



## The Dead Women Of Juárez

*Sam Hawken*

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## **The Dead Women Of Juárez** Sam Hawken

A visceral crime novel based on the true story of mass murder in a Mexican border town

In the last twenty years, over 3000 women have disappeared from Ciudad Juárez, on the border between Mexico and the USA. Sam Hawken takes this story of mass murder and abduction and around it weaves the story of Kelly Courter, a washed up boxer from Texas, who doesn't mind playing the stooge in the ring, so long as he gets paid. Courter is sucked into the underworld of organised crime that flourishes in the city, soon finding himself in way over his head. As his life spins out of control he becomes obsessed with seeking the truth about the female victims of Juárez. Sam Hawken is a classic American voice and Kelly Courter is a timeless American hero, fighting for freedom and justice in this fast-paced and brutal novel.

## **The Dead Women Of Juárez Details**

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Author : Sam Hawken

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# **From Reader Review The Dead Women Of Juárez for online ebook**

## **David Marshall says**

This is a powerful thriller, pacy and full of elegantly constructed prose. I'm slightly less convinced the author should be this obsessed with the crime rate in Juarez but that does not detract from a fine debut novel.

<http://opionator.wordpress.com/2012/1...>

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## **Ian Mapp says**

I hate books that show early promise and then collapse from under themselves. This is a classic case of a book that shows early promise, struggles in the middle section and by the end, you cannot give a damn.

Starts off well enough, as we have a washed up american boxer who has ended up in a mexican border town. So far, no dead women.

His story is grimm and unflinchingly told. Carefully, his backstory is revealed and then he ends up in the hands of the police following the murder of his partner in drugs sister.

Ok - interesting twist, the book shifts and our boxer is marginalised, with the story being led by an elderly mexican detective.

You think that something is going to be revealed about the 100s of women that disappear from the border town and the book will reveal something about what is happening. After all, it is the title of the book.

What happens is the weak characterisation means that you are never sure what is going on, who is who and why things are happening. Last 100 pages are a real chore.

Glad its over.

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## **Paul says**

"The shaking didn't begin until he was behind the wheel. In the middle distance he heard sirens, and flickering above the rooftops of houses and buildings there was the dry lightening of police and ambulances. People were out of doors despite the hour, comparing theories, but soon even they went indoors. More death in the city of the dead. It was not worth interrupting a quiet evening at home."

Another consistently good, entertaining, gritty crime novel from Sam Hawken.

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## **Hector Acosta says**

I picked up this book largely due to the title. As a previous resident of both Juarez and El Paso, I have always wished that both cities were used in fiction more often.

I have to say that the author knocked it out of the park with this book. I really enjoyed all the characters in the book. Both Kelly and Sevilla can be considered hardboiled archetypes-both men are broken down shells of what they once were, and both are weighted down by a past that is slowly revealed as the book goes on. Hawken though infuses them with life, and while they might at times do things that would be considered despicable or wrong, you can't help but continue to root for them, and more importantly, want to see them pull through all the way to the end.

The setting of Juarez, as cliché as this sounds, becomes a third character in the book. Now, it has been years since I last visited Juarez, so I'm sure things have changed, but Hawken's Juarez is immediately familiar to me- from the bars and clubs that Americans visit to get drunk on the cheap, to the colonias and poor neighborhoods where the homes are built out of nothing else but carton. It might not be 100% factual, but honestly, if I wanted that, I would read a non fiction book. I wanted a badass hardboiled, pulp story and got that. The same goes for the criticism I have seen about the author not tackling the issue of missing/dead women of Juarez to some reader's satisfaction. Again, maybe it's different expectations, but I thought that from the first page of the book, the author's intention seem pretty clear, in that he wants to tell a good, gritty story with Juarez as a setting. To me, the issue of the women are used well, it's always hovering at the edge of the background, and the author provides enough detail that if someone wants to know more about the issue, they can continue on with non fiction books.

