



# Aftershock

*Andrew Vachss*

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The idyllic facade of a small coastal tourist magnet hides its secrets well. But when the shining star pitcher of the girls' softball team guns down the most popular boy in school, the shockwaves reverberate far beyond the school's walls. In the wake of the killing, two of the town's newer residents turn over deeply embedded rocks, exposing a subculture of almost unimaginable horror lurking beneath.

Formerly a nurse with Médecins Sans Frontières, Dolly has become a defender and confidante to dozens of local teenage girls, and she refuses to accept that MaryLou ("Mighty Mary") McCoy's gunning down Cameron Taft in a high school hallway is a typical school shooting. Although MaryLou's guilt is not in doubt—it's even captured on the school's security camera—the girl insists on a trial . . . but inexplicably refuses to cooperate with her own defense. Enlisting her troupe of teenagers and the local contacts she has cemented, Dolly calls on all of her resources to get to the truth . . . and to whatever secret MaryLou is guarding.

When Dolly's husband, Dell, sees his beloved wife begin her quest, he immediately signs on. A former mercenary and ex-Legionnaire, Dell treats this "job" as he would any other—with no boundaries. His entire arsenal is put into play: guile, extortion, tracking devices, shadow networks, and, finally, an act of terrorism that blows the cover off the soul-killing rite of passage demanded of the town's most vulnerable girls. Dell's discovery of MaryLou's true motive and the community's shocking failure to protect its children culminates in a decision to put the town itself on trial. The explosive verdict blows away the facade . . . and forces the village to stand in judgment of itself. The aftershocks keep coming until the foundation itself fractures, leaving cracks too deep to patch ever again.

## **Aftershock Details**

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Author : Andrew Vachss

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## From Reader Review Aftershock for online ebook

### Marvin says

This is a nifty no-frills thriller that should have grabbed me more than it did. Perhaps I was looking for more insight in school shootings, considering that was the basis of the plot. Instead we have a former mercenary investigating an odd shooting of a popular high school boy by an equally popular girl. Needless to say, there is a hidden reason behind the shooting. The author does a nice job in exploring certain elements such as social pressure and hidden town secrets. Yet I found the protagonists to be not all that sympathetic (girl or mercenary) and I didn't always believe the mercenary's motives. He was a little too cold for my taste. Add on a courtroom drama in the latter part of the novel where Vachss packs the deck with unbelievably stupid prosecutors and the ending comes out too predictable and too pat. Yet Vachss has a realistic if somewhat cynical style that I like. I may try his Burke series which I have heard raves about. Until then...good thriller but not out of the ballpark.

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### Lee Thompson says

4.5 stars. My favorite Vachss characters so far. Check it out!

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### stormhawk says

**"Like being cut with a ceramic knife."**

You don't know you are wounded until you feel the blood flowing. Or something like that. It's a quote from this novel, or as close as I can remember, and it describes Andrew Vachss' writing perfectly. This is a book about love. And revenge. It's a courtroom drama that doesn't leave you yawning over boring bits of legal procedure. It's a crime novel with no question about who done it, but with a why that slowly reveals itself in the pain of the victims. I can't really tell you anything about the plot, except that you'll be up all night reading it because your hunger to know will rush over your desire to sleep. Don't say I didn't warn you.

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### Deborah Klein says

Vachss struck literary gold with his Burke series. Since he apparently grew bored with the characters, he has struck out with new scenarios and characters, none of which, in my mind are too successful. Don't get me wrong - I have great admiration for both the man and the writer; he has had a challenging career practicing law in a tough area, and then exorcising those ghosts by writing about it. But this new series involving Dell, the mercenary and Dolly, the nurse, feels like low rent James Lee Burke, his stygian hero Dave Robichaux, and his various wives. I couldn't engage with the characters. Dell is all hard man, no heart, with a bag of tricks all out of proportion to the situation he finds himself in. Dolly is simply written as a simpleton, all boobs and squeals. I certainly understand a writer's need to write something new. It is just too bad that in this case, it appears Vachss peaked with Burke. P.S. Sloppy editing too. "Oregon", anyone?!

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## **Sharon Michael says**

The usual edgy language and storyline I expect of the author and excellent characterization. Main character is reminiscent of Burke, through a different and military background, with a wife, who has a very different outlook on life but is his 'lifeline'. Interesting psychology involved, not only between the two main characters but also with the teenage killer they are defending.

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## **Curt Fox says**

Via Goodreads First Reads:

When an author writes the second book in a character series, there's a fine line to be walked between rehashing the entire plot of the first and dropping indecipherable hints that muddy the waters. For the first 25 or so pages of *Aftershock* by Andrew Vachss, the current gets rather murky, with circular meanderings, chronological landmines, and philosophical digressions peppering a slippery, rocky bottom. But it does get better. Though in a sometimes halting, street style, the plot is brought to light, and a series of shallow twists and low-altitude maneuvers help to pick up the pace a bit. Still, the depth of main characters Dell and Dolly, to me, in the end, just doesn't develop enough to inspire much care beyond wanting to see how the problems resolve, almost independently of the two themselves. In fact, a pair of secondary characters, Mack and camera-creep, leave me wanting to know more about them than the two chief protagonists.

