



Snatch

Gregory McDonald

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Whether it's a Middle East oil crisis in the 1970s or the London Blitz during WWII, world events have a way of breeding trouble on the home front, too. That's how Toby Rinaldi, son of a U.N. Ambassador, wound up kidnapped on his way to a California amusement park, and how Robby Burnes, orphaned son of British nobility, wound up snatched on the snowy streets of New York City. But as Robby's famous namesake taught us, the best laid plans don't always work out as intended. Especially not when you're a kidnapper in the hands of Gregory McDonald.

The comic genius behind the Fletch and Flynn books, Gregory McDonald also penned the two brilliant kidnapping novels appearing here for the first time in three decades - and the first time ever in a single volume. Two precocious eight-year-old boys...two teams of kidnappers, in way over their heads...two opportunities for mayhem, danger, and the trenchant social satire no crime writer has ever delivered like McDonald.

Snatch Details

Date : Published February 7th 2017 by Hard Case Crime

ISBN : 9781785651823

Author : Gregory McDonald

Format : Paperback 446 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Noir

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From Reader Review Snatch for online ebook

J says

A fun little duo of novels about kidnapping that McDonald did before his Fletch books made him famous.

Dave says

Hard Case Crime's latest selection is a two-for-one double bill that harkens back to the old Ace Double paperbacks. Snatch offers us not one, but two, novels from Gregory McDonald, both reprints. The first is "Snatched," a 1978 book, also released as "Who Took Toby Rinaldi?." The second is "Safekeeping," a 1985 book. The two novels, whose pages add up to a whopping 448 pages (two complete novels for the price of one) are wholly distinct, separate, and unrelated, but sharing the fact that both involve kidnapping of somewhat precocious eight-year-olds, diplomatic intrigue, and satire. Neither of the two novels, moreover, is the usual hardboiled fare that one expects from Hard Case Crime.

I have never read McDonald before, who is best known for his Fletch series of eleven novels issued between 1974 and 1994, a comedic detective endeavor, involving a journalist and a murder-for-hire, widely known because it was turned into a movie vehicle for Chevy Chase. Having never been a Chevy Chase fan (I'm more of a Belushi fan), I unfairly and unjustly have avoided the Fletch novels as well as the movie.

"Who Took Toby Rinaldi," the first of the two Snatch novels is a comedic crime caper that reminds me quite a bit of some of Donald Westlake's comedic crime novels. It is a bit tongue-in-cheek and involves a diplomatic mission to the United Nations, a plot to kidnap the diplomat's young son, and the oddest of kidnappers. The novel has a made-to-be-a-movie feel to it and, with the right cast, it could be quite humorous and successful. The best parts of the book involve young Toby who hasn't quite got the idea that he is a kidnapping victim being held against his will and the ex-con who holds him hostage. The pair play Marco Polo at a motel pool with other children and end up at Fantasyland, an ersatz-Disneyland type place where all kinds of action takes place, often in comedic fashion. For my tastes, this was the better of the two Snatch novels.

The second Snatch novel is "Safekeeping," and begins in a prim and proper British boarding school during the Second World War. There are some odd scenes involving the head of the school and it is really tongue-in-cheek stuff. Somewhat Oliver Twist-like, young Robby becomes an orphan when his parents' home is bombed by the Germans and he is shuttled off as an orphan to America for safekeeping. There, his adventures begin in earnest as a drunken reporter takes him in and sends him off to school in the morning, with the advice that he should walk in concentric circles growing ever wider around the apartment until he found the local school. Robby is spotted as the heir to a noble British peerage and kidnapped by an odd collection of kidnappers. Again, as in the Toby Rinaldi novel, at first, Robby doesn't always seem to get the idea that he is indeed a kidnapping victim, although later on he gets it. As with the first novel in this two-novel collection, the second novel also appears written with a possible eye to a movie tie-in. One can just picture some of these oddball characters on the big screen.

Both novels in this collection are enjoyable and easy to read. Remember when reading them that they are meant to be funny, odd, and humorous.

Karl says

In my inability to do diligence, I discovered upon receiving this book it consists of two books I read years ago under two different titles, now plastered together.

I realize that I should check further into books prior to purchasing them, so I take partial blame, yet I hold anger and animosity toward Hard Case Crime for this deceptive packaging,

The first half of the book was a hardcover (which already I own) first printed in 1980 by Putnam, titled "Who Took Toby Rinaldi?". the story is about a kidnaping in the middle east of a kid.

The second half of the book is another reprint of a book I already owned titled "Safekeeping" , this one published by Mysterious Press in 1985 about another kid, this one set in world war 2.

