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When Hackberry Holland became sheriff of a tiny Texas town near the Mexican border, he'd hoped to leave certain things behind: his checkered reputation, his haunted dreams, and his obsessive memories of the good life with his late wife, Rie. But the discovery of the bodies of nine illegal aliens, machine-gunned to death and buried in a shallow grave behind a church, soon makes it clear that he won't escape so easily.

As Hack and Deputy Sheriff Pam Tibbs attempt to untangle the threads of this complex and grisly case, a damaged young Iraq veteran, Pete Flores, and his girlfriend, Vikki Gaddis, are running for their lives, hoping to outwit the bloodthirsty criminals who want to kill Pete for his involvement in the murders. The only trouble is, Pete doesn't know who he's running from: drunk and terrified, he fled the scene of the crime when the shooting began. And there's a long list of people who want Pete and Vikki dead: crime boss Hugo Cistranos, who hired Pete for the operation; Nick Dolan, a strip club owner and small-time gangster with revenge on his mind; and a mysterious God-fearing serial-killer-for-hire known as Preacher Jack Collins, with enigmatic motives of his own.

With the FBI, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and a host of cold-blooded killers on Pete and Vikki's trail, it's up to Sheriff Holland to find them first and figure out who's behind the mass murder before anyone else ends up dead. In this thrilling and intricate work, James Lee Burke has once again proven himself a master storyteller and a perceptive chronicler of the darkest corners of the human heart.

Rain Gods Details

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From Reader Review Rain Gods for online ebook

Steve says

Not surprisingly, James Lee Burke can tell a good story! If you like your violence with a literary twist, you ought to give him a try.

I like Hackberry Holland (and this prong of the story arc). I thought the first book in this (relatively compact) sub-series was the weakest, which probably means I prefer the aging, more mature version of Hack. To be fair, JLB rolled out Hackberry Holland years before he hit his stride with his primary vehicle, Dave Robicheaux, so another way to look at it is that I like the Hackberry Holland that JLB re-introduces us to - in this book - nearly 40 years later, with more than 15 Dave Robicheaux novels under his belt. Which makes sense, because I enjoyed Dave Robicheaux more in installment 20 than I did in installment one....

An interesting blend of themes here - many staples of the JLB library - violence (of the most pathological kind), alcohol (and addiction), love (always complicated, never simple), aging (inexorable), error and (sometimes) redemption, human frailty, luck and misfortune, and service (which rarely is without cost)....

I expect I'll continue chipping away at the mountain of JLB novels. Which prong next? Back to Dave Robicheaux? Or should I give Billy Bob Holland a try?

Paul Nelson says

The first of this Hackberry Holland trilogy Lay Down My Sword and Shield was released in 1971, it then took James Lee Burke 38 years to pen this sequel and fuck me was it worth the wait, 38 years of wisdom and experience have gone into these characters and it shows.

Not for me of course because I'm lucky enough to read all three books one after the other, the first lay Hackberry Holland's soul open for all to see and you don't see characters laid as bare as this very often. In the first story Hack was an often infuriating man, took liberties with everyone around him and pretty much did everything his own way with no respect or recompense, just a long trip down Jack Daniels Way.

In Rain Gods, time has moved on for everyone, Hack no longer a lawyer is on a different angle of the law, he's now a small town Texas Sherriff and an old man, somewhere in his fifties I guesstimate because his wife is now dead, his kids up and away and Hack just has his role as a law enforcement officer and his horses to occupy him. If that wasn't enough he finds himself caught up in the disturbing consequences of the massacre of 9 Thai women, illegal aliens used for drug trafficking. The search for justice pits Holland against drug dealers, pimps and one particularly psychopathic man who hastens death to those that are looking for it and some that aren't.

Whereas the first in the trilogy primarily concentrated on Hack, his history as a POW and his almost death wish philosophy. Rain Gods opens up on a lot more characters, everyone of them flawed in some way, striving for redemption or just cold hard cash.

This is where we meet one of the most memorable characters I've ever encountered, 'Preacher' Jack Collins is a gun for hire, a complicated man whose actions surprised and shocked me several times, the self-styled

left hand of God who spends a good portion of this book on crutches due to the fact a woman he was supposed to kill, bettered him and shot him in the foot. An unpredictable man who seems to find an edge in every conversation and this for me was the most compelling part of the story, the dialogue is absolutely riveting at times, Tom Stechschulte the narrator did a fantastic job and every conversation around the Preacher had a hint of danger to it.

