



The Rainy City

Earl Emerson

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"Earl Emerson is one of the best of the new private eye writers."

--Chicago Sun-Times

Something made Melissa Nadisky flee her husband and their daughter. The note she left behind paints a picture of a woman haunted by a private hell. Now Thomas Black's friend, Kathy Birchfield, wants him to find Melissa--before she's consumed by her secret, terrifying demons.

Yet the straightforward missing persons case turns deadly when a killer starts silencing key witnesses in Black's investigation. But there's no turning back--especially after the sometimes-psychic Kathy tells him about her terrifying vision: a weeping little girl and a pit full of human bones. . . .

"Emerson is right up there with the best in the genre when it comes to bringing the elements of mystery to a rolling boil."

--Mostly Murder

The Rainy City Details

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From Reader Review The Rainy City for online ebook

aPriL does feral sometimes says

Thomas Black is charming. The Seattle locale is the draw for me, since it is my hometown. Otherwise I hope the series improves. This is book one.

Ed says

#1 in the Thomas Black series. Finalist 1986 Shamus Award for Best Paperback. Thomas Black is a bicycle riding, Seattle ex-cop who investigates for lawyer Kathy Birchfield. This is the debut novel for Earl Emerson, a Seattle Fire Department lieutenant, who would go on to pen 11 more Thomas Black novels, 5 novels in the Staircase, WA Fire Chief Mac Fontana series, and 6 stand-alone firefighting thrillers.

Thomas Black series - Kathy Birchfield urges Thomas to find Melissa Nadisky. As he investigates, people who have information show up dead. Thomas' dog is killed and in the course of his house being burgled, Kathy is attacked. Melissa's husband is a hapless poet and her daughter has been abducted by her father. Someone doesn't want Thomas to succeed.

Donny Forbes says

Set in Seattle, this fun murder mystery hits what I look for in a book. Being able to visualize the setting of a book is awesome. Emerson does a great job accurately portraying the PNW.

Linda Lai Hipp says

Horrible storyline

Did not enjoy at all. Characters not believable. Does not measure up to other writers in genre. Only finished reading because, after all, I paid for the book.

Jeff Dickison says

The first Thomas Black tale is very good as he and Kathy Birchfield go looking for a missing wife who it seems abandoned her wimpy husband and her pretty 3-year old daughter. Then potential witnesses begin to turn up dead and Black knows this is more than a missing persons case. Well done whodunit with good snappy dialogue. Recommended.

Susan says

The Rainy City is the first book of the Thomas Black mystery series by Earl Emerson, set in modern-day Seattle Washington. Thomas Black is a former policeman, now private investigator. He rents a basement apartment to law student Kathy Birchfield.

The story opens on an unsettling note: Thomas' dog is murdered.

Kathy's friend Melissa Nadisky has been missing from her home, and Kathy feels a strong premonition that Melissa is in danger. Thomas has learned from experience to respect Kathy's premonitions, so he agrees to begin a search for Melissa.

Melissa's poet husband loves Melissa but is not sure that she wants to be found, since she has left home before. When Melissa's father abducts his granddaughter Angel by force, Thomas insists on finding out where Melissa is and why.

Kathy and Thomas speak to Melissa's counselor. Thomas locates and visits Melissa's aunt. Both women know more than they are willing to reveal at first. By the time they agree to provide more information, it is too late.

As a policeman, Thomas once shot and killed a young man in the line of duty, and it haunted him ever since. He retired from the force due to injury, and does not willingly carry a gun. However after the violence escalates in his search for Melissa, he begins to carry his weapon to protect himself and Kathy.

Thomas and Kathy are interesting main characters with a strong friendship. The story moves at a good pace and balances humor, suspense and violence. I plan to read more of the series in the future.

Dale Rosso says

First of the Thomas Black series, I love this series because I am from Seattle so when something is described in the story, I can picture more than what the author is describing to us in areas that I am familiar with.

Monty says

I listened to this book on tape and loved how the narrator took his time to allow the story to unravel. I live in Seattle so I especially appreciated the 1985 locations in parts of Seattle, Tacoma, Bellingham and Monroe. Of course, it rained in almost every scene. The story itself kept getting more and more complex in an enjoyable way. This is the first in a series; there seem to be about nine in the series so far. I already ordered the next installment.