The climax, to call it that, and the denouement proceed apace over the last several pages in an almost "oh yeah, by the way fashion," leaving the reader not so much edified as cryptically resigned to having reached the end of the book.

I've enjoyed Vachss in the past, but I have to say, this book, as #2 in the series, does little to inspire me to go back to #1 and find out where and how it all began for Dell and Dolly. Indeed, the alliterative duo will be moving on without my continued company.

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## **Larry Bassett says**

The author is well known for books about people taking the law into their own hands and acts of vengeance and vigilanteism. Justifiable murder is a pretty big pot to stir. The hero's history as a mercenary gives one point of view. I listen to this book on an audible recording.

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## **Vicky says**

Vachss starts a new series featuring Del and Dolly. Del doesn't know who he is, all he remembers is escaping from a hospital and living on the streets in Paris until Luc takes him in and raises him and tells him to join the French Foreign Legion. Del fights all over the world and meets Dolly in two separate locations as she is a nurse with *Médecins sans Frontières* (Doctors without Borders). Dolly wants to live in the Pacific Northwest, so Del buys a house, tracks her down and they go to Oregon to live. But there is a dark underbelly to the

town where they live. A rape culture has grown up around a secret group known as Tiger Ko Khai. When the town's star softball pitcher kills the head of the group, the lid is blown off the secrecy. Del and Dolly have to protect Mary Lou and rescue the underage girls upon whom the Tigers prey. Another adrenaline-soaked thrill ride from Vachss; there's even a dog named Rascal (who isn't quite as cool as Pansy, but maybe he will grown into it). Vachss' spare writing style takes some getting used to, but his knowledge of the horrible things people do to each other informs this book. I am looking forward to more adventures and learning more about Dolly's background. Vachss' female characters are not as well-drawn as his men are.

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### **Nick says**

I finally signed up for this site because of the reviews to this book. I can't believe how high they are. I have not read any other Vachss books, but this was a very unexciting non-mystery with some of the worst courtroom 'drama' I've read. I don't think it's very realistic at all.

I'm not a big fan of reviews that recount what happens in a book, so I'll leave it at that. And I realize with only 1 review I sound like someone who has something against the author, I'll try to post some more. In the meantime I can say, I really enjoy the Lee Child Jack Reacher series, and I think this was trying to be like that, but it is awful.

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### **Jim A says**

Gave up on this one. Not Vachss' fault. I just couldn't get my mind wrapped around the characters. I guess I've read too many of the Burke books and to me Vachss set the bar too high with Burke and his merry band.

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### **Stewart Tame says**

A new Andrew Vachss book is always cause for celebration! I've honestly reached the point where I don't even bother to read the plot summaries on the jacket flaps. It's a Vachss book. I know it's going to be good. That said, this one kicks off a new series. Dell, a former mercenary, is moved to investigate a school shooting in the small Oregon city where he lives. What he uncovers goes much deeper than anyone suspected and the novel climaxes in a sizzling courtroom drama that I literally could not put down until I'd finished reading it. Fans of Vachss' work will recognize that part of this novel previously appeared as a short story (in, I think, the Mortal Lock collection, though I haven't actually checked. It's the Alfred Hitchcock story. You fans know the one.) As always, the prose is pared down to the bone and gleams with a razor's edge. Vachss can imply in one sentence things that would take, say, Stephen King paragraphs to explain. Why his work isn't more well-known is a mystery to me. He's one of the best mystery/thriller writers around, and this novel is an excellent starting point if you're game to check him out. Be warned: Vachss novels can be an addiction.

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### **Harry says**

### **Book Review**

Andrew Vachss's books have been primarily labelled as Noir, Pulp, and Detective/Mystery. American authors of these genres do not often write with, nor expect readers to glean social and political insights from these genres (unlike their Scandinavian counterparts who use the crime-fiction genre to do precisely that), and in this sense and with several authors joining his ranks (James Lee Burke's Robicheaux series, for example) Vachss is one of the few notable exceptions. Vachss novels represent a crusade against sexual and child abuse driven by years of experience in the real world. To this, Vachss writes:

*"I learned, a long time ago, that people can read for entertainment and come away with enlightenment, so long as the vein of truth runs throughout and doesn't detract from the narrative force. I understand there are those who believe "noir"—or "hardboiled," or whatever term they prefer to lavish upon themselves—writing shouldn't be cluttered up with "that other stuff." As if littérature engagée is only acceptable in "magical realism" novels translated from original Incan scrolls. All these "outlaws" who want me to live by their rigid little rules . . . good luck to them. I understand I am too "pulp" for the literati, and too "literate" for the pulpsters. Lost a lot of sleep over that. I'd rather burn a bridge than crawl over it, and genre- worship isn't one of my disabilities. Apparently, as with all religions, some people believe they can dictate definitions. I don't ask these self-appointed high priests for the "Noir Seal of Approval" that only they (think they) can grant."*