The story starts with Kelly, a beat up old boxer-so beat up and fucked up that I was constantly surprised when the story reminded me he's only in his thirties. Kelly's story takes us to about the halfway point of the book, and deals with his attempt to get back into legitimate boxing after a horrible incident in the U.S. Unfortunately, Juarez and its corruption destroys those chances, and Kelly's story seemingly ends unresolved. The book then follows Sevilla, a Juarez cop that as Murdoch might say- "is too old for this shit". We had gotten glimpses of Sevilla through Kelly's POV, but Hawken fully fleshes out the character in his own portion of the story, and while I was originally disappointed in not following Kelly to the end, Sevilla quickly grew on me, and more importantly, he actually does provide a connection to Kelly, one that I didn't see coming but found to be really good.

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## **Holly West says**

Trust me, just read it. I expect this book to be one of my favorites of the year.

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## **Paul Finch says**

WARNING FOR MINOR SPOILERS

Ciudad Juárez is a Mexican border-town where something akin to a national disaster is being played out.

Since the early 1990s (in real life as well as in this powerful work of fiction), at least 5,000 young women, mostly prostitutes, students or assembly line employees in the maquiladoras – US-owned car-making plants where sweatshop conditions are the norm – have vanished. In many cases they have never been seen again, but a significant number have reappeared in shallow graves or on city dumps, murdered and displaying signs of extreme sexual torture.

Whether it's the work of a serial killer, or multiple serial killers, or dope gangs, or sex tourists, or who knows what, it's a hideous mystery which endures right to this day.

It's difficult to understand how something like this can go on unchecked in the 21st century, but Juárez is a town with all kinds of problems, not least the cartels who fight each other daily up and down its bullet-scarred streets, the persistence of corruption in institutions like the police and local government, the prevalence of drugs and drug addicts, and the hordes of reckless American turistas who flood across the border every evening to drink and whore themselves senseless.

It is against this tragic but hellish backdrop that Texas author, Sam Hawken, tells his tale of two deeply-flawed men: Kelly Courter, an American boxer now long past his best, and Detective Rafael Sevilla, an alcoholic narcotics cop who is close to retirement after a career (and a lifetime!) during which he feels he's achieved nothing.

Courter and Sevilla are as unlikely a pair of heroes as you could meet.

The former fled the States to evade a likely lengthy jail sentence, and now has a heroin dependency, which, though he's only in his 30s, long ago ruined his boxing career. These days, just to be able to support himself (and buy smack!), Courter rents himself out as a human punchbag to unscrupulous backstreet boxing promoters like the verminous Ortiz – who put him in the ring against eager up-and-comers, where he suffers the unbridled hatred of the crowd and takes some bone-crunching beatings. The one light in his life is Paloma, his girlfriend, a fearless activist with Mujeres Sin Voces, a self-help organisation seeking justice for the legions of murdered women, and whose drugs-dealing brother, Estéban, he occasionally helps by providing a white face by which to lure nervous American customers.

It is through this connection that we first meet the honest but drink-enfeebled cop, Sevilla, who is constantly leaning on Courter to get him to give up his and Estéban's supplier. Courter resists, of course, and there isn't much Sevilla can do about that, or even is motivated to do, if he's honest – because his life too has been irreparably damaged by the plague of 'femicide', which, among so many others, has claimed both his daughter and his granddaughter.

As such, neither Courter nor Sevilla, nor even Estéban lead happy and fulfilled lives, but things get a whole lot worse when Paloma, who on several occasions has stood up to the menacing gangland figures constantly circling Mujeres Sin Voces, also disappears. If this isn't enough, as neither Courter nor Estéban have adequate alibis – Courter was on yet another drugs binge at the time! – they are taken into custody as suspects by the monstrously violent Captain 'La Bestia' Garcia, who, while he's pretty incompetent when it comes to collaring gangsters and sex-murderers, likes nothing better than to brutalise confessions out of the little fish who drop his way.

Even Sevilla, who by now has developed a reasonably amicable relationship with Courter, can do nothing to help. When he turns to Adriana Quintero, the almost impossibly well-groomed prosecutor attached to the

Special Task Force for the Investigation of Crimes Against Women, and pleads Courter's innocence, he is greeted with utter indifference; Quintero's real job, it seems, is to make it look as if Juárez is being served by the law.

Sevilla realises that only one route is open to him. Somehow or other, he must do the unfeasible, and bring the real perpetrators of the Juárez 'femicides' to justice ...

