



Crashed

Timothy Hallinan

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Junior Bender is a Los Angeles burglar with a magic touch. Since he first started breaking into houses when he was fourteen years old, he's never once been caught. But now, after twenty-two years of an exemplary career, Junior has been blackmailed by Trey Annunziato, one of the most powerful crime bosses in LA, into acting as a private investigator on the set of Trey's porn movie venture, which someone keeps sabotaging.

The star Trey has lined up to do all that's unwholesome on camera is Thistle Downing, America's beloved child star, who now lives alone in a drug-induced stupor, destitute and uninsurable. Her starring role will be the scandalous fall-from-grace gossip of rubber-neckers across the country. No wonder Trey needs help keeping the production on track.

Junior knows what that he should do — get Thistle out and find her help — but doing the right thing will land him on the wrong side of LA's scariest mob boss. With the help of his precocious twelve-year-old daughter, Rina, and his criminal sidekick, Louie the Lost (an ex-getaway driver), Junior has to figure out a miracle solution.

Crashed Details

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From Reader Review Crashed for online ebook

Trish says

”For most people who write thrillers and mysteries, creating crooks is more than half the fun. They’re intrinsically interesting because they’ve rejected the standard set of values and, since we all need values of some kind, they’ve invented their own. It was probably just a matter of time before I came up with a series that’s essentially all crooks.”—Tim Hallinan

Tim Hallinan wrote the quote above in the “Author’s Note” to the first book in his new series featuring Junior Bender ("Burglar to the Stars") in Los Angeles. For those readers unfamiliar with Hallinan’s work, he has written a series set in Thailand featuring Poke Rafferty, a travel writer with a heart of gold and karma to burn. Rafferty makes a lot of sense (and friends) defending the underdog in unequal transactions and seems to grasp the essentially welcoming Thai society is *not* as morally deficient as it is painted by some critics, but has a strong sense of values that are easily transgressed by unwitting or unthinking Westerners.

In the Junior Bender series Hallinan turns his eagle eye on Los Angeles for a change. The reader can tell he is having a blast with the range of folks and the shifting sense of morality he encountered there. Hallinan still has a strong instinct for protecting the underdog: witness his lack of judgment about the drug addiction of his latest fictional charge, a young female actress on a downward spiral snookered into making a porn film. These are verboten subjects in Western educated circles but Hallinan doesn’t let it faze him. He has the “come to me with your handicaps” generosity of the Dalai or the Pope. And if those two men of god will fix your afterlife, Hallinan, and his henchman Junior Bender, will fix the here-and-now.

The pace in this novel is fast—the whole thing takes place in a couple of sleepless days (the reader may experience this also)-- and the subject matter is edgy. California is once again on the leading edge in reformulating “moral man.” But *everybody* is a crook of some sort, as Hallinan said in the opening quote to this review, so one has to roll with the attitude and take the material for the laughs. Moral insights are there, however, as they always are with Hallinan’s books, which makes it thought-provoking and good discussion material. How far would we be willing to go, given the same constraints or circumstances?

Check out the genesis of this series on Tim Hallinan’s website. Hallinan is a man who doesn’t let a little negativity let him down. When his long-time publisher didn’t want an L.A. series, Hallinan self-published until Soho Crime picked him up. Now he has sold the film rights and the audio rights. But he’s got it going on now: visit this review by blogger and former Valley girl Nancy O.

Keith Johnson says

Again, I’m in the minority with my negative review on this one. SPOILERS: First off, the entire premise of the book is REE-DIC-U-LOUS!! Why would a crime organization blackmail a thief to solve a mystery? Why not an ex-cop, or a private investigator? They did not even know this guy, yet they are trusting him to protect a project worth millions of dollars. Yeah, that makes sense.

So right off the bat I'm taken out of the story. In addition, I hate chapter titles. They are pointless. They added to my already high dislike level of this book. I realize the writer attempted to bring an "old-school" feel to the book with the chapter titles and the writing style, but for me, it failed.

The ending was horrible. Most of the issues were wrapped up with a quick visit to an unknown character who made a few phone calls and cleared up the many problems for the protagonist. Creative? Nope! You spend an entire book with this character and you want to see a resolution which makes sense. It seemed like the author got tired of writing or needed to make a deadline, snapped his fingers, and resolved the book. How un-creative can you get?

When I first rated the book, I had it at 2 stars, however, the more I think about it the more I hated it. 1 Star.

