. I then looked around for Caught Stealing. I had already tossed it. So, I paid for it again, this time on Kindle, and enjoyed it.

Lastly, I bought 'A Dangerous Man' to complete the trilogy.

I tried reading Charlie's vampire books, but I guess I'm just not a vampire guy.

Laura Belgrave says

Forget plot summary. Think recipe:

Ingredients:

- * party-boy bartender
- * dirty cop
- * Russian gangsters
- * entrepreneurial gangsters
- * mysterious key
- * placid cat
- * lots of money

Blend with Sharp Knife

- * bullets
- * booze
- * lousy kidney
- * fear
- * dollop of conflicted conscience

Vigorously Mix

- * violence
- * non-stop action
- * surprisingly realistic plot
- * great characterization

Bake At High Temperature

Yield

Damned fine, rapid-paced, can't-put-down story that someone will probably crap up in the process of turning it into a blockbuster action movie.

Sarah says

Charlie Huston has been described as "the poor man's Cormac McCarthy" and "Tarantino meets Hitchcock

meets Bukowski."

All are true, this is a fucking cool book..

I'm a fan, and will continue reading Charlie Huston, though crime-noir isn't my favorite type of book. The whole time I read it, I could visualize it unfolding as a movie. The dialogue is sharp and coarse, villains devious, and story timeless. Great New York book as a bonus

David says

This is a book written by an author who set out to write something "edgy" and "hip", vowing to take noir fiction to the "next level". Not even close. The book is a nihilistic hodgepodge of drug taking, drunkenness and gratuitous violence. "A tale told by an idiot signifying nothing" is an apt description. One by one the author beats and/or kills just about every character in the book. Wow, great accomplishment, that's so rad, man.

I don't really have a problem with the violence in the book. I read a lot of mysteries and crime fiction. But the attitude of the author seems to be, "ho-hum" another beating or killing or maiming of an animal -- no big deal. In addition, rather than write something intelligent that would require some thought -- forensics, interesting plot twists, real character development or ethical dilemmas, Huston, each an every time he has a choice, opts simply for more violence. It's funny at first, but ends up just seeming incredibly amoral.

The dialogue is inane and very affected with an attempt to be hip and cool. The author has been compared to Tarantino, and I would bet, Sam Peckinpah. Ah....*no*. More like whoever did "The Fast and the Furious" or "Go" or any of the other wannabe movies that don't bother with character development, plot or insight -- just action and violence for the sake of action and violence. So many authors do what he is trying to do so much better: plot - Michael Connelly, drug and alcohol binges - George Pelecanos, street reality - Dennis Lehane, violence - Cormac McCarthy. Better to read the real authors than the wannabe copycats.

LJ says

CAUGHT STEALING (Amateur Sleuth) – G+

Charlie Huston – 1st book

Ballantine Books, 2004 – Hardcover

Bartender Hank Thompson agrees to look after his neighbor's cat, Bud, for a few days and, as a result, is beaten so badly he loses a kidney. He is chased, beaten, tortured, and friends murdered by a pair of Russians, a red-headed Asian, two brothers, and a dirty cop all because of a key found in the bottom of Bud's carrier.

*** Many of likened this book to a Tarantino movie and I can see why. The profanity, violence and pace are unrelenting. But Hank loves his parents and does everything he can to protect Bud and it's those bits of humanity that balance the rest. I am not a Tarantino fan, or I'm certain I'd have rated it higher, but found I couldn't but this book down.

J.D. says

Dark, relentless and fast moving. I definitely recommend it.

J.K. Grice says

The Hank Thompson trilogy is the finest I've ever read in the thriller/crime genre, with the exception of Michael Gruber's Jimmy Paz books. Charlie Huston's writing is violent, but razor sharp. Hank Thompson still remains one of my favorite characters of all time. CAUGHT STEALING is just a brilliant book. Highly recommended.

Carol. says

An explosive read that demands a soundtrack. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrwjiO...>

Here we go!

Henry--Hank, to his friends--is just chilling in New York City, working his bartender gig, working his way up at the bar, and slowly pickling his liver. Hank is a genuinely nice guy: he gets along with his neighbors, does the odd job for the super, calls his California parents regularly, lends money to his friends and even--and this is astonishing--*doesn't ask for it back*.