The first thing that struck me about *The Dead Women of Juárez*, Sam Hawken's debut novel, is that it isn't your typical crime-thriller. I've seen it described variously as 'hard-boiled', as 'a border noir', as 'a classic murder-mystery', and while there are aspects of all those in there – hard-drinking detective, Sevilla, and battered boxer, Courter, wouldn't be out of place in any Chandler or Mickey Spillane – the overwhelming catastrophe that is actually occurring in Juárez basically takes centre-stage.

And that's the main point. Because this relentless spate of unsolved murders is a real thing, and because the real city in which the novel takes place is every bit as dusty and down-at-heel as Sam Hawken describes it here, it would seem indelicate, if not downright trite, to classify this novel as anything resembling pulp fiction. It's a rattling good story – there's no question about that, and Hawken's lean, mean prose keeps it bouncing along at pace. But the whole narrative aches with a deep-felt sadness, which can only stem from the real life horrors of that woe-begotten burg.

And it's quite clear that Hawken wrote his book fully mindful of this issue.

His approach is observational rather than judgemental. Whether it be the extreme inequality of wealth on display here (some folk living in 'cartons', while super-powered businessmen like Rafa Madrigal, and his vile son, Sebastian, own ranches and private golf courses), the rash crowds of American kids who flock across the border to party and get high, or the armies of dealers, hookers and hustlers who cater to them, he simply describes things the way they are, rather than calling down fire and brimstone on it. Even the ongoing murder spree is brought to us subtly, Hawken not sitting us down to lecture us, but gradually drawing it to our attention via the clusters of wooden crosses we see standing on wasteland now and then, or the flyblown 'missing' posters adorning streetlights and telegraph poles.

This, he shows us – without really needing to say it – is the tragedy of modern Mexico.

Poverty and crime are the norm. Murder is so common that people are no longer shocked; they simply live their lives around it, getting on any way they can. Even Mexico's crime-lords and their roaming gangs of gunmen are regarded as an everyday occupational hazard.

But while that's the way of normality in Ciudad Juárez, for the rest of us it's seismically terrifying. You find yourself shuddering more with each page turned, appalled that such injustice and exploitation could ever exist in the modern world. The desolation of all the main characters' lives is palpable. It extends to the lesser characters too: the scores of bereaved parents and siblings protesting futilely on barren street-corners; the dead-eyed workers trudging in for yet another long shift in hot, dirty factories; those people who live in cartons.

In all these respects, *The Dead Women of Juárez* is an unforgettable read. It is dispiriting and distressing – just when you think one awful thing too many has happened, another, even worse thing comes along. The violence and cruelty is more visceral and in-your-face than almost any reader could be comfortable with. However, none of this means that there isn't going to be a reckoning of sorts. It certainly doesn't mean that Rafael Sevilla, finally galvanised to take a long-overdue revenge on the enemies of his town, won't get his

act together.

To say more on that would be a spoiler, but *The Dead Women of Juárez* isn't just a warts-and-all study of modern-day despair; it's a multi-layered, fast-moving piece of docu-fiction, superbly written and while not exactly entertaining, ultimately very, very satisfying. Okay, it may not be true to call this book a typical crime-thriller, but that certainly does not mean that it doesn't reach a very thrilling conclusion.

Another one I highly recommend, though with the caveat that it's more an existentialist nightmare than a murder mystery, and that even in that brutal guise, it pulls absolutely no punches.

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### **Margie (Bookzombie) says**

I think this started off strong but just didn't work. The first half is about an American boxer in Juarez. After the boxer's fiancé disappears, the focus changes to a middle aged detective working the case. I wanted it to tie in more to the title since this is a real issue and focus on the crimes against these women. I don't feel it did that. Warning: If you do decide to pick this one up, there are some horribly violent scenes against men in jail.

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### **Elizabeth A. says**

Once a promising boxer, American Kelly Courter found himself in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico after his dance with drugs and alcohol resulted in a horrific accident he chose to flee from rather than face the consequences. He still boxes, though now it's his job to play the role of human punching bag for up-and-coming young Mexican fighters in unsanctioned smoker fights. He also makes a little money on the side by helping his friend Estéban sell marijuana and repackaged prescription pills bought dirt cheap from farmacias and sold at tremendous markup to clueless turistas. It's not an ideal existence by any stretch of the imagination, but Kelly does have one bright spot in his life, Estéban's sister, Paloma, with whom Kelly is involved.