I seem to recall enjoying both books back when I read them. The reason for this (for me) bad book review mainly reflects my anger at Hard Case Crime's packaging department.

McDonald is the author of the Fletch books which I also enjoyed, he is a pretty good author and I don't blame him in any way, however...

Raspberry's all around.

Kevin says

Two-time Edgar Award-winner Gregory McDonald is best remembered for FLETCH and its 10 comedic mystery sequels, but he also wrote a number of popular standalone thrillers and mysteries. Snatch collects two McDonald novels that have no characters in common but both revolve around the kidnapping of eight-year-olds.

SNATCH (originally published in 1980 as WHO TOOK TOBY RINALD?) is the breezier of the two, expertly blending action, quirky characters and an acerbic sense of humor. It is told in 67 bite-sized chapters for maximum forward momentum. Toby Rinaldi, the son of a UN ambassador from a Middle Eastern monarchy, is snatched by a group who want to control his father's actions. But the inexperienced kidnapper is no match for the savvy kid, who is more concerned with visiting a California amusement park than being reunited with his folks.

The second novel, SAFEKEEPING (1985), feels like a mixture of Oliver Twist and Damon Runyon. Eight-year-old Robby Burnes, orphaned son of a duke, is one of many children shipped to New York during World War II to escape the London bombings. An Italian family with ransom dreams immediately kidnaps him from his inattentive, boozy guardian. But when Robby witnesses a mob murder, he flees to the streets--chased by one group trying to keep their ransom safe and another intent on killing a witness.

Both entertaining novels are fun, fast-paced capers with colorful, sympathetic characters, surprising plot twists and crackling, snappy dialogue. Snatch offers two less-familiar but top-notch Gregory McDonald

novels in one delightful volume.

Richard Whale says

I enjoyed the Toby Rinaldi story with it's twists and turns in a wholly absorbing plot. Very much a page turner and with a very believable account of a kidnapping. I thought the way characters developed was very well done with very few characters ending up as they initially seemed. The only weakness was when "Jackson" is left to mind Toby and the person originally tasked with this overdoses. Otherwise a well written and enjoyable story.

The second story of Robby Burns I didn't enjoy. It seemed rather laboured and manufactured and the story all worked out in the end in a rather tongue in cheek manner and lacked something real.

Sam says

The First Snatch

Bill says

I read McDonald's Fletch and Flynn books years ago when they were first published. I enjoyed them immensely and was quite upset when they were made into the Chevy Chase films. Chevy Chase actually was a good choice for Fletch, but the films were awful, relying on gross gags and ridiculous situations and disguises. I kept reading the books though but the quality fell off there as well. But I had found enough memories that I chose to read these re-issues from Hard Case Crime. Again, I found them amusing and rather fun, although I didn't buy everyone's motivations all the time. Enjoyable but forgettable. In fact, all through Snatched, I had the vague feeling I had read it before. And perhaps I had read "Who took Toby Rindaldi?" when it was first released, but if so, I had totally forgotten it. So, enjoyable and forgettable. Oh, I forgot I said that already.

Tom Steer says

Personally I believe this book falls solidly in the three star category: the first novel--Snatched--is the better of the two, an enjoyable story of a diplomat's son kidnapped to California. However, I struggled with Safekeeping: I'm surprised Hard Case have published it, as I would struggle to call it a crime novel at all. It reminds me more of a Horatio Alger novel than the pulp crime I would expect of them, and I can't honestly say I enjoyed its rambling plot and cliched characters.

I'd say Snatched gets about 3 1/2 stars and Safekeeping gets a (fairly generous) 2 1/2 stars, averaging out for a 3. If you find yourself with a copy of this, read and enjoy Snatched and then shelve the book and read something else rather than going on to read Safekeeping--I thought about doing this a few chapters into the B side, and after battling to the end of it, I still wish that I had.

Andrew F says

Two books in an omnibus. The first one (Snatched, or Who Stole Tony Rimbaldi?) is the better of the two, a then-contemporary 1970s thriller from the writer of Fletch. It has a little of The Ransom of Red Chief in its dna, lots of sparkling dialogue and it all moves super fast. It does lack a really terrific central figure like Fletch, Flynn or Jack.

The second book (Safekeeping) is a little funny. It's set during World War II, and follows an evacuee, an English orphan. It starts off very unMcDonaldian, like he was trying to do Dickens or something - an orphan meeting strangers on a kind of adventure. It ends up being far more enjoyable with a lot of strong characters and fun writing. In both books, the main character is an 8 year old boy who has a lot less idea what is going on, but the young lad in Safekeeping becomes savvy but virtue of his experiences. It was a nice story with heart, but not especially what I want out of Hard Case Crime.

