



The Two Gentlemen of Altona

Lisa Henry , J.A. Rock

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The first title in the exciting Playing the Fool series

Mischief, thou art afoot.

Special Agent Ryan "Mac" McGuinness is having a rough week. Not only is he on a new diet, but he's also been tasked with keeping Henry Page -- the world's most irritating witness -- alive. Which is tough when Mac's a breath away from killing the Shakespeare-quoting, ethically-challenged, egg-obsessed Henry himself. Unless killing isn't really what Mac wants to do to him.

Con man Henry Page prefers to keep his distance from the law . . . though he wouldn't mind getting a little closer to uptight, handsome Agent McGuinness. As the sole witness to a mob hit, Henry's a valuable asset to the FBI. But he's got his own agenda, and it doesn't involve testifying.

When evidence surfaces of a mole in the FBI office, Mac and Henry are forced to go into hiding. Holed up in a fishing cabin, they're surprised to discover that their feelings run more than skin deep. But as the mob closes in, Henry has to make his escape. And Mac has to decide how far he's willing to go to keep Henry by his side.

* * * * *

The Playing the Fool series should be read in order for maximum enjoyment.

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From Reader Review The Two Gentlemen of Altona for online ebook

Exina says

The Two Gentlemen of Altona is book one of the *Playing the Fool* series.

Positives: humor and the mystery. I don't mind the cliffhangers and unanswered questions – it's a series after all.

Negatives: too long, too slow, low heat, no sparks, no sex. A bit melodramatic ending.

Actually, it is not an MM romance, at least, not yet. Hope it will be, eventually. I might give a chance to book two.

Shile says

3.5 stars

I liked it but i wanted to strangle Henry most of the time. And too many cock-blocks for my taste, i will maybe read the rest.

Lisa Henry says

J.A. Rock and I wrote this. We hope you have as much fun reading it as we did writing it.

I think we can all agree our lives need more Shakespeare-quoting, ethically-challenged, egg-obsessed conmen in them. Also, candy.

Wow. Did you see how I typed "candy" there, without even flinching?

American English. I'm finally getting the hang of it!

Oh, and anything you want to ask about *The Two Gentlemen of Altona*, here's as good a place as any!

UPDATED TO ADD: You can now read an excerpt online at <http://www.riptidepublishing.com/titl...>

Rosa, really says

Enjoyable start to a new series. Loved Henry and Mac's conversations--their snappy dialogue reminded me

of a fast talking 40s movie in some parts. Such as this scene where Henry yet again gives Mac some super helpful diet advice:

"You know what you should try?" Henry tossed a couple of candies into his mouth.

"No advice necessary."

"Quinoa."

"Please."

"Have you ever had it?"

"What?"

"Quinoa."

Mac sighed. "No."

"It's good. It's a pseudocereal."

"That means nothing to me."

"All the grains look like little sperms when you cook them."

[....]

"Good," Mac said. "Because I want to feel like I'm eating little sperm. The only thing that could make this god-awful diet better is if it included something that looked like sperm."

I applaud Mac's patience, because if Henry had tried that conversational topic with me he would've found himself on the ground with all his candy missing. Fucking quinoa, my ass.

I must admit I was a bit distracted by all the Shakespeare references. My brain kept nattering away--*Sebastian and Viola, huh? Is this based on Twelfth Night? Wait, is that yet another name from yet another play? Which play? (Probably all the damn plays.) What am I missing? Goddammit, I need to stop filling my brain with reruns of Morse and Midsomer Murders and pics of Dylan O'Brien.* But that may be more of an issue with the voices in my head than this particular book.

My only real complaint is that *Two Gentlemen* feels more like a first act than a complete novel. I like it when there are some plotlines left hanging, gives me something to mull over when I'm looking forward to the next book, but it felt rather like *everything* was left hanging at the end of this one. Luckily, the rest of the series (The Merchant of Death and Tempest) should be out shortly.

Copy provided by Netgalley in an exchange for an honest review.

♣ Irish Smurfétté ♣ says

Ok, this might frighteningly resemble a stream-of-consciousness review but I honestly don't care because this was fun and clever and complex and one of the best leading-men-duo character studies I've read and I love it.

Ok.

Mac is tired, worn out, and tightly wound. And a good agent. And wants more. And doesn't know exactly what that "more" is or will or could be.

Henry, well, Henry is intelligent, and seen and done a lot in his young life, but has some blind spots that almost taste naive. Only, it's not that. There are things he should have had and learned when younger but was not afforded many of those opportunities. There is nearly a bottomless pit of things we haven't learned about

him, either, so it seems only fitting. My gosh, Henry, I need to know more.

