



Sweet and Vicious

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“Fascinating and hilarious,” “relentlessly clever,” and “truly haunting” are all phrases that have been used to describe David Schickler’s unique talent. And all apply to this brash, brilliant novel featuring two of the most memorable characters in contemporary fiction: Grace McGlone and Henry Dante.

Sexy and willful, Grace McGlone is saving herself for the right man. When Henry Dante pulls into the small Wisconsin town where she works at the car wash, she instantly knows he’s the one. He knows it too. But when Grace discovers Henry has “The Planets”—a stolen set of famous Spanish diamonds—stashed in the back seat of his truck, she’s having none of it. She’s “trying for heaven,” and the ill-gotten jewels must go. And so they do, in a race across the American landscape from Chicago to Yellowstone, pursued by a savage gangster obsessed by the diamonds he thought were his.

Passionate, criminal, comical, and possessing all the dark enchantment of a fairy tale, Sweet and Vicious is a modern love story shot straight from the heart of David Schickler’s miraculous imagination.

From the Hardcover edition.

Sweet and Vicious Details

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From Reader Review Sweet and Vicious for online ebook

Amy says

Silly & not well written. Pass.

Jodi says

This book was loaned to me by a friend with the words "one of my favorite books" attached to it. I started it and put it down, and picked it up and put it down. I had it sitting on my bookshelf for an amount of time that isn't socially acceptable. I finally picked it up and told myself that I couldn't read anything else until I could give it back to my friend and honestly tell her I had finished it. In the 2 weeks since that happened, I cleaned my carpets, scrubbed the bathrooms until they shined, mopped the floors, wiped down the walls, spackled the holes in the walls in prep for them to be repainted, and found many other ways to not read. And it's a relatively slim novel at 200 pgs and some change. The conclusion I've come to is this: I should read not so good books more often. Did you see all the things I got done while avoiding reading this book when I normally would have been reading?! It's not that the story wasn't good, it's just that I felt very detached from the whole thing. It was a story told from a very detached point of view. I know it was meant to be quippy and sharp, but it fell flat for me. The ending was awful and incomplete. I've also decided that my sweet friend and I have very different opinions on what makes a good book. That's ok. I still love her, but don't know how many books of hers I will read in the near future. **Not that anyone would read this after that glowing recommendation, but just in case I've made you curious--there is language and sex. Not extremely graphic sex, but it's there.**

Ron Grunberg says

It's been a few years since his last publication, I've read both David's books at least twice, and am somewhat impatiently waiting for his next. He's a bright young writer of enormous talent. He takes every word--every sentence--as a great challenge. He doesn't want to be mediocre for one moment. He demands his prose is infused with--here's a word he might use--the stupendous.

Each of his characters are remarkable. On the one hand they seem absurd caricatures but on the other, many are presented as considerably more noteworthy in their inner lives--more profound, more dramatic--than the average characters we seem to see on an everyday basis, inside and outside of books.

If one theme drives all of his writing it is man's confrontation with that "great opportunity" in life--it comes to all of us at least once, he seems sure to be saying--and it's what we do with that moment that is crucial, that defines us for evermore. Even if the action we need to take at such a given moment is completely boggled, wrong, insanely misplaced, the moment calls for action, big action, and in the end the taking of it is what might well propel us to "the next level" of being that we all strive for.

I owe at least myself an explanation of why I didn't place five stars next to this book; I seem pretty liberal with that assignation. I think it's because I prefer the less absurd--although I can't really fault him for this presentation. At all.

Andrea Risker says

It made me laugh. Made me cry. Made me feel in touch with "real life". lol. :)

Lili says

Kissing in Manhattan is one of my top ten favorite books. So when David Schickler's new novel finally became available at the local library, I shamelessly abandoned the book I was currently reading and settled in to finish it in one giant gulp. Honestly, there is no comparison between Sweet and Vicious and Kissing in Manhattan, and no replacing the latter in my hierarchy of favorites. But I did enjoy Sweet and Vicious for what it was - an absolutely dizzying romp! If I could compare it to anything, I'd say it was kind of like a chaste Chuck Palahniuk novel. The characters were fun and quirky. The action moved, sometimes in unexpected ways. And it all came together in the end. I'd definitely recommend this as a quick afternoon read.