Jiří Pavlovský says

Nová kniha od Gregory McDonalda, autora Fletche? To je událost! I když je samozřejmě termín "nová" použitý poměrně volně. V knize Snatch jsou dva jeho romány, jeden z roku 80 a druhý z roku 85. Oba jsou na téma únos dítěte, který se poněkud vymkne z rukou.

Ten první román, Snatched, je ze sborníku rozhodně ten lepší. Je unesen syn politika, aby se mu zabránilo v prosazení zákona, jenže díky okolnostem a předávkování spojky zůstane kluk s druholigovým kriminálkem, který moc netuší, co s ním, tak s ním každý den chodí do "disneylandu" - zatímco ho zoufale hledají jak rodiče, tak ti, co únos naplánovali. Je to zajímavé v tom, že kniha začíná poměrně vážně až temně... a postupně se v ní začínají nenápadně objevovat humorné momenty, které s dalšími stránkami stále sílí. Těba když si zločinec porovnává zkušenosti s cca desetiletým žákem internátní školy, jestli je to horší na internátu nebo ve vězení. Nebo celé crazy finále v zábavním parku, ve kterém si každou postavku a vraždu nadšeně fotí turisté, domnívající se, že je to součástí programu.

Druhý román, Safekeeping, už, co se týče humoru, víc tlačí na pilu a je to spíš sled velmi volně provázaných situací než příběh. Odehrává se během druhé světové a i tady je hlavním hrdinou malý kluk, obě anglického školního vzdělání - žil zvyklý poslušně dle všeho, co mu dospělí řeknou. I když ho unesou. Rychle se mu ale podaří utéct (no, vlastně spíše odejít) a pak jen bloudí New Yorkem (kam byl odvezený poté, co mu bomba zabila rodiče) a potkává podivné lidi - zatímco novinář, který ho dostal na starost, se snaží z jeho únosu vymáknout jak popularitu, tak prachy (takže v podstatě je to takový předchůdce Fletche). Zatímco první román byl přes temný rozjezd vlastně docela pozitivní, tak druhý je rozhodně od začátku víc legrační, ale taky depresivnější - skoro všichni jsou parchanti, kteří dletského hrdinu jen využívají a ignorují. Svět zločinců a policie je od sebe skoro neoddělitelný a realita nemá žádnou váhu - platí jen to, co je napsané v novinách.

Jak jsem byl z prvního románu nadšený, tak druhý je skutečně jen sled satirických výstupů, sledovaných ořima pasivního dletského hrdiny, což táhne dle dolů a brzdi těnění. Navíc jsou nejlepší pasáže na začátku, pak se zdá, že se autor unavil a vynahrazuje to tím, že se hrdina stane cílem neúnavného zabijáka.

Ale jo. Obvykle, když se takhle vyhrábne šuplík slavného autora, vypadnou věci, které se tak úplně nepovedly. Ale to v tomhle případě rozhodně neplatí. Snatched řádím rozhodně k tomu lepším McDonaldivkám... a i Safekeeping mělo pár skvělých momentů a rozhodně to nebyla ztráta času.

Mike says

In the interest of brevity, I'll just say this: the best thing about "Snatch," by Gregory McDonald, is the cover art. The two books in this volume are pretty awful. Don't bother reading them. The end.

If you're not as much into brevity, I'll explain further. "Snatch" is two novels in one. But both have the same subject--smart young boys are kidnapped by morons. The first novel is about a Middle Eastern Ambassador whose son is stolen to influence a policy speech at the United Nations in the 1970's. The second novel is about a British war orphan (during World War 2) who is shipped off to America and whose accidental "kidnapping" becomes a manufactured media sensation.

Gregory McDonald wrote "Fletch," which became the excellent Chevy Chase movie of the same name. But I saw none of the wit and humor in these two books (written in 1980 and 1985, respectively) that I saw in the "Fletch" film. McDonald seems to feel that no one has ever written satire adequately before and that he can take aim at big, easy targets (Disneyland! Religion! Politics! Yellow journalism!) and finally slip wholly into allegory.

Yes, we're in "Home Alone" territory here as far as the plots. And these two books make those insipid "Home Alone" movies seem well-written by comparison.