And when Hack Holland meets Preacher Jack Collins, you're never quite sure which way it's going to go, especially when the Preacher carries a Thompson machine gun as his chosen method of a quick conclusion.

It's not just a story full of Texan gangsters, there are several strong willed female characters that add to the story, Deputy Pam Tibbs being the most prevalent and it's almost a joy to listen to her attempts to ensnare the wily old Sheriff in places he just doesn't want to go.

James Lee Burke creates an atmosphere perfect for the occasion, there's mention of the Alamo and tumbleweed amidst the carnage that is Rain Gods but this is a deep personnel story from both sides of the fence and I enjoyed it immensely. In fact I'm going to listen to the last one with thoughts of this going into my all-time top 5, it is that good.

Highly recommended

Also posted at <http://paulnelson.booklikes.com/post/...>

Bondama says

This is one of the best of Burke's books, and that's saying a tremendous amount. This man is the single best writer of "thriller" type novels, because they're so much more than that. His prose is elegant, and his plots all-consuming. I dare you to put one of his Dave Robicheaux (or any of his others) books down once you've started them. Unbelievably good.

Adam says

Decided to start on Burke with a recent one. This seems a summing up of lifetime of themes and disheartening portrait of America. Like a home grown Le Carré or Greene, Burke uses a page turning thriller to capture the tenor of the times so accurately and artfully it will hold up as a historical novel. And what an ugly face he gives America, a litany of the ills of this fading empire including human trafficking, drug mules, the scarcity of opportunities for emotional scarred veterans, Russian and Mexican Mafia, the drug war in Mexico killing more people than Iraq, military contractors, Christianity hijacked by psychopaths and sociopaths for their own justification, and the enormous and growing gulf between rich and the poor. This sounds like a bitter pill but for the beauty of his landscapes, lyrical prose, genius of his dialogue, and compassion for his characters. This has been compared a lot to McCarthy's No Country for Old Men and the comparisons are noticeable; old sheriff lost in thoughts, an enigmatic serial killer, same general geography, and they both update Treasure of the Sierra Madre and Robert Stone's Dog Soldiers. But Burke's sheriff isn't an impotent conservative but a former ACLU lawyer, and we get to know Preacher Jack Collins a lot better than Chigurh, and the rest of his baddies (though Hugo and a demonic Russian mobster could have been explored more) Burke is a moralist not a nihilist but his work isn't as lean and stripped down as

McCarthy's work. Burke brings a large talent and astounding breadth of knowledge to the crime genre. Lots of food for thoughts from the characters being consumed by their past, the use of randomness and accidents in the plot (not in an annoying way it seems thematic) and why the Sheriff never seems to kill anyone (but his partner does).

Jim says

James Lee Burke is a great writer, who delights in intellectual asides, precision pastel description, and discursive moral tirades that could rival a fundamentalist preacher, threaded through thriller novels that feature strong-willed, emotionally damaged (from military service and the loss of a wife), recovering addict (usually alcohol) lawmen facing off against a hard-bitten, intelligent, psychopaths who have little or no care for humanity. There is usually a sidekick, a loyal compadre of similar stripe, or a tough female cop. His hero bumbles through his quest, gets hurt and luckily dodges death, but doggedly stays on the trail, while constantly dealing with demons in his head. His prototype, of course, is detective Dave Robicheaux of Louisiana, but similar protagonists have appeared in other stories. Burke has a template, and he seldom strays from it. One might argue that there is no reason to mess with a good thing, but it does get tiresome. In fact, his characters are often interchangeable. His tales have garnered a large loyal following, among whom I consider myself, and his recent effort, *Rain Gods*, is an enjoyable romp. But methinks his skills are slipping, he is rushing to satisfy obligations, or his editors have simply given up pointing out problems because of impressive sales and awards. In this volume, Burke was even more repetitive than usual. Anyone who regularly reads his work will recognize that his characters are in many ways one dimensional. It is ok if one consistently uses the same phrases and thoughts, but it is highly disconcerting when many characters adopt the same tone and dialogue, even within the same volume. His characters' thoughts and speech (whether they be good or bad) seem to come out of the same mouth. You can be pretty sure there will be some scatological reference to glass or some other painful device, and mention of spitting or pissing into someone's mouth, and abuse via toilet bowl is commonplace. One or more characters will request that someone remove an item from their mouth. "Can you take the pralines out of your mouth," deputy Pam Tibbs asks, while Preacher says almost the same thing to one of his cohorts, "Can you take the crackers out of your mouth." Many characters in other books use the expression, or some variant: "Want to take the collard greens out of your mouth" (Robicheaux, *Glass Rainbow*); "so clean the mashed potatoes out of your mouth" (Clete, *Tin Roof Blowdown*); "take the mashed potatoes out of your mouth" (Molly, *Tin Roof Blowdown*); "how about getting the mashed potatoes out of your mouth" (Clete, *Tin Roof Blowdown*); "the bean pole with the corn fritters in her mouth" (Clete, *Crusader's Cross*); "Clean the peanut brittle out of your mouth" (Robicheaux, *Burning Angel*); "Come on, Clete, get the peanut brittle out of your mouth" (*Dixie City Jam*), and so on. In three volumes (*Heaven's Prisoners*, *Electric Mist*, and *Stained White Radiance*) characters are told to "clean the shit out of your mouth." In fact, Burke has an oral fixation, because there must be sixty or more references to the mouth---wiped, filled with a cigarette, dripping saliva, screwed tight, etc---in each book. Often a female character will place her fingers in the protagonist's mouth, and frequently a character is shot in the mouth, or is threatened to be shot there. Burke also falls in love with certain words or phrases. He must have used "riparian" three times in this book. In nearly a dozen volumes you will find "firing in the well." How many times was mention of J. Wesley Hardin needed? There are other signs that Burke is just pumping them out, but will that keep me from picking up his next offering? Nope.