Mike says

I can't remember how I was tipped off to David Schickler. Maybe I'd read a story of his in a magazine. At any rate, the reviews for this novel weren't great so I worried that I should have got his short stories first, but I really enjoyed it. It reads like modern noir with a quirky twist... like a Quentin Tarantino (when he made good films [film?]) collaboration with Wes Anderson (when he made good films, haha).

The only criticism, which I'm not sure is a criticism, is there are certain plot elements that you think will wind up mattering to the overall story but then don't. Maybe that's not a bad thing if the gun in the first act does not go off in the third, just because I expect it to? I guess also there are some mixed messages with sexual violence in the book that someone more attuned to overall cultural wrongness will pick up on better than me.

The book reads quickly and is entertaining. It seems tailor-made to be adapted to film and indeed, he thanks his film agent in the back. I guess that's how to make the big bucks these days, if you can't come across 7 flawless diamonds that is!

Bark says

This is a book I wouldn't normally choose on my own but I stumbled across an unabridged audio version at the library and it caught my attention.

It tells the story of a mob enforcer named Henry who has a weakness for beautiful women. That weakness is his downfall when it lands him on the run with a suitcase full of stolen diamonds called "The Planets". Then the book takes an entirely different turn and actually felt like a different book when the author jumps back into the past and introduces a 15 year old girl named Grace. Grace has a disturbing event happen to her

which molds her world view. Now she is determined to be a good, moral person. Several years later she is working at a car wash when she spots Henry and knows instantly that he is the man for her. The two then go on an adventure dropping diamonds off to those they deem worthy as they travel.

This is a quirky read with dark edges. Initially, the quirkiness reminded me a little of Christopher Moore but as the book limped on I realized it wasn't anything near a Moore book. Midway through it lost steam and my interest waned. The humor was not there and the characters did some things that just didn't ring true to character. And the end, ugh, completely annoying to me. . .

Christine says

I didn't know what shelf to put this on. It almost fits in the fluff category. S. returns again to jewelry, or more specifically the stones, as a pivotal "character" for the action. His books almost feel like fairy tales for adults. It's what extraordinary people would do in normal circumstances, for good and for bad.

I think like most readers, "Kissing in Manhattan" was soooo good, so engrossing that it overshadows this a bit. As a book from any other author it would be an achievement, but I think this one will always live in the shadows.

Fredrika says

ugh. the ending. just, ugh. ruined.

Amy L. Campbell says

Quite a bit of violence, sexual and regular. Some very strange stuff going on in this novel. Basic plot revolves around some stolen diamonds, the man who stole him, and the woman he randomly hooks up with. It's not bad, but when all is said and done, there's just not a lot going on in this novel. It's a quick and fun read, so if you need something between two serious novels or a break between semesters it would be a good choice. On the other hand, there's no real reason to seek this out.

The reviewer is a 2009 graduate of Kent State University's Master of Library and Information Sciences program, an alumna of Antioch College, and the author of the blog A Librarian's Life in Books.

Mark says

David Schickler's short story collection, *Kissing in Manhattan*, is one of the best collections of short stories I've read in ages. Understandably, then, I was expecting a lot from Schickler's first novel.

Aside from the longish (50-page) second chapter, which, with a few tweaks, could have easily worked as a great stand-alone short story, the rest of *Sweet and Vicious* was thoroughly disappointing. In the acknowledgments Schickler thanks his film agent, and I'm not surprised--because the book reads like the

novelization of a film script. Is it cynical of me to believe that Schickler wrote this book primarily in the hopes of turning it into (or at least selling the rights for) a movie? Even if this isn't the case, the events in *Sweet and Vicious* read like the plot-points of a not-very-good mobster/road movie. Even if a movie were to be made, I don't think it would do very well at the box office.

The stories in *Kissing in Manhattan* had their share of quirky elements, but those quirky elements worked. The quirky elements in *Sweet and Vicious*, however, stick out in gaudy, cartoonish ways. For example, a mob boss whose signature is sitting at his restaurant's bar eating blueberries soaked with wine, to the point where his teeth are stained a permanent blue? And he does this because his abusive stepfather, whom he hated, used to do so? As a character trait, this is memorable but also nonsensical and pointless.

I was hoping for the magic present in "The Smoker" or "Fourth Angry Mouse" but got something else; arguably, something less. I don't know if this is just Schickler's sophomore slump, or if he spent his talents in his first book, but *Sweet and Vicious* simply didn't hold together for me. I wonder if the author shouldn't stick to Manhattan and leave the rest of the country out of his fiction from now on.