Though Paloma is romantically involved with Kelly, her passion lies with *Mujeres Sin Voces*, an organization dedicated to seeking justice for the countless young women of Ciudad Juárez who go missing every year. Sometimes the women are found murdered, but more often than not they simply disappear, never to be seen again. The policía are no help, they more than have their hands full fighting a losing battle against the drug cartels, leaving the families of the missing to seek what justice they can on their own.

Detective Rafael Sevilla is a man close to retirement, having put nearly thirty years of his life into the drug wars. Most recently he's had Estéban on his radar, occasionally leaning on Kelly to try and get the name of Estéban's heroin supplier, information Kelly honestly doesn't know having steered clear of that end of Estéban's business. When Paloma goes missing, Sevilla can't help but question whether there is a connection between her disappearance and her brother's business, though Sevilla's colleagues are more than happy to put Kelly in the frame and be done with it. Unwilling to watch an innocent man go down, and haunted by his own daughter's disappearance years ago, Sevilla finds himself taking on one last crusade, that of the dead women of Juárez.

Unfortunately, the underlying premise of author Sam Hawken's haunting crime novel, *The Dead Women of Juárez*, is rooted in reality, as the city of Ciudad Juárez experiences an alarming number of murders and disappearances of young women every year, most of which go unsolved. Like the policía in *The Dead*

Women of Juárez, the authorities in the real Ciudad Juárez are overwhelmed with their fight against the drug cartels, a problem that given its financial and international ramifications is deemed more important to them than that of missing local women. The resulting sense of devastation and hopelessness among the families of the young women left to cope with their loss hangs like a pallor over the city. It's grim.

As is the overall tone of *The Dead Women of Juárez*, necessarily so. To take any of the rough and ugly edges off would be doing a disservice to the issue upon which Hawken is trying to shine a light. Accordingly, Hawken pulls no punches when describing the horrific violence visited upon his characters, and there is a quite a bit of it. But the matter-of-fact manner in which it is presented makes it clear this is not violence for violence's sake, but rather a conscious decision on Hawken's part to drive home the casual brutality which permeates the lives of the characters and the dangers they face just trying to eke out an existence.

Yet, despite all the physical destruction meted out in *The Dead Women of Juárez*, it is the emotional devastation which leaves the biggest impact, both on the characters and the reader. Kelly and Sevilla are men living with an endless inner ache, the type that can only result from unresolved loss. Similarly, the families of the missing women shuffle through a hollow existence, unsure whether it would be better to fill the hole of loss in their hearts with definitive knowledge of their loved one's death or to nurse the belief that their sisters and daughters will be found alive.

That feeling of desperation tinged with hope is one Hawken captures in a way that is almost uncomfortably palpable. It's a feeling which stays with the reader long after the last page has been turned, one which makes *The Dead Women of Juárez* an undeniably eloquent and haunting work, and certainly one of the best I've read this year.

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## **Gavin Armour says**

Sam Hawken spinnt in seinem Debutroman mit feinem Faden eine klassische Noir-Story um Verlierer dies-, wie jenseits des Gesetzes, um abgehalfterte Boxer, Drogensüchtige und Huren, um mächtige Männer, denen Recht und Gesetz vollkommen gleichgültig sind und das alles vor dem realen Hintergrund der fürchterlichen Serie an Frauenmorden, die in Ciudad Juárez, der Zwillingsstadt von El Paso im Süden Texas', seit den frühen 1990er Jahren wütet und der mindestens 400, vielleicht weit über 1000 Frauen zum Opfer gefallen sind. Es wurde immer wieder in den Medien darüber berichtet, doch seit vor nunmehr fast zehn Jahren der Krieg gegen die Drogenkartelle, die sogenannten ‚Narcos‘, begonnen hat, sind diese Gräueltaten in den Hintergrund gerückt. Umso verdienstvoller, daß ein Autor wie Hawken sich dieser Fälle annimmt und in seinem nominellen Kriminalroman *THE DEAD WOMEN OF JUÁREZ*, der im Original 2011 erschienen ist, an sie erinnert.