Stealing a little from the author's bio here on GR: *"Andrew Vachss has been a federal investigator in sexually transmitted diseases, a social-services caseworker, a labor organizer, and has directed a maximum-security prison for "aggressive-violent" youth. Now a lawyer in private practice, he represents children and youths exclusively."*

His crusade arrives with the public in the form of crime-fiction (primarily). For readers worried that the crusade will detract from the reading of one of his novels, let me assure you: At no time does Vachss lose sight of what he is doing, which is to say, he is writing a fictional novel where the author never loses sight of the story he is telling. In fact, his novels are intense reads, dark, infused with raw material and heart-pounding suspense and dead-pan heroes.

Most readers who have read him will be familiar with his Burke Series. *Aftershock*, a stand-alone novel, is a further edition to his crusade. It deals with rape, abuse, sociopaths, and school shootings, albeit with an unusual twist. This book too features a dead-pan, historically violent but likeable hero, named Dell (we sense similarities to Burke). Dell's allies are women - intelligent, loyal and sexy (Dolly, Dell's reason for living), teenagers hardened by a war against abuse and in this case driven to the ultimate act of a killing, a wicked sociopath in the form of a lovely teenager, all set in a small town setting (unlike the Burke series which are very urban). The crusade doesn't stop there, however. *Aftershock* is a condemnation of legal practices, court room settlements and the overall tendency to not prosecute rape cases. All of his novels explore areas such as: What is the difference between being "sick" vs. "evil; sociopaths; the acceptance in society of cases involving children; behavior vs. truth...and more.

There is some suspension of disbelief necessary especially with court room scenes, and a heavily weighted and unrealistic defense procedurals, but anyone reading pulp and loving it is quite used to doing so. Some might say the jury verdict is a given. There are instances of french paragraphs for which no translation is given for which we might lower the rating a bit. Some might say there's too much historical background on Dell (his experiences in the French Foreign Legion). The beginning outlines some killings that are left alone and given no further explanation later in the book.

But make no mistake, Vachss is a great story teller. His prose is like a bullet: hard and fast. It's simply the case that you want to continue turning pages, you eagerly grab the book whenever you can to see what

happens next. Vachss gives us the "why" of a crime, not just the "who" of it. Perhaps questions if it is a crime at all.

I've given it a 4 star rating. It's a good read, but not as good as a 5 star Burke novel.

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### **Series Review**

Currently, not part of a series

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### **Bracken says**

Hands down, this is one of the best books Vachss has ever written. This book reminds me of when I first started reading him.

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### **Nikmaack says**

The main character, Dell, is a mercenary. He's a hard man. Brutal. At the beginning of the book, he commits several murders that are extremely dubious from a moral sense. Like, killing hunters to make his little neighbourhood safe.

These creepy murders intrigued me, and I thought, here we go. A super noir, dark, crazy book.

Then, about half way through the book, the mercenary from the French Foreign Legion, tough as nails and who is occasionally portrayed as almost entirely nonverbal, is pretending to be a Hollywood talent scout in order to trick a young girl into giving him information. Worse, this goes on for many, many unbelievable and pointless pages.

The book also takes a strong left turn. Suddenly a guy who solves problems by murdering people is helping with a trial. And then Vachss does what he has done in other novels of his: he forgets to have a plot, or conflict, or intrigue, and lectures us on PTSD and rape and psychology for countless pages.

If you start a book with a guy who murders a teenager for torturing a crow, you cannot then have the same character not kill an organized gang of rapists. It literally makes no sense. No, instead he pursues it in court, with the help of powerful psychologist experts.

I skimmed the last 50 pages of the book, having lost all faith and interest in the book. The ending is a fizzle of zero conflict or intrigue.

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### **Joanne Hurley says**

I have been reading Andrew Vachss for many years. I first read Blue Belle, and then proceeded to read the entire "Burke" novels. To say I 'enjoyed' them might be a difficult term, but they were always well-written and thought-provoking.

Andrew Vachss has been a federal investigator in sexually transmitted diseases, a social-services caseworker, a labor organizer, and has directed a maximum-security prison for “aggressive-violent” youth. Now a lawyer in private practice, he represents children and youths exclusively.

As such, some of the subject matter in Vachss' books may be difficult to read. That is a given. However, as a forum for disseminating information to the 'world at large' they are highly effective.

I have to admit that I haven't read any of his post-Burke novels (yet) - until this one.

Aftershock is well-written, and exposes - yet again - many issues affecting society with regard to the perception of rape.

And at the same time, he's spun a good yarn: likeable (to some extent) main and secondary characters; a believable anti-hero; a loving and perceptive mate.

I have particularly enjoyed the courtroom interaction.

I have not finished the book as of yet (90%), but I'm certain I will appreciate the final outcome.

I do plan on going back to read some of the books I've missed. And I hope that Dell will make a return visit to the world of Mr. Vachss.

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