I won't mince words. The "satire" involved is not remotely funny. None of it is witty or interesting. The characters are either obnoxious or pathetic. Even the "adorably" smart kidnapped kids are grating after a while. The running joke in the second novel is that the kidnapped boy is slowly starving to death in the "land of plenty" as he gets passed from one set of fools to another.

Between the two novels, the first, set in the 70's, is marginally better than the second. Both seem to be written by a very old man who has no idea what a modern audience wants to read--even a modern audience in the 1980's. His characters are mere shells for the creation of satire and they grimly jump through the hoops required for the so-called plots to advance.

Anyway, you get the idea of what I'm saying. Enjoy the cover art, which is quite nice, and skip reading either of these books. You'll be glad you did.

Roger says

Really liked this hard-boiled crime book. I didn't realize that there were actually 2 books in this one volume, and there was no indication on the cover that there was a second book within. So when I abruptly came to the end (thinking I was only halfway through) I was surprised. Guess that's why you read books on devices!

Liked the characters and the dialogue. Especially the criminal with a heart, Spike. Fac' is....

Garrett Hamblin says

I enjoyed the book. It was the tale of two kidnappings set in the 70's. Both were 8 year old boys and both were kidnapped for political leverage. Pulp fiction in every sense of the term.

Kate Stark says

Entertaining and kind of charming. Different from other books I've read by McDonald.

Phillip III says

Gregory McDonald, who passed away in 2008, is best known for his FLETCH series. Yes. Fletch. That loveable, quirky crime solving journalist depicted by Chevy Chase on the big screen. Back-when I'd read a handful of the Fletch books, and loved them. Now, some two decades later, I am rediscovering McDonald's work.

SNATCH is like picking up a 45 record down at the music store. (Feel free to Google the reference if necessary). Hard Case Crime has re-released two novels under one title. SNATCH. And, just like that 45 RPM record there is clearly a Side A, and a Side B.

In the first novel, SNATCHED, we are looking at a kidnapping. Difference is, the abduction has nothing to do with money. When eight year-old Toby Rinaldi goes missing, his parents find themselves in the midst of a nightmare.

Teodoro is a Middle East Ambassador to the King, living in New York City. His wife, Christina, an American, is overwhelmed by the politics, and diplomatic life that seem to have driven a wedge into her marriage, and threatens her family.

There is a powerful article on the table. Resolution 1176R. It deals with closing, or not closing, the Persian Gulf to the shipping of oil. Whether passed, or dropped, the possibility of war hangs in the balance. Teodoro's presentation, and vote, could make all of the difference.

A phone call confirms it. Toby will either live or die based on how Teodoro votes. The choice is up to the ambassador.

Working with the king's secret security personnel, Teodoro does not trust anyone. And he has every right to feel paranoid. Something has gone wrong. There is more behind the kidnapping. Toby's life is in danger, and the vote is only a few days away!

SNATCHED was an easy, straight forward read. Some good twists. The characters were simple, but well drawn. Some of the best parts of the book pertained to Toby and his Kidnapper, Spike. The last forty, to fifty pages was packed with action. Fantasyland-style action. And the pages just kept turning, and turning.

IN THE SECOND book in SNATCH, we have SAFEKEEPING.

Unfortunately, for me, SAFEKEEPING was clearly the B Side of the 45, the lesser known song, if you will. It is meant as satire. I needed to continually remind myself of that while reading. It is nothing at all like the Fletch novels, and nothing at all like SNATCHED.

I saw some reviews compare SAFEKEEPING to the likes of Mark Twain. I did not see that. The story takes place during World War II. Our main character, the hero, if you will, is Robert James Saint James Burnes Walter. (Robby Burnes for short). The eight year old boy is in an England bordering school when he learns that his parents have died in a bombing.

The school informs the child in a very flippant way of the deaths. They inform Robby that he will be sent to stay with his uncle in New York City. Journalist Thadeus Lowry shows up hours late to retrieve his nephew. He is clearly self-absorbed, arrogant, and does not seem to realize no one takes him serious at all.

There is no sympathy, or questions asked about the death of Robby's parents. Thadeus seems indifferent about the death of his sister, Robby's mother, and more concerned with finding his next story--always looking for the byline.

The two get tangled up in some misadventures that, I presume, are meant to be funny, and ironic, and full of satire. Me? I either just didn't get, or just didn't care enough to try. The story reads easy. Smooth writing. For me, SAFEKEEPING was like drinking from the container in the 'fridge and expecting sodapop, only to end up swallowing milk. Milk's still good, but not when you are expecting soda. Perhaps I thought I was in for a noir-style story, and was a bit taken aback by getting something more Steinbeck-ish instead.

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