Back to Mac, he needs to know more, too. He *wants* to know more about the **real** Henry.

clears throat and holds up two fingers

Here are the reasons this will be a rather complicated challenge: Henry feels like he doesn't know his real self anymore and Mac isn't quite sure how to help, though he starts to try.

I think they *will* figure it out. See...

motions for you to come closer

... they each carry the key to freeing the other. Uh, they just have to, ya know, find 'em.

So.

This is woven together all throughout beautifully. That completely natural and unsteady back and forth of a ride as you get to know someone, especially someone completely unexpected and occupying a "type" you didn't even know existed because they're one of a kind. Nary a stumble to be found.

The dialogue, my gosh. It's like Henry and Rock simply put recorders down and let these guys have at it. It didn't feel "written", it just is what it is. I love when I almost forget I'm reading and instead feel a part of the world the authors have created and am getting to know these characters at the same time they're getting to know each other. It's kind of a rare thing.

On the surface, these two don't appear all that unique, a Feeb and a grifter. But that's just it, they're unlike anyone else, and now their paths have crossed and they're skidding and dodging and colliding along, uncertainty their only sure thing.

Or is it?

The connection between Mac and Henry is spread out before us as-is, no fake-itude or cheap cheats. I wasn't given anything in advance, nor was I left behind, wondering what happened or how did they get there. My seat was right next to them, feeling and experiencing everything simultaneously.

Immediate.

Gripping.

Silly.

Generous.

Brave.

As I type this, I'm replaying scenes in my head. This will be one I grab from the shelf (literally!) to read again and again, and not just to see if I missed any of the fun references. ;)

I'm excited to read the next books in this series. For as much as we learn about Mac and Henry, there is that bottomless pit of discoveries yet to excavate. The "cliffie" is just a bonus. :D

ETA: one of my favorite forms of blasphemy (new word alert!) is used in this book, and that is "fuckton", as in a shit load.

Ok, carry on...

Catherine says

An entire romantic suspense novel and nary a handjob or blowjob in sight. *disapproving frown* Now, I know I'm a horny bunny, and I understand that sex isn't the be all and end all of romantic relationships - really, I do - but in my romance novels? I wants it. I needs it. I needs it baaaaaad.

My lady bits were having serious sympathy pains for Mac and Henry's blue balls.

Otherwise, I enjoyed this book. I loved Rock and Henry's writing, I felt the novel built towards the conclusion in a natural manner that avoided being melodramatic, and I loved, loved, LOVED Mac and Henry together. Mac was gruff and intelligent and a little bit in denial; Henry was charming and a little over the top and emotionally wounded. Together, they were two flawed, mostly average characters who had completely believable chemistry on page.

I'm looking forward to more from this series, but hoping for ~~hot monkey sex~~ more romantic feels in the next book.

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

3.5 stars

I'm the first to admit that romantic suspense isn't really my thing, but I LOVE Lisa Henry and J.A. Rock so I felt compelled to give this a go. And this book was a pretty nice introduction to a new series, even if it ended on a huge cliffy and gave me the WORST case of blue balls (female equivalent, of course!).

Sometimes romantic suspense can be really serious and intense. This isn't one of those books, thank god. It was really clever, easy reading with a fast pace that kept my attention. I also enjoyed the sort of offbeat characters. Henry was deliciously complex, with loads of walls up and secrets, enough to fill an entire series, I'm sure! I loved Mac's grumpiness, struggles with dieting (we all hear you!!), and sort of antisocial personality. It was refreshing. One question: Was anyone else thinking of Mac from Life Lessons? Two romantic suspense cop M/Ms with the same name... I kept thinking of that series!

Though I enjoyed reading this one, I also had no problems putting it down and moving on to other things. I wasn't dying to keep reading about these guys. I'm not sure why, but this story wasn't as engaging as I would have expected. I don't know if it was because of the lack of heat or the fact that this felt very much like an intro story, but I wasn't itching for the next chapter.

I'm going to continue the series because I'm SO curious how this relationship will progress. And we better

get some nookie! *glares at Lisa and J.A.*

Copy provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review

Emma Sea says

4.5 stars.

I really, really liked this. The humour was just right for me, and I adored the layer of tragedy beneath Henry's exterior. I mean, I actually seriously adore Henry. All of him. Mac's not good enough! Mac doesn't deserve Henry!