*I've been caught stealing
once when I was 5
I enjoy stealing
It's just as simple as that
Well, it's just a simple fact.
When I want something, man
I don't want to pay for it.*

Hank stole for a brief period in his youth, after a tragic accident ruined his golden boy status. Now he's just a guy getting by. All that changes after neighbor Russ prevails upon Hank to watch his cat while Russ goes back to Minnesota to visit his dying father. Hank reluctantly agrees, becomes temporary owner of Bud, and everything starts to shift into overdrive.

*I walk right through the door
And I walk right through the door.
Hey all right! If I get by, it's mine.
Mine all mine!*

Strangely, it's not long after that a couple of Russian-like thugs beat Hank nearly senseless. Nearly, because he actually finishes the "senseless" part of it by drinking away the night after the thugs take off. He wakes up peeing blood, but knows from experience that his kidney is probably just bruised. Luckily, he has a doctor's appointment scheduled (his feet are just killing him), so when he passes out from shock, the doctor quickly

gets him to the hospital and to surgery. Shortly after, he's minus one kidney and heading home, vowing to change his life--no more booze, no more bartending. Although it's hard to go cold-turkey, so he calls his dealer to get a little grass to smooth the transition. Even though the kidney-shaped hole in his side is just killing him, he heads out to do his laundry. Being the nice guy that he is, decides to toss in the cat's blanket as well (see how nice he is?).

*My girl, she's one too.
She'll go and get her a skirt
Stick it under her shirt.
She grabbed a razor for me
And she did it just like that.
When she wants something,
She don't want to pay for it.*

Returning from the laundromat, he sees the thugs that beat him having a pizza across the street from his place. Sliding up the stairs, he then notes strangers outside his apartment door. Perhaps they are connected? His missing kidney urges him on. He really wants to call the police, but he's got that big bag of dope sitting on his table, so he employs skills developed as a teenage thief to sneak down the fire escape and into his apartment. Stuff happens, and if you aren't in the mood for violence, you need to put the book down *right now* because it's about to get physical. For me, the level of casual violence and death was a detractor.

*She'll walk right through the door
Walk right through the door.
Hey all right! If I get by, it's mine.
Mine all mine!*

What follows is pretty much *The Fugitive* only with an alcoholic almost-baseball star instead of a doctor, and with gangsters instead of marshals. But you get the idea. I have to applaud Huston, he actually makes the plot seem plausible, with a protagonist that essentially wants to do right, only right isn't very clear when the bad guys change the rules all the time. Still, Hank gamely keeps trying, even when the curveballs come fast and loose.

*We sat around the pile
We sat and laughed
We sat and laughed and
Waved it into the air!
And we did it just like that
When we want something,
We don't want to pay for it.*

Huston has a gift for writing, no doubt. But ultimately, the book feels like a movie script for a wry, post-modern heist. Crystal clear visuals. Fast paced. Characters out of casting 101, even with their oh-so-clever quirkiness (Russians in track suits! Black guys wearing cowboy gear!) A protagonist trying to save his skin--and a cat--gets a pass for almost any behavior. Hell, I'd probably even watch that movie. But I missed Huston's subtle humor, his pokes at cultural mores, his vivid sense of place and character--everything I loved in the Joe Pitt books.

*We walk right through the door
Walk right through the door*

*Hey, all right! If I get by, it's mine,
Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine...*

The best parts for me were the subway scenes, and Hank's clever use of New York culture. But honestly, the song is a lot more fun.

Three (stolen) stars, not four, because I have a decent anti-theft system.

In parting, a couple of quotes with trademark Hudson humor:

"There's one beer left and it keeps staring at me. I get tired of trying not to stare back so I put it in the john where I won't see it or hear it."

"They cram into the elevator, making cracks in French about drunk Americans. Fucking French classes. I wish I'd taken Spanish."

Cross posted at <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

Wil Wheaton says

On the back of this book, there's a blurb about how it's nearly impossible to put it down.

"Oh, really?" I thought, "We'll see about that."

After one day, the score is currently Blurb: 1, Wil: 0.

I'll write a full review when I'm finished with it, but based on about half of *Caught Stealing*, I can attest that that particular claim is not mere hyperbole.

Marvin says

Charlie Huston is one of the best pulp fiction writers alive. There is no more accurate way to describe him. He has taken the mantle of Mickey Spillane and customized it to the gritty post-modern streets of New York. The Hank Thompson series takes a unlikely hero, puts him in the innocent victim in the wrong place and wrong time scenario and revs it up to rpms in the light years. Hank and his cat Bud (who has to be the mellowest cat in existence) are instantly likable and I suspect I will be rooting for them in the rest of the series.