Art says

Many years have passed since the first Hackberry Holland novel. The young attorney is now a 70-year-old sheriff, following in his family's footsteps.

And James Lee Burke is at his best here, painting vivid word pictures and creating memorable characters on both sides of the law.

We know what series I will be devouring next month! Too bad McKay's had cut down on the Burke shelves.

Bookmarks Magazine says

"Critics have nothing but praise for Burke's latest Hackberry Holland novel. An author with a deep regional feel for parts of the United States -- including Texas and Louisiana -- Burke aptly portrays ""a range war in Southwest Texas -- a pitched battle between gangs of displaced bad guys, fighting among themselves for the new territory against the outmatched locals"" (*New York Times Book Review*). He revisits themes of sin and redemption, but adds unusual layers of depth to his story with a keen exploration of human flaws and true characterizations. Preacher Jack intrigued critics to no end, while even minor characters were wholly compelling. Burke's fans will relish this fast-paced, tense, and harrowing addition to his oeuvre."

Joie says

This is the first book I've read by James Lee Burke and I loved it. Burke is unique among mystery/thriller writers in that he uses a lot of flowery language and has his characters engage in a lot of philosophical reflection. I listened to the audio book which was read by Will Patton who did a fantastic job. Listening to the book was almost like watching a movie. The main character Hackberry Holland is an elderly sheriff in a remote Texas border town (think Tommy Lee Jones or Clint Eastwood). Hackberry was a wonderful character - trying to do the right thing and living by his own unique code of honor. The supporting characters were also wonderful. One of the bad guys, Nick Dolan, had an amazing character arc - starting out as a petty criminal with petty thoughts and ending the book on a truly heroic note. I've already started the next book in the series.

Cathrine ?? says

4.5★

"We decry violence all the time in this country, but look at our history. We were born in a violent revolution, and we've been in wars ever since. We're not a pacific people." James Lee Burke

From a goodreads review: *"Fuck me. Burke is such a goddamn badass."*

If that language offends, you probably do not want to read these books. In this one Hackberry is an aging sheriff with a bad back, nursing sobriety, and he's still a badass. Plus, our author is an equal opportunity writer and his women are also badass. Be very careful around them if they've been in or near the kitchen. The villains are as bad as it gets in the worst possible way. We're talking Quentin Tarantino bad. While

Hackberry is confronting a slime ball named Ouzel (*that name*) he **“thought he could detect an odor that was reminiscent of a violated grave or the stench given off by an incinerator in which dead animals were burned.”** Definitely skull and crossbones tattoo-on-their-forehead-bad.

Burke's trademark prose sings out like a siren song reeling you in. It's like he's serenading you with poetry. If he was away at the ranch without you and you called and asked *"Then what happened Jimmy?"* he'd say something like **“Then the sun broke above the crest of the hills and the entire countryside looked soaked in blood, the arroyos deep in shadow, the cones of dead volcanoes stark and biscuit-colored against the sky. I could smell the pinion trees, wet sea, woodsmoke, cattle in the pastures, and creek water that had melted from the snow. I could smell the way the country probably was when it was only a dream in the mind of God.”** (Jesus Out to Sea).