I knew going in that it was a cliffhanger ending, so I was okay with it, and it's not too long to wait before books #2 and #3. I can deal. Right? I totally don't need the next book right this second, curse you, JA and Lisa . . . *ahem*. Anyway, I thought the writing in this was great. These two authors only get better together with time. I did definitely experience the odd jarring moment where I heard a line clear as a bell in Lisa's 'voice' or JA's voice, but I guess when you read a lot by any two authors, that's gonna happen. But listen to this:

"A disconcerting meal [of a] lump of greyish meat next to a web of mashed potatoes spackled onto the tray."

Is that not every hospital meal you've ever (not) eaten?? A *disconcerting* meal. That's lovely. And Henry's lines get **all the points**, but I can't quote because I'll spoiler it all for you.

The plot was well-paced, and actually pretty much perfect for me. I didn't have a single one of those "Oh, FFS!" moments. This reminded me of a Josh Lanyon, actually, in the best possible way, but with much better humor.

So why not five stars? Because I would have liked less sexual contact. It's coitus interruptus all the way with Henry and Mac, and I felt like it was unnecessary fanservice; like the authors thought we wouldn't read the book unless they wrote in fondled balls and an *almost* blow job for a great big dick. I mean, I do *want* fondled balls, but with these guys I would have been fine with the undertone of sexual tension being drawn out until book three (as long as I got a goddamn mind-blowing conclusion in bed for them).

But, yeah, this was great. And I love the covers for this series. Recommended.

ETA: Oooh, oooh: Secondary characters! Remy! Oh, Remy. Let me save you and love you and wrap you up like the woobie you are.

Full disclosure: This is like that awkward moment in French where you have to decide if you're using tu or vous, but I think I'm at the point where I have to say that Lisa is my friend (and where she says "Emma who?"), so, there's that. Usually when my friends write books I worry I'm being over-generous as much as I try very hard not to be, but with Lisa it actually means I think I'm bloody picky.

Ingie says

Written January 31, 2015

4 Stars - Outrageously funny! - I fell head over heels.

Book #1

This was quite different to other Lisa Henry books I read. I mean neither positive or negative, just something completely different.

A light-hearted fun "Catch Me" comedy

A con character who changes shape like a chameleon and a slightly pudgy FBI agent who longs to jail a murdering criminal (...and to find a ordinary nice boyfriend to love).

The Two Gentlemen of Altona is the first, of three, serial crime-romances in the new Playing the Fool series by two pretty well known M/M authors, Lisa Henry and J.A. Rock. For me both known as writers of much darker stories. ~ Quite surprising and funny, they wrote this. Here is an applauding new fan.

Indianapolis, Indiana U.S.

Special Agent Ryan "Mac" McGuinness is a hard working man who miss the chance to get a criminal suspect when he is tricked by the witness at the crime scene. A witness with a very attractive neat little butt, a credible smile and quick feet.

Con man Henry Page (view spoiler), is a Shakespeare-quoting, ethically-challenged, egg-obsessed 25 years old, —a fleeing soul— who prefers to keep his distance from the law.

Soon meet their paths again and this adventure (and laughter party) can begin.

"It would probably be more miraculous if I had a sugar hit," Henry suggested.

"Is that so? Are you planning on blowing my budget on junk food?"

"Sugar is good for shock," Henry told him. "That's why in old movies, if somebody is in shock, they always give them a very sweet, milky tea. If it's a woman, they slap her too, but that's probably not medically recommended."

The first half was outrageously fun.

I can't remember when I last read a book like this one. I giggled, laughed out loud, tears ran, and I fell in love with these characters at once. Then it became more seriously but that light-hearted comedy-feeling remained.

Hooray for another two charmer characters to love.

It is strange that two such pretty predictable, for this comedy genre, main characters can feel so incredibly fresh to follow. Not quite perfect men, obvious character deficiencies, cute fragile self-confidence now and then, and also evident connection problems. But gee so amazing charming these guys are.

...Or perhaps I should say, *Gee!*, what amusing charming fun everything here actually were. I want to spend more time at the FBI office in *Indianapolis*.

“Let’s start there. What aren’t you good at? Besides running.”

Mac opened his mouth. “Running?”

“Yeah. You run with your arms kind of flapping.”

Was the little shit seriously criticizing the way he ran? “May I remind you that when you saw me, I was running after the guy who’d just tried to kill you.”

“And maybe you’d’ve caught him if your arms weren’t flapping.”

As a first part of a three-part serial ended this book as expected: Hanging in the air. It's just to dive right into book two as soon as possible. I want to see how this unfolds and I want to see if there will be a grand HEA-romance, and if they ever get to it.

Next up: #2 - The Merchant of Death.