Jo says

Timothy Hallinan has created an intriguing, funny character in his Junior Bender mystery series set in Los Angeles. Readers first meet professional burglar Junior Bender in "Crashed".

But Junior is more than an ordinary burglar. His intelligence and skills have made him the go-to guy for crooks with problems. Do you want to know who stole your stolen painting? Then Junior is the person for the job, if you can put up with his wise-cracking remarks and moral streak (yes, a burglar can have a moral streak.)

Junior has a big heart, which means he doesn't always go along with the demands of his clients if he thinks the job goes against his moral code. He also dearly loves his 12-year-old daughter, who he doesn't get to see as much as he would like because his ex-wife doesn't approve of his lifestyle or career path.

In "Crashed", Junior is hired under duress (meaning, blackmailed) by Trey Annunziato, the head of a notorious mob family, to find out who is sabotaging the pornographic movie she is making. The star of the movie is Thistle Downing, a washed-up, drugged-up young woman who had been the darling child star of a hit television series.

As Junior tries to figure out who is behind the problems on the movie set and gets to know Thistle more, he becomes more and more troubled about the whole movie venture. He is helped out by his old friend, Louie the Lost, another crook with a big heart. "Crashed" was an entertaining, quick read and Junior is a humorous, memorable protagonist.

Keith Raffel says

When it comes to burglars as protagonists in mysteries, Lawrence Sanders set the bar high with his Bernie Rhodenbarr series. With Crashed, the first Junior Bender, Tim Hallinan has surpassed the master. Bravo!

David says

Junior Bender has been a successful burglar since he was a teenage boy. However, everyone's luck runs out eventually, and when Junior is contracted to steal a Paul Klee painting, he finds he's been set up, a blackmail victim because of an inconvenient video surveillance system.

A Los Angeles crime boss, Trey Annunziato, needs Junior to protect her new movie project, a trilogy of porn films starring the former child television star, Thistle Downing. Someone is trying to shut Trey's production down, and whether it's disrupting the film set or killing the star, they don't care.

Downing was one of the biggest child stars of her time, but drugs, poor money choices, and parental problems have left her destitute and disillusioned. Junior takes a liking to the young woman and finds that he can't let her, or his 12-year old daughter, Rina, down. Now how can he help her without paying the ultimate price?

Hallinan has written an irreverently, nice guy in Junior Bender. He's a criminal with lots of smooth, intellectual edges. Although divorced, he still loves his wife, and cherishes his daughter. He'll do what's right as long as it falls within his unique moral code. If not, he'll do what's necessary.

Doing what's necessary happens a lot in **Crashed** and following Junior as he navigates through the land mines of bad girls and worse guys is great fun.

Amy says

My favorite mystery authors have been dying off, one by one. With the demises of Donald Westlake and Robert B Parker, I was fearful of finding a decent story, told with intelligence and humor. But thanks to Nancy Pearl's recommendations NPR for books under the radar, I've discovered Hallinan, and his Junior Bender, and am a happy girl.

This is apparently the first in a newish series for Hallinan. (I've got the second requested at CCPL, and just saw that another one is due out any moment. Bender (whose first name is actually "Junior" . His father was a junior, but despised the name so much that he didn't want to saddle his son with it, so just gave him the Junior bit) is a burglar. And he's smart. He's been doing his craft since he was fourteen, and hasn't been caught yet. But, he's in for a bit of a tough time when he basically blackmailed to work for one of LA's crime bosses. There's trouble on a movie set for a film the boss is producing and Bender is put in charge of keeping things straight and getting the job jobbed.

Only problem is, it's a porn movie that is to star a former child actress/American sweetheart, currently down, out, drugged, and on a pretty impressive downward slide. And it turns out that Junior has a heavy dose of compassion in his make-up, as well as brains.

The writing and dialog is good, filled with amusing bits. The twists and solutions Junior comes up with were also amusing. Junior is unashamed that he's a burglar, sees some benefits in a work schedule that keeps him pretty free most of the month, and lives mostly out of hotel rooms since his marriage ended. He has a good relationship with his young daughter. He reads a lot, and has pretty much charted a educational course that is probably better than what most undergrads get at a majority of universities. He's a self-made burglar, and

comfortable in his own skin.

Looking forward to the next book with Junior.

Debbi Mack says

CRASHED is one of those novels that's a bit hard to categorize. It's sort of a thriller combined with a whodunnit.