Lukasz Pruski says

They say that the second book in a series is usually not as good as the first one. Well, this does not hold for Charlie Huston's series about Hank Thompson. I happened to have read Mr. Huston's "Six Bad Things" before "Caught Stealing" and I find the second novel significantly better. Don't get me wrong, "Caught Stealing" is still a very good book; it is just not as outstanding as the second book in the series.

We learn the details of how Hank Thompson became a fugitive pursued by various parties, including the police and the Russian mafia. We learn how Hank, basically a good guy, who dearly loves his parents and cares for a friend's cat, accidentally became a murderer. The funniest aspect of the novel is the inevitability of the escalation of "bad things" – beatings, torture, and murder. Very much like in the second novel in the series, the plot is almost entirely about all the bad guys chasing Hank because he has (or they think he has) certain items.

Mr. Huston's writing is very funny, perhaps not as hilarious as in "Six Bad Things", but the book still made me laugh frequently. However, if you do not enjoy sentences like "Bolo opens the rear door and climbs in with a bottle of Formula 409 and a roll of paper towels and starts cleaning up Red's brains", this might not be a book for you. (Tarantino's Mr. Wolf comes to mind.) Or what about pulling out surgical staples, slowly, one by one, from the kidney removal operation as a form of torture? Truly funny!

The train scenes towards the end of the book are outstanding; "The French Connection" movie comes to mind. The entire book is tremendously cinematic (but converting it to a movie would most likely kill the humor).

On the cover of "Caught Stealing" Harlan Coben, a famous author, screams his praise of the novel: "Wow! Brutal, visceral, violent, edgy and brilliant." I rarely agree with the often idiotic advertising quotes, but this one has merit. It is a brutal, visceral, violent, and edgy novel. It is not brilliant, but still pretty good.

Four stars.

Claudia says

This had all the elements of a book I would love; a thriller set in NYC, baseball, and even a cat. And while I did like the story, and some of the phrases were well turned, I didn't actually love it.

My biggest problem was sheer physical implausibility (and I'm terrific at suspension of disbelief; if you lose me, you're screwing up). Right off the bat (so to speak), our hero has taken a beating, and wakes up in the hospital to learn that he's actually lost a kidney (and the remaining one is pretty darn sore). Yet, in less than a week, we see this same guy climbing up and down a fire escape, running for his life along 14th St., and even swinging a bat in a batting cage.

Yeah, no. I've actually donated a kidney--intentionally, not having it beaten out of me--and I went into the surgery healthy, not having been a functional alcoholic like this guy. Trust me, none of that would have been remotely possible. Walking very, very slowly up a flight of stairs was possible four days later; climbing a fire escape? Ha, ha, ha....

I suggest approaching this book like an action movie, or a cartoon. In movies, we expect to see two big men beat the tar out of each other for five minutes on screen, and then appear in the following scene with a single, small Band-Aid on their foreheads. It's patently ridiculous, but hey, it's the movies. If I could have read this book with that mindset, I think I would have enjoyed it a lot more. I tried, but I just couldn't manage it.

Jim says

I read it for 50 pages. The style is a turn off, but the writing & the plot are pretty good. If I didn't have anything else to read, I'd continue, but I have a LOT of other stuff & I just find this style too irritating to continue.

Jason says

4 stars

This is my first Charlie Huston book and I am already sold. This is a straight up noir type thriller that starts fast and ends even quicker. It a story about a young man that thanks to some bad luck and bad timing gets involved with things that will change him forever.

Hank is somewhat likable but easy to identify with as we all know people who seem to have everything going their way until fate reaches up and smacks them in their face and down into humble town. I thoroughly enjoyed the gritty first person narration that gives this novel the wonderful noir feel that it has. Like most noir, this book is filled with violence, darkness, tragedy, and a lot of unresolved issues to be worked out. Huston uses a peppering of humor and wit to give his story a more complete feel.