Any other author would have a hard time having his way with me in this dark matter (even if I'm drinking a badass Zinfandel). It's really hard to describe the fascination and appreciation if you've never read his books. It's complicated. Read one and you'll discover your own badassness. There are multiple Holland Family stories which I'm reading out of order and it matters not. *"Bartender, bring me the bottle and a club soda with lime for the sheriff here."* Then I just might be ready to go get my first tattoo, one for each of his books I read. Grownup badass girl scout badges. But not on my forehead.

Ellen Dunne says

Loved this! Atmosphere, characters, the writing, and it also was so tense and suspenseful! I suspect there are minor plot holes lurking round but I was much too swayed by the rest to care :)

Carl R. says

I'm beset with the voices of Gods, literary and atavistic, screaming at me about why I should or should not care about Burke and his Rain Gods or Burke and anything else he ever wrote.

I'm devoted to the guy, but at the same time my literary eye--my English teacher eye? What's that worth?--sees right through him. Sees through his repeated characters and their repeated motifs. There's always the recovered (recovering?) alcoholic, the endless descriptions of landscape and weather somehow tied to the moral implications of action and plot, the passages of scripture and philosophy from young, old, literate and ill-, also tied to the moral implications of action and plot. Isn't this a bit like Barbara Cartland?

[Note here perhaps the most grotesque book cover photo in history. They guy's really not much older than I am, and he's not Alfred E. Neumann, so why do this except that he's already sold all the books he needs and doesn't care? I wouldn't either.]

No, not really, no bodice-ripping here, I protest. But what's the difference? Deeper I guess. And why isn't it just Louis L'Amour. Well, I like him, too, so is it just a guy thing? No, for all his repetition, James Lee is deeper than Louis. L'Amour's good vs. evil isn't as profound as Burke's, stereotyped though James Lee's may be.

You've got to dig into where your mother poisons you and you run through rattlers in a cave and come out the other side to scavenge in dumps with boots held together with duct tape to get through a Burke evil.

Louis never makes you do that.

I guess I could never defend either Louis or James Lee in a college seminar or a writing workshop, but I couldn't and wouldn't stop reading either one. [When's your next one, Louis? I don't care if you're dead.] And that's what makes the literary and the human world human and makes us, as Whitman put it, more or less, contradictions? Then we contradict ourselves, for we contain multitudes.

Dale says

A dark, wearisome and depressing novel

Crime novels come in all sorts of varieties and flavors. At one extreme are the slapstick Evanovich Stephanie Plum books. At the other end come moody and brooding novels like those that James Lee Burke produces. I have read several of his books and I know that they are not fun-loving romps, but the morose nature of this book takes the cake.

???

With the exception of two brief scenes *Rain Gods: A Novel* was relentless in its brooding tone. I found it wearisome. Every male character is burdened with evil deeds, obsesses over them and then acts out in self-destructive, often violent ways. All of the female lead characters offer wisdom, strength and guidance. There are literally more than a dozen bad guys and it seems that this desert Texas countryside is full of nothing but broken people, hookers, alcoholics, criminals and a couple of cops. Where are the regular people?

The book was just too much death, despair and regret for me.

A wearisome and disappointing read.

Vannessa Anderson says

James Lee Burke is an author whose canvass is paper as he paints stories with words!

While immense in the story one can visualize the settings and characters. James Lee Burke's bad guys and gals are so bad that if you're deeply engrossed in the book and someone knocks on your door or rings your doorbell or you hear the floor squeaking above your head, you'll jump from fright. The law enforcement who chases the bad guys/gals is just as bad, and so is the staff? they have to be to capture the monsters who create havoc in and around them.

Former attorney and war hero turned sheriff, Hackberry Holland, is after Preacher aka Jack Collins who is the badest of the bad, and who'd make a forensic psychiatrist's wet his/her pants to have the opportunity to try to get into his head.

In James Lee Burke's novels you learn how society help mold these individuals into the monsters they've

become by turning their heads and pretending they don't see the problem staring them square in the eyes.

In Rain Gods, we learn how those who've served in wars, protecting that same society, are left to fend for themselves after serving their country and keeping these society members safe in their self-made world of greed, jealousy, and selfishness.

James Lee Burke's stories are not for the faint of heart but if you're interested in being held captive by good storytelling you'll want to read Rain Gods.

Schneehase says

Eigentlich nicht schlecht, konnte dem Hörbuch aber nur sehr schlecht folgen. Daher abgebrochen.

The Librarian says

Question to Self: "Self, how did you overlook Burke all of these years?" Answer: "I have no clue, but now that I found him, I want to read ALL of his books!" Great storyline & character development!