However, it starts out looking very much like a crime caper. The story takes place in Los Angeles and surrounding area. The protagonist is a burglar named Junior Bender (which kept reminding me of Junior Walker, but that's another story) who's enlisted to steal some artwork from the home of a big criminal-type guy. But really that's neither here nor there, because after a chain of Rube Goldberg-like events involving a safe, some diamonds, a chandelier and a pack of Rottweilers, Junior ends up in a compromising position. Thus, he's convinced (i.e., blackmailed) to work for crime queenpin Trey Annunziato. Trey inherited the business from her gangster father, who she's rumored to have offed. Anyhow, Trey wants to go straight. And she forces, er, hires Junior to babysit the star of a porn film trilogy that's supposed to finance her way out of the underworld. That star is Thistle Downing, a destitute and drugged-out former child star of major proportions.

Okay, so the story is really about a burglar sort of hired to make sure this dazed and drug-addled former child acting prodigy shows up and actually makes this porn movie. And even though Junior is supposed to be working for Trey (who's tough, but not totally unsympathetic), he ends up feeling conflicted when he sees what's happened to Thistle (super talented child who's grown up into a worn down nub of her former self). Oh, and by the way, it turns out that someone's trying to kill Thistle. However, another person is murdered instead.

Hmm. That sucks.

This is one of those stories that could so easily slip into mere cliché in lesser hands. After all, the child star-turned-drug addict has become almost a Hollywood icon. Plus does it come as a great surprise that Junior is divorced and his ex-wife gives him grief over visitation with their daughter? Something about burgling houses doesn't sit well with the ex. Imagine.

However, what makes this book absolutely worth the reading is the way it's written. Timothy Hallinan has a way with description that's brilliant, but seems effortless (which it's not, of course) and writes dialogue so snappy and engaging, it disappoints when the scenes end.

Junior may be a burglar, but in a literary sense, he follows in the footsteps of Philip Marlowe. He does so without being imitative or derivative.

Hallinan puts his unique stamp on the hardboiled genre and makes it his own. Whether its the description of traffic on a rainy night in LA or the feeling of being up at three AM, unable to sleep, Hallinan writes in a way that's wholly fresh and memorable, as if it were being done for the first time.

Read the entire review at <http://thebookgrrl.blogspot.com/2010/...>

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Junior Bender, burglar

SETTING: LA

SERIES: 1 of 3

RATING: 4.5

CRASHED is a book that drew me in right from the first chapter. Junior Bender is a burglar who has been commissioned to steal a valuable painting from an upscale home. The job is a tough one—he has to enter through the front door, which is completely visible, and the property is guarded by five Rottweilers. Of course, things go wrong; and when they do, Junior finds very creative ways to manage the situation. That first chapter serves as a fine example of how inventive and witty the author can be. What it doesn't show is how much heart is hidden within the humor.

After the little art-stealing fiasco, Junior discovers that he's robbed a major crime figure and has set himself up for a world of trouble. He finds a way out when he meets with crime boss Trey Annnziato who is channeling her organization into legitimate businesses. At the moment, she has taken on producing a porn movie starring a former child acting prodigy, Thistle Downing. It appears that someone is trying to sabotage the movie, and Trey needs Junior to find out who and keep the movie shooting. After meeting Thistle and discovering that she is destitute and addicted to drugs, he assumes responsibility for her welfare. It breaks his heart to see what she has become and how her talent has been wasted.

Junior has his hands full, to say the least. Whoever is trying to stop the movie being made has upped the bar and killed one of Junior's best friends who was surveilling Thistle's apartment and attempted to kill Thistle as well. Thistle herself is quite self destructive, and it's all Junior can do to keep her clean. Despite being a criminal, he finds that he cares about this lost person and is horrified by the idea of her having to perform sexual acts in the movie. He's determined to get her away from that, but how can he do so without ending up in a slab of concrete when the original theft comes to light?

CRASHED is full of memorable, distinctive characters. Many of them present a real dichotomy of values. There's Junior, who is a criminal but someone who has a real heart and is willing to go the limit for those he cares about. The crime boss, Trey, is a real entrepreneur who recognizes that her organization's will be far more successful if they move into legal activities. Jimmy's friend, Ji Ming Ding, is a gangster who loves Jimmy Dean fanatic (try saying his name). Hallinan builds a believable plot, filled with both humor and pathos, but never taking things to anything beyond believable.

I thoroughly enjoyed CRASHED and look forward to the next two books in the series, which will be published next year. Those of you who are fans of the Simeon Grist and Poke Rafferty series by Hallinan will find CRASHED to be quite different from those books but equally entertaining.