Suzanne says

Our mystery club theme this month is "Earth, Wind, and Fire," so I chose this book for fire. I thought

Thomas Black, the PI, was a fire fighter, but apparently Earl Emerson, the author, is with the Seattle Fire Department. Seems that many of the books in this series deal with fire / arson, but not this first one. Oh well, I kept reading because I am enjoying it. I very much like Thomas Black and Kathy Birchfield.

This was pretty good and I'll definitely check out more in the series later. The ending was a touch anti-climatic but the main characters and plot make up for that.

LJ says

THE RAINY CITY - Ex
Emerson, Earl W. - 1st in Thomas Black series

Something made Melissa Nadisky flee her husband and their daughter. The note she left behind paints a picture of a woman haunted by a private hell. Now Thomas Black's friend, Kathy Birchfield, wants him to find Melissa-before she's consumed by her secret, terrifying demons.

Yet the straightforward missing persons case turns deadly when a killer starts silencing key witnesses in Black's investigation. But there's no turning back-especially after the sometimes-psychic Kathy tells him about her terrifying vision: a weeping little girl and a pit full of human bones. . . .

I don't know how I missed this, but now reading the first of the series, I can see his talent started with the very first book.

Dave says

Emerson's Thomas Black series, published mainly in the late 80's and throughout the 90's, sets a slightly quirky private eye in Seattle and nearby environs. This is the first book in a series of about a dozen or more books. It is well-written and engaging. One of the refreshing things about this book is that Emerson doesn't simply attempt to retell a classic fifties PI story. It is a more modern take on the theme.

Black is an ex police officer with some issues about firing his gun. A good shooting with bad consequences can do that to you. He rents his lower basement flat to a young law student, Kathy, who frequently pops in just when it would be uncomfortable for Black. She is not just a hit dame though. She is his close confidante and Pancho to his Cisco Kid or June to his Wally. Sometimes Black bikes to witness interviews.

Missing heiresses, angry industrialists, hookers, strippers, psychologists, and aunts with secrets people this book along with people popping up in clown suits. And, here, Thomas is plagued by dog-murderers, burglars, and a tail he can't shake.

There is a sort of quirkiness to some of the characters and you get the feeling reading this that it might develop more of a cult following than a wide readership. Nevertheless, I certainly enjoyed it enough to look for the rest of this series.

Donna Davis says

Why did Emerson discontinue this series? I miss it like crazy!

Rob Kitchin says

As PI stories go, The Rainy City is pretty good. Black is hewn from wherever PI characters are cookie-cut and some of the characters are a little stereotypical, but the writing is expressive and tight, the plot has the right amount of twists and turns, it clips along at a jaunty pace, with plenty of action and realistic dialogue (though occasionally it becomes a little wooden), and there is a nice blend of characters. The end was no great surprise, but then few are, although Emerson does a nice job of maintaining tension to the final few pages. I have no idea why the cover shows a sinister man wearing a clown's mask. Black's lodger does dress up as a clown at one point, but she's a beautiful young woman. The book kept me entertained on the two flights between Dallas and Seattle, thus performing its job admirably. The Rainy City is the first in a series of nine Black books and if they improve as they go along, then this is a good starting point.

Robert Torrey says

Great local detective novel

I've always enjoyed Earl Emerson's work. My dad, a fellow firefighter, turned me onto him when I was in high school. I love the Mac Fontana series, I breezed through all of them while serving in Afghanistan. I enjoy Robert P. Parkers Spenser and Jesse Stone series. I see a lot of similarities in Mr. Emerson's characters. Strong men of strong will and high morals with the added local flavor, which growing up in the area I truly enjoy. I burned through this book in a matter of days and look forward to the next!

Kay says

This may well be my favorite Earl Emerson---love the writing, the pace, the story, the characters. Also love the expectation that the "problem" the missing blond has with her father is not the one that's in all the books these days, but a wholly unexpected one. Ending scary--takes us right up to the last page.

Beth Gibson says

I have read a few in this series because they are set in the Pacific Northwest, where I live. So I like them from that perspective, since I am familiar with many of the landmarks. Otherwise, it is a private detective story, featuring Thomas Black, a one time policeman. This is the first in the series, in which he is hired to find a missing person, who is a friend of his tenant, Kathy. Along the way, two other people related to the missing person are killed and her daughter is kidnapped. The story had several twists and turns and the writer does a good job disguising who the final perpetrator is. I like the personality and wit of the detective and his friend, who sometimes has physical impressions that often turn out to be true. I enjoy this series and intend to

read more of them.