[ACHTUNG, SPOILER] Aufgeteilt in vier Abschnitte, wird uns zunächst vom Leben des amerikanischen Boxers Kelly berichtet, den eine dunkle Geschichte in seiner Vergangenheit dazu zwang, nach Mexiko zu gehen, um amerikanischen Ermittlungsbehörden zu entgehen. In Mexiko verdingt er sich bei unangemeldeten Faustkämpfen, bei denen er das Fallobst für junge, hungrige Mexikaner geben soll. Mit seinem Kumpel Estéban vertickt Kelly Marihuana an die amerikanischen Touristen, selbst allerdings ist er heroinabhängig. Mit Estébans Schwester Paloma unterhält Kelly eine komplizierte, nicht wirklich gefestigte Beziehung. Paloma arbeitet für die Organisation ‚Mujeres Sin Voces‘, die sich um die Hinterbliebenen verschwundener Frauen kümmert und dafür sorgt, daß die verschwundenen Töchter der Stadt nicht in Vergessenheit geraten. Als Paloma selbst verschwindet, geraten Estéban und Kelly in den Fokus der Polizei, der es weniger um Aufklärung als vielmehr darum zu gehen scheint, einen Täter - irgendeinen Täter - zu



präsentieren. Kommissar Sevilla, seit dreißig Jahren beim Drogendezernat, selber Vater einer verschwundenen Tochter und Opa einer verschwundenen Enkelin, beobachtet Kelly schon seit längerem, in der Hoffnung, über diesen an die Hintermänner des lokalen Heroinhandels zu gelangen. Nun kann er nicht verhindern, daß Kelly in die Fänge des brutalen Garcia gelangt, eines Polizisten, der statt zu ermitteln per Folter Geständnisse am Laufband produziert. Als Kelly schließlich ins Koma fällt, Estéban bei einem der Verhöre derart zugerichtet wurde, daß der Tod ihm letztlich eine Gnade ist, nimmt Sevilla die Ermittlungen auf eigene Faust auf, korrumpiert den jungen Enrique, der für Garcia arbeitet und diesen verachtet, und versucht, Licht ins Dunkel um die verschwundenen, getöteten, gefolterten und vergewaltigten Frauen zu bringen. Allerdings muß er begreifen, daß er es mit einer Macht zu tun hat, die weitaus größer, stärker, mächtiger ist, als ein kleiner Drogenpolizist mit Alkoholproblemen, der sowieso am Ende seiner Laufbahn angelangt ist.

Hawken bietet seinen Lesern am Ende dieses gewalttätigen und blutigen Buches, das momentweise nur schwer zu ertragen ist, ein wenig Hoffnung, wenn auch kein Happy-End. Die Hoffnung aber hat man auch bitter nötig. Mord und Totschlag, Vergewaltigungen und vor allem die Folter, der Kelly und Estéban im Gefängnis unterzogen werden, haben es in Hawkens Beschreibungen in sich. Der, darin seinen Kollegen der Hard-boiled-Fraktion nah verwandt, erspart dem Leser nichts, lässt wenig aus und überlässt auch nur selten die Arbeit der Phantasie des Lesers. Dafür bekommt man einen atmosphärisch dichten, wahrscheinlich im Vergleich zur Realität immer noch geschönten Bericht aus den Knästen Mexikos, wo ein Menschenleben vergleichsweise wenig wert zu sein scheint.

Die erste Hälfte des Buches, also die ersten zwei Teile, die sich fast ausschließlich auf Kelly und dessen Leben, auch seinen Alltag in Ciudad Juárez konzentrieren, ist gespickt mit solch blutigen Details. Denn auch in Kellys Profession, dem Boxen, das in Mexiko den Charakter eines Volkssports hat, erspart uns Hawken kaum die Einzelheiten. Das Binden der Hände, das Einsetzen des Mundschutzes (wenn es denn einen gibt) wird uns ebenso minutiös geschildert, wie das Geräusch, wenn Fäuste oder harte Handschuhe auf nacktes Fleisch klatschen und dieses aufreißen. Es sind dies manchmal doch eher auch das Lesen erschwerende Beschreibungen von Tätigkeiten, die vielleicht nicht so sehr interessieren, gepaart mit fast banalen Alltagsbeschreibungen uns eher unsympathischer Menschen. Auf den ersten hundert Seiten vermag - außer man interessiert sich für ausgesprochen genaue Beschreibungen des Boxsports - wenig zu faszinieren, abgesehen von Paloma, ihrer Arbeit und ihrer Beziehung zu Kelly und auch zu ihrem Bruder, Estéban.