Patricia says

Junior Bender is a burglar but he has some rather unique ways of approaching his jobs. Some of his methods will have you rolling on the floor laughing but they seem to work for him - at least most of the time. There are a few moments when the reader wonders if Junior will survive to steal another day.

An LA crime boss is producing a porn movie starring Thistle Downing. Thistle is a former child star who was loved by her fans but time has taken a toll on Thistle and she is currently living in a drug-induced stupor, destitute and uninsurable. The movie would bring income to Thistle but would only send her further down her current path of destruction.

Junior is blackmailed into accepting the free-lance job of finding out who is sabotaging this movie. His job is to keep the movie on track. The problem Junior is running into is that he likes Thistle and knows the movie is not the best thing for her even though she needs the money. Junior sets out to fulfill his obligation but at the same time do right by Thistle and this isn't an easy thing to do. Junior has some very interesting friends who lend a helping hand along the way.

I want to read more and more about Junior. He is a character that is full of charm and certainly has some interesting escapades. Crashed is written in a totally different style from the Bangkok series. This novel proves that Timothy Hallinan can entertain us with more than one type of novel and I for one want to read everything he writes.

Midwest Geek says

I enjoyed this light read because of its humor and its convoluted plot. Yes, it strains credibility, but this is not great literature, just recreational reading that is much enhanced by the quality of the narration. I enjoy mysteries in which the hero is himself a criminal. This reminded me of the classic series by Richard Stark featuring Parker, although Junior is not nearly so ruthless. After all, he has a daughter he loves and an ex-wife he hopes to win back. He's a little bit disarming in his forthrightness. I can imagine his going to a parent-teacher conference and, responding to his teacher's query about what he does for a living, that he is self-employed, a professional thief. I look forward to the next in the series.

Peter Berkot delivers an outstanding narration (5-star).

Lynn says

Junior Bender only works two days a month. He is a professional burglar who lives in cheap motel rooms in the Los Angeles area. He spends his spare time reading and is self taught.

The book starts out with Junior being hired to break into a house on a very busy street in broad daylight. The entry is very close to the street. In the back of the house, he can hear the pack of man eating rottweilers. In what seems to be an unlikely successful burglary, he does get away with the painting he went in for. It did not go smoothly though and he comes out looking pretty banged up.

He then finds out he was set up by a third generation organized crime leader. He is blackmailed in helping the leader Trey.

The organized crime leader Trey, has decided to go legitimate. She is selling off her crime businesses and starting new businesses within the law. She has hired a young woman who was a tv super star during her youth for her porno movie. The young woman is all strung out from drugs. Trey wants Junior to find out who is trying to sabotage the movie being made.

There are various quirky characters. Some I hope are in future books. There was humor. It was a different and good read.

Lance Charnes says

It's not something we think about very often, but it's pretty inevitable that villains will prey on other villains as well as on straights. By definition, the victim-villains can't go to the cops for help. What do they do? The answer in any number of other crime books is, they grab a gun and do their own vigilante thing. But in *Crashed*, the first installment in a series, the victim-villain goes another way: hire another villain to investigate the case and enact whatever passes for justice in this context.

Our detective-villain in this case is "Junior" Bender, a burglar of some repute, whom we meet at work dealing with vicious, hungry dogs and an insufficiently secured chandelier. He's hornswoggled into taking a job from Trey Annunziato, an L.A. organized-crime boss who's trying to go legit. She (yes, and a comely she, of course) has a problem: someone's trying to sabotage a major porn production she's financing. This particular production stars Thistle Downing, a former child star who has not only hit the skids, but has left a miles-long skid mark on the freeway of life. Junior gets to find the culprit or his extremities will be fed to the dogs previously mentioned.

Author Hallinan knows how to put a story together and how to populate it with vivid oddball characters. His Los Angeles settings show a more-than-passing familiarity with both the downmarket and upscale parts of the city, especially the San Fernando Valley. His descriptions come somewhere in between the extremes of feast and famine that we see in novels -- detailed enough to clearly see the place or person being featured without wallowing in adjectives. The book reads fast and light; I probably could have put it away in a couple sittings if I'd had the time.

Junior is somewhat closer to the Rhodenbarr end of the fictional-burglar spectrum than he is to the Parker end. Still, he's not exactly cuddly, and he doesn't mind getting his hands dirty with things worse than dog treats. He has the requisite rotten upbringing and difficulty maintaining adult relationships, and the kind of quirks (he lives in an endless rotation of fleabag hotels) we've come to expect of our protagonist-criminals. He does have his soft spots and weaknesses -- which usually involve women in need of rescue -- and in general you won't mind following him around (which, since he's the narrator, you have to).