Andrea says

Pretty good first book in a series. Didn't knock my socks off, but had me wanting to know whodunit. I will probably read another, but I don't feel the need to run out and read the next one immediately.

Jen says

THE RAINY CITY is the first book in Earl Emerson's Thomas Black mystery series. Thomas Black lives in Seattle - a la "The Rainy City" - with his renter, Kathy. Kathy is a first-year law student and she rents the basement of Black's house. It is Kathy who talks Black into investigating the disappearance of her friend Melissa and the subsequent "kidnapping" of Melissa's daughter Angel. Angel is abducted but she's abducted by Melissa's parents, and everyone knows that they have her. Angel's father is pretty much a wet noodle and does nothing to try to get Angel back.

Along the way of Thomas and Kathy's investigations, two people are killed, a pimp is knifed in the leg, and the missing body from a supposed twenty-year-old suicide is uncovered. There is definitely no loss for action going on in this book.

While I thought the plot was just so-so, I loved the characters in this novel. Well, I loved Thomas and Kathy. Melissa's husband Burton was a little hard to figure out. I wasn't really sure what Emerson was trying to do with him, but I kept feeling that he didn't quite finish what he started with Burton. Burton was, as I said, a "wet noodle." He let people walk all over him. And Emerson couldn't have gotten more stereotypical with him...Burton is a poet. Several people throughout the book make the comment "don't underestimate Burton." However, there isn't any action on Burton's part that justifies that statement. Melissa is the character in the end who finds her gumption.

Now Thomas and Kathy on the other hand are rich, strong characters. Thomas is unique in that he rides a bike - no not a motorcycle; I said a bike, an honest-to-God ten-speed bicycle. And Thomas is along the lines of an Elvis Cole or a Lincoln Perry when it comes to sarcastic humor. Of course, that is a trait I find attractive in my P.I. characters, so that endeared Thomas to me right away.

The element of Thomas's character that really drove it all home for me, though, is the reason he left the police force. Thomas shot a kid who was high on drugs and trying to run him down with a car. Thomas never was able to deal with killing the boy, and he ultimately left the force and doesn't like to handle a gun any longer. While I don't mind characters wielding guns in my books - wouldn't be much to the crime in crime fiction if they didn't - I don't like protagonist characters who seem unfazed by the violence associated with killing. For me as a reader, that indicates a lack of depth.

Kathy is a fun character. She's not afraid to be different; she speaks her mind; she isn't afraid to walk in on Thomas in the bath...

As I said, the plot was average to me. In the midst of the book I was turning pages because I was very intrigued to find out what was going to happen, but then the conclusion was rather flat. I was anxiously

waiting for something more dramatic to happen with all the conflict and foreshadowing throughout the rising action. So when the conclusion came, I was asking myself, "really? That's it?" However, I can assure you that I will be continuing this series because I want to follow the characters. Emerson did a great job of reeling me in with Thomas and Kathy!

James courneya says

Thomas Black is my favorite Northwest P-I. Earl Emerson captures a Seattle that may not exist anymore, the picture he paints makes you want to spend time in the Rainy City. I'm glad that after a long break from the series he has come back to it again.

Steven Howes says

A new Goodreads friend alerted me to this series of books and I am glad he did. Thomas Black, a struggling Private Investigator in Seattle, is asked by his renter and U of W law student Kathy Birchfield, to help locate a friend who has gone missing. What seems to be an apparent missing person case turns out to be much more complicated and involves elements of family dysfunction and of course murder. In order to solve the case, Thomas and Kathy navigate through the seedy underbelly of the Seattle/Tacoma Area at much risk to their own personal safety. Contributing to the dark mood of the story are the author's descriptions of the gray and wet climate typical of the Northwest. After having grown up in the area, I could almost feel the chill.

While not lovers, Thomas and Kathy have a unique relationship and are very close. Their interactions and the dialog between them are at time times touching, humorous, and clever. Thomas also has an interesting backstory that affects how he deals with each situation, especially involving his use of firearms. Suffice it say, this made me root for him even more during the story.

This is now one of the several "series" I will be following in the future and have already downloaded book #2 to my e-reader.