Hawken versteht es also nahezu perfekt, dem Leser einen wirklichen Schock zu versetzen, wenn er diese mutige Frau aus der Handlung nimmt. Daß uns dann auch der nur schwer als Identitätsfigur zu akzeptierende Kelly abhandenkommt, verunsichert, allerdings ist man sich hier weniger sicher, daß das ein vom Autor gewünschter Effekt gewesen ist. Ein wenig hilflos wirkt dieser literarische Kniff dann doch, mitten im Buch Tonart, Perspektive und Personal nahezu komplett zu wechseln. Dennoch entsteht im zweiten Teil mit Sevillas Suche nach den wahren Zusammenhängen um die verschwundenen Frauen ein weitaus größerer Sog, dieser Erzählung folgen zu wollen. Denn mit der Figur Sevilla, die sich uns nach anfänglicher Skepsis, wissen wir doch nicht so recht, wie sich dieser Mann zu Folter und Gewalt verhält, mehr und mehr entblättert, immer mehr Schichten freilegt, ihre Tragik geradezu entpuppt, tritt eine weitaus interessante Gestalt in den Vordergrund, als es Kelly oder gar Estéban je waren.

Daß sich dieser Mann, Sevilla, schließlich mehr als eine reine Aufklärung eines Verbrechens wünscht, daß er Erlösung sucht und bereit ist, dafür das eigene Leben zu geben, daß er sich mit Kelly nahezu in einer Symbiose wähnt und in Anbetracht all der Schlechtigkeit dieser sich ihm darstellenden Welt zumindest dieses eine menschliche Leben retten und beschützen will, macht ihn als Figur interessant, macht aber auch das Buch halbwegs erträglich für den Leser. Daß sich Hawken schließlich darauf einlässt, uns nicht vollkommen desillusioniert aus der Lektüre zu entlassen, mag man kritisieren, denn die Wirklichkeit hält

solche Wendungen selten parat. Doch wäre ein düsteres - noch düstereres - Ende dann wahrscheinlich nur noch ein Klischee. Das versteht Hawken zu vermeiden.

Leider gerinnen ihm die Beschreibungen und Schilderungen der ersten Kapitel eben doch arg wie aus einem Setzbaukasten des Noir-Stils, sie wirken konstruiert, die Figuren erinnern uns hier doch eher an Vorbilder aus Romanen und vor allem Filmen der 50er Jahre, ebenso die Handlungen und Taten, als daß sie der Realität entliehen wirkten. Drogen, Boxer, Halbwelt. Es bedarf schon eines gewaltigen Sprachvermögens oder einer immensen Phantasie, um solch einem Setting noch etwas Originelles abzugewinnen oder gar hinzuzufügen. Das können Leute wie Pete Dexter oder Donald Ray Pollock, vielleicht noch ein Tony O'Neill, um einen Vertreter der jüngeren Generation zu nennen, Hawken kann es nicht. Umso erstaunlicher, weil ungewöhnlich, daß sein Text Seite um Seite ansprechender und glaubwürdiger wird, je weiter er voranschreitet. Also sollte man vielleicht sagen: Er kann es noch nicht.

Hier spürt man bald die Dringlichkeit, die ihn beseelt, dieses Thema aufzubereiten und seinen Lesern nahezubringen. Ein wichtiges Thema, das nicht vergessen werden sollte. Denn literarisch mag Roberto Bolaño in seinem Beitrag zur Weltliteratur 2666 (2004) den toten und verschwundenen Frauen von Ciudad Juárez das bedeutendere Mahnmal gesetzt haben, Hawken bringt die Thematik hingegen einem gänzlich anderen Publikum nah und scheut sich nicht, die gesellschaftlichen Kreise zu benennen, die für Entwicklungen wie die in Mexiko verantwortlich zeichnen. Das ist gerade heraus, grundlegend spannend, direkt und klar erzählt und erreicht rechtzeitig die Fallhöhe, die uns auch emotional bangen lässt.