"I start with the beer, pouring it in the sink, but the smell backs up in there and my mouth starts watering, so I change my plan.I take the whole load into the bathroom and start pouring it all into the toilet. It works great and I feel very efficient: instead of drinking all this and pissing it back out, I've cut out the middleman. "

I loved how we the reader could feel the helplessness of Hank as he tries to deal with the out of control situations that continually ramp up the stakes and threat of death and failure. By the end of this book fate and some really bad luck has changed Hank forever...backing him into making decisions that just a short time ago that he would never dream of. Damn I found that I totally empathized with him and could see myself making such sickening choices...

Great short read in a genre that I cannot seem to get enough of. Although, I generally read sci-fi type noir books this thriller was a blast to read. I highly recommend it. On to book 2!

ΠανωζK says

Παλπ μ?χρι το μεδο?λι. Ταραντινικ?. Μπ?ρες. Μπ?ιζμπολ. Μια γ?τα. Με μουσικ?ς Κλας, Μπλακ Σ?μπαθ, Μπ?ρυ Γου?ητ και Κ?ρτις Μ?ιφιλντ. Διαβ?ζεται μονορο?φι, απολαυστικ? ?σο μια παγωμ?νη μπ?ρα μες στο κατακαλ?καιρο.

Josh says

Hank Thompson is haunted by his failed attempts at being somebody. From horrific accident, to horrific accident, he's lost pieces of himself (figuratively and literally) as well as friends. His dreams are constant reminders of why his lives life out of a bottom of a whisky glass. That is, until reality catches up with him and the glass smashes into his face. A bar brawl leaves him a kidney light, remedying his unhealthy outlet and unearthing a whole new world of pain. With a busted leg, bleeding wound, ghosts of friends haunting his dream-scape, and busted feat, his job prospects low after the doc tells him he needs to give up the bouncing gig - life is pretty low. It's just the beginning.

With a corrupt cop named Roman, Russian gangsters and professional madmen all wanting a piece him, Hank slowly evolves into an accidental hardman handing out beatings like they're cheap advice. Who knew looking after a cat would cause so much trouble?

'Caught Stealing' is a hard hitting New York bar room brawl of a novel. From it's blood stained opening, murderous intense plotting to bare knuckle ending, the first installment in the Hank Thompson trilogy is a homage to pulp noir.

This was a re-read for me in light of the recent news of it being adapted to the big screen. Having read it for a second time, I can't wait to see how it turns out. Alec Baldwin has been cast as Roman, and during 'Caught Stealing' I thought his look went well with the hard, greedy and vicious cop. Patrick Wilson will play Hank and I think he has the right look. Wilson very similar to how I pictured Hank so this works well for me. News on the movie can be found here: <http://www.wordandfilm.com/2012/09/al...>

Much like the first time I read 'Caught Stealing', the star rating remains at a solid 4.

Review also posted on my blog: <http://justaguythatlikes2read.blogspot...>

Jim says

Not a bad sentence, nor a wrong word. This is easily one of the best books I've read this year.

I suppose one of the central messages of this book is that no good deed goes unpunished. Other messages, in no particular order, are:

- Alcoholic bartenders on a downward spiral can also be good guys.
- Good guys in bad situations often must do bad things.
- Some people care deeply about big bags of cash.
- Being cruel to cats brings on some wicked bad karma.
- Cold beer is often desirable, even if you have only one kidney.
- There is no honor among thieves.

- Kicking someone's ass hurts only slightly less than having one's own ass kicked.
- Manhattan is a cool, edgy place, but sometimes it's waaaay too edgy.
- The f-bomb retains a certain emotional potency, no matter how often it is dropped.
- Any piece of furniture has a use as a weapon.
- Although its fictional form can be exciting, real violence is ugly, brutal, and very bad when directed at you and/or yours.
- Baseball, however, is very good.

A lot of reviewers have compared this book to *Pulp Fiction*. It's a fair comparison, I suppose. I'd say it's somewhere in between that movie and something by Elmore Leonard, which is a pretty good place to be.

Lee says

HOLY \$HIT - how many bad things can happen to a good guy....in a week?

Hank Thompson found out the hard way, and it all started with helping a neighbor across the hall. Huston's debut novel, is petal to the metal pulp, brutal and violent... with a protagonist you will root for.

Mohammed says

There are few authors whose prose style i like as much Charlie Hustons and not because its lean style or fancy. His style remind me of noir writers like Richard Stark.

I likes this story of an average man getting caught in trouble and only reason i dont rate this novel higher is because the lead character Hank Thompson is not hardcore, noir enough for this story. I like his other series character Joe Pitt much more.