Thistle is what's left of an adolescent female version of Robin Williams: a gifted comic performer whose skill at mimicry and fierce improv licks carried an otherwise dire '90s sitcom to pop-culture-icon status. The talent's still there, buried under the drugs, bad attitude and general hopelessness. She presents as a realistically muddled, hard-bitten victim of the Hollywood machine who has just enough of a spark left to

take the help Junior offers her.

The other major characters are more-or-less types and are likely to be part of the series' stock company. Since most live on the other side of the legal line, they have colorful nicknames, unusual physical features, and predictably unhealthy habits. At times it felt like *Guys and Dolls* shed some of its players and they fell into this novel; you'll have to decide for yourself whether that's a good thing.

It does tend to fit the story's overall ethos, though. The author clearly had '30s screwball comedy on his mind when he put digital ink to virtual paper. Junior is a smartass, as is nearly every other character. There's a lot of snappy banter going on, the kind that never happens in real life because nobody's that good with a comeback. Unfortunately, it tends to make the dialog seem sameish no matter who's speaking. The situations and twists are usually fun enough that you won't mind that they take place in a parallel universe. If *La La Land* had been a crime story rather than a romance, it would've been something like this.

Crashed is a wisecracking, wisecracking caper story that starts rather than ends with a heist. The Runyonesque characters, rimshot dialog and general eccentricity mean that you'll have to approach this novel with precisely the right mindset and expectations or you'll meet with great disappointment or, perhaps, cognitive dissonance. Don't try to take any of this seriously and you might have some fun.

Nancy Oakes says

Career-burgler Junior Bender has picked up a gig from a "facilitator," whose client wants Junior to steal a Paul Klee painting from some people who are currently on vacation. She has provided the layout and other info Junior will need to know -- but what she doesn't know is that there's a video camera that is tracking Junior's every move. Sadly, he discovers it too late...and the guy who monitors the stored recordings has him in a corner. He will either work for Trey Annunziato, "a third-generation hood," "heir to the Valley's most diversified crime family," and "Mount Rushmore with hair," and do the job right, or his face will be the one the painting's owners see on the recording when they come back from their vacation. Trey is planning to go straight and has decided to make one last porno movie "to finance everybody's transition to the straight life," meaning all of those people involved in her criminal activities. The star is going to be a former child actress, a young woman named Thistle Downing who captured everyone's hearts on her own television show some years earlier but now is a drug addict having trouble making it through the day. While Trey's plan to exploit Thistle is already in progress, there are people who don't want to see the film made, and there have already been problems. Junior's job is to make sure Thistle is ready to work, and to see that the film gets made at any cost. As Junior soon finds out, this won't be easy -- and when one of his friends ends up dead, it becomes personal.

It sounds kind of like a cut-and-dried kind of mystery, but no. There are multiple laugh-out-loud moments and the author's totally nailed LA and the Valley here, along with the various personality types you find living there. No one is safe from his snark here, most especially the media vultures and the film industry.

Crashed is a book that is hard to dislike -- and I don't really have anything on the negatory side to say about it. It's good for all crime readers, especially when you want something on the lighter as opposed to edgy side, although it does have its moments of blood, guts and wisecracks. As an anti-hero, Junior's one of the best -- he has a conscience and a very clear sense of morality with lines he tries not to cross unless absolutely necessary. In his own burglar sort of way, he's a wonderful dad, and has made a promise to himself to never lie to his daughter -- who has her own very cool personality as well. Definitely a first-rate series starter, and

after I finish this series, I'll be off to find others by this writer. I LOVED this book, and I think my enthusiasm must have bubbled over, because now my husband wants to read it. We never agree on crime novels, but I think this book may prove to be the exception.

Mike French says

My first book that I have read from Timothy Hallinan, but certainly not my last! Very enjoyable and entertaining. The reason I read this book is GoodReads! Another member mentioned his name in his review of Duane Lindsay's-Missing Amanda. This the reason that GR is my favorite web site.

Jim says

3.5 stars. A fun mystery thriller. There wasn't anything terribly profound about it, although the plight of the child star was heart-wrenching, but it was quite entertaining. Just the right mix of humor.

It was well narrated & the publisher made each chapter an audio file, a real plus. I'll certainly listen to another.