THE DEAD WOMEN OF JUÁREZ ist ein Stück „Kriminalliteratur“, das weit über sein ureigenes Metier hinausweist. Sowas ist immer bewundernswert, vor allem, wenn ein Anliegen hinter dem Text zu spüren ist. Ein Stück Kriminalliteratur, das sehr bewusst gegen die Dekadenz und den herrschenden Zynismus anschreibt und dabei bereit ist, weh zu tun. Man sollte diesen jungen Autoren im Auge behalten und genau schauen, was er uns weiteres zu bieten hat. Denn es könnte wesentlich sein.

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### **Ross Cumming says**

Really enjoyed this book as it brought to my attention the plight of Mexican families whose female relatives go missing, presumed murdered, but whose bodies are never found and also of the Mexican authorities who do little to investigate these crimes as they are too busy fighting the 'Drug Wars'.

The story follows Kelly, a washed up American who makes his living from boxing and dealing drugs to American tourists. The story starts out at quite a slow pace but builds momentum as the story reaches its climax. There is a major twist about half way through the book and to reveal this would spoil the read. At the end there are still questions left unanswered but overall I enjoyed the book and the dilemmas faced by the various characters.

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### **Brian Southworth says**

This was a dark, seedy novel that kept me very engrossed. I loved it! It actually made my skin crawl. After the completion of reading it all I could do was lay down sucking my thumb. Sam Hawken has created a gripping and at times disturbing novel that transported me to Juarez. Love his writing style and will

definitely be reading everything he writes.

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### **Jemera Rone says**

This was a really good book, although I was misled by my first impression that this was a non-fiction account of what we already know is femicide in northern Mexico.

But it is fiction, although based on this shameful situation. It stars a police detective, of course; a drug dealer and his sister, who is also a drug dealer involved with our American hero, a past junkie and current pot dealer who dried out in Juarez and remains there. Perhaps the American is actually the hero, come to think of it.

This novel has all the murder and mystery and unsolved mystery that persists in Juarez. The drug-dealing sister is also a heroine of local women's groups who are protesting the widespread killings and disappearances of women in northern Mexico.

So it's a pretty good book, all and all.

Our two heroes come through and their demons explained in the end, which is most satisfactory.

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### **Andrea says**

I quite liked this, liked that it started with a down and out white boxer in Juarez but then sidelines him to let the cool old Mexican detective take over, liked the stuff about the women fighting back -- I wanted more of that.

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### **Jim says**

Two stars means "it was ok", and that's what I felt on turning the last page of this novel. I wondered if the author had become bored with both the subject and the characters he has created as he wrote this novel?

While the first half concentrates on an ex-boxer trying to find his missing fiancée, the second half sidelines him to pivot the story around an elderly detective who then picks up the trail. In the same way, supporting characters seem to be half-developed and then dropped from the scene.

The title suggests that we are going to learn about a serious social issue in Mexico, but the book doesn't really develop it much, despite a coda from the author telling you where you could look to find out more about the "dead women" of Mexico. Eh, that's why I was reading the book actually, to find out if there is some sort of organised femicide happening in Juarez that has to be related in fictional terms. The book does paint a picture of it, but it's more a sketch than a deeply drawn portrait.

A more interesting non-fictional treatment of the subject is given in "Amexicana", where the author is undoubtedly interested in the socio-political upheavals happening on the Mexican American border and gives a more shocking account. With regards to this novel, I can't say that it stood out much from hordes of others of American crime fiction, although I was hoping it would.

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## **Mr. Gottshalk says**

This book was published in 2011. Six years later, I picked it up at my local library, and it had nary a crease in it. I'm glad I did. This is a tough book to read. I had put it down over five nights just because there is a lot to think about. It is raw, based on the hundreds of unsolved homicides of females in the rough border town of Juarez, and unrelenting in its descriptions of people seeking the truth and how there is a whole class of people who have horrible, tragic lives. I learned a lot about the wretched conditions south of the border, and a bit about myself as a reader. That's all I will say about this one.

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