Lauren says

A disappointment after "Kissing in Manhattan."

Azura says

I think the beginning part focusing on the male main character was really good, and then it changed to the woman main character as a girl, and it started to change the whole feel of the book.... Though there were some parts I liked about it... but I was set on the book being focused on the first main character introduced and the story from his perspective. The background informative story of the men the main male character deals with on a regular basis, added to the depth of the story in a way that made sense to me. When the main male character and the main female character got together, parts of the story were softened and distorted to me and out of place in my opinion; though it picks back up and gets back to the tough stuff. But to me the end of the story was unfitting and left my mind unsettled. But I would have to say that this author has a creative way of writing and conveying unique perspectives; which I liked.

Ben Babcock says

This is an adorable book. I don't know why it hasn't received more attention, though looking at other reviews, it seems that most people didn't find it as charming as I did—or at least, that charm didn't outweigh perceived faults in David Schickler's writing.

The premise of *Sweet and Vicious* is simple: it's a gangster romance road trip black comedy.

Gangster: Henry Dante is one of Honey Pobrinkis' best thugs—though he hasn't had to kill anyone yet. But when Honey's nephew threatens an innocent woman while on a job, something in Henry snaps. He betrays the Pobrinkis clan, making off with the diamonds they were sent to collect on Honey's behalf. Now he's a wanted man.

Romance: Grace McGlone is an odd kid. Her religious mother is obsessed with evangelists on the radio, particularly Betram Block. Somewhere along the way, Grace goes from rejecting religion to a curious convert—she's "trying for heaven" in the "celibate until marriage" way, but after walking through an automatic car wash and jumping in Henry's truck to run away from home, Grace seems to be more on a literal journey than a spiritual one.

Road trip: Henry and Grace tour through a couple of midwest states as they attempt to elude Honey's pursuit and give away the diamonds Henry stole. Along the way they encounter your standard cast of quirky road trip characters who help Henry and Grace Learn a Lesson.

Black comedy: Everyone dies. Well, OK, not everyone dies. But without spoiling it, a significant number of the main cast dies. This isn't the blackest of black comedies—think more a charcoal than jet. Really, though, that's the only way to do humour with gangsters—you can't ignore the reality that, at the end of the day, Honey is this guy who kills people and steals things. Gangsters, even sympathetic ones like Henry, are objectively not nice people. So when you want to tell a funny gangster story, your comedy needs that dark edge to it.

The power comes from the unexpected sources of darkness. The title, *Sweet and Vicious*, comes from a phrase Henry utters to himself. He's describing Grace and himself: she's the sweet one, and he's the vicious thug. Or are they? As the story develops, Grace seems to have a vicious streak centred on Bertram Block—and Henry's inherent sweetness is visible ever since he throws it all over for Helena Chalk.

I appreciate, too, that this book does not overstay its welcome. It is a short and sweet little story. Even still the first part lingers a little longer than it could, but I'd argue that the action-packed last chapter, with its precarious and enthralling climax, more than makes up for earlier indiscretions. You could easily read this in an afternoon and be none the worse for it.

The writing could be better, sure. I mean, with characters like "Honey Pobrinkis" and "Grace McGlone" and "Bertram Block" you have to recognize the aesthetic Schickler is going for here—and arguably it takes even more work to come up with such caricatures. The name "Honey Pobrinkis" isn't just arbitrarily chosen as a funny-sounding name for a gangster. Many gangsters have sweet-sounding nicknames belied by their cruelty. Schickler carefully calibrates this nickname, even going so far as to divulge backstory for it.

So I give this book four stars for the same reason I give *Animorphs* novels four stars: the story is the thing. Even amidst bad writing, if your story tickles me, you've got me. I'm not saying I'd marry *Sweet and Vicious*, but I'd swipe right.

And that's as close as I'll likely ever get to a casual hook-up.

Aurora says

alcuni libri iniziano a metà, altri a metà non reggono un ottimo inizio.

ed è un peccato perché dolci e viziosi era proprio partito bene, molto fisico, molto concreto, tangibile. ma poi va in vacca o per la fretta di concludere o perché anche il sistema solare, si sa, è un universo finito. e dai diamanti non nasce niente, eccosìvvvia.

insomma si poteva fare di più.

(si salva l'edizione della collana “i coralli” di cui mi piace molto la porosità della copertina e il taglio del carattere di stampa. per una persona empatica coi libri come me è fondamentale...)

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