I LIKE - hilarious giggling reads

****ARC kindly provided by Riptide Publishing via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. January 2015****

Buddyread with my bestie Sofia January 29-31.

Vivian says

The series title is *Playing the Fool*, now I'm sure future books will elucidate this further, but right now I feel like the Fool. *wags finger* Evil Henry and Rock.

This is playful and charming with a strong dose of understated pain. Deep pain. The kind that you ignore, but when you're weary suddenly comes upon you like a Mac truck. But the laughs, they lure you away, trick you, deceive you and on your merry way you go. After all, no one wants to linger too long in the dark.

That is precisely why this story is an abrupt departure from the unrelenting gloom and misery that Henry proudly wears as a hallmark. Here, you laugh. You gambol along and chase until you almost grasp it--only to smash your nose against the sliding glass door as your quarry escapes. Evil, but sometimes it's a delight to play the fool.

Overall, Catch me if you can with a few pricks of melancholy.

Favorite quote:

“So you have trouble believing people would want to protect one another, but you’re willing to risk your life to protect some abstract idea of ‘humanity’?”

Adam says

This review might have spoilers

I finished this book two days ago, and I'm still not quite sure exactly what to write about it. I know that I liked it, but this feels very much like a 'part 1' than a full completed book, so I feel as if I'm giving a rating without the full picture. But even so, here's my review:

The first half of the book was very slow. The mystery aspect is very much so in the background, and is just being set up for the second half. What makes the first half readable is the humour. The authors have done a great job of writing Henry as a funny character, without making him annoying. There are jokes, one-line zingers and a few hilarious scenarios. This helps to alleviate the boredom and slow pace before we get in to the second half, which is where the action and mystery really come to the fore. The mystery isn't particularly suspenseful, but it will keep you guessing.

The romance aspect of the book is there, but don't expect Henry and Mac to fall in love easily. Both of these men are proud, and they don't like depending on others. There's also a whole lot of UST, emphasis on the 'U'. The two come close to having sex a few times, but personal hesitancy and bad-timing always get in the way.

Personally, I didn't mind the lack of sex, but readers who really hate being left hanging will likely be disappointed. I'd say the same for readers who don't like cliffhangers or unresolved endings. As I wrote in the beginning, this book feels like the first part to an entire book. The primary mystery is solved, but the romance, and another plotline that's introduced right at the end, are left up in the air. There are also a lot of unanswered questions, which I assume will be answered in the next book, *The Merchant of Death*.

However, that doesn't mean that 'The Two Gentlemen of Altona' isn't enjoyable. There's humour, some angst, an engaging mystery and even a couple of action scenes. Had there been some steam and a more concrete understanding between the two MCs, I would have bumped up the rating an extra star. As it is, I liked it and I'm looking forward to reading the sequels.

**ARC provided through NetGalley*

R * A Reader Obsessed * says

3.5 Stars

To be honest, I wasn't quite sure what I was getting myself into with this, but overall, I had a good time!

Ryan "Mac" McGinnis is bound and determined to arrest an infamous mobster, and he knows the only way he can do that is to get witness, Henry Page, to testify he saw said mobster shoot one of his lackeys. The thing is, Henry has no reason and no plans to do such. He wants to stay alive, and promising to point the finger is not going to help him maintain such a reasonable goal.

What ensues is a comedy of errors with some dashes of suspense. There's a lot of cat and mouse as Henry puts Mac through his paces. When danger lurks too close, they're forced to run and inevitably, close quarters reveal some interesting developments.

Where this shines is the juxtaposition between benign con man Henry, whose sparkling congenial and wily personality battles the no nonsense, straight and narrow Mac, who is aggravated but also helplessly charmed by Henry's antics. There's definitely fun and funny chemistry plus great banter between these two leading to a very nice build up as they dance around each other while trying to not die. However, this was one big cock tease where the ultimate culmination is rudely interrupted at the end, setting the stage for the next book. Grrrrr.

Regardless, the writing is top notch! I was entertained, and I look forward to revisiting opposites Henry and Mac, if only to see them do more than just circle each other.

Kat says

3.5 Dang, I HATED this book.

It gave me the most awful donut cravings. So I couldn't resist sneaking into a bakery. One donut didn't make the trip home.

A second one didn't survive me snapping a pic.

And do I really have to confess that the last two were gone before I finished *The Two Gentlemen of Altona*? Grmbl.

So the Two Gentlemen of Altona is nothing like the Henry & Rock collaborations I've read before. And you know what? In my opinion that's a good thing! In this book, there are no tragically damaged characters to unabashedly manipulate you into shedding big emo tears. It's a remarkably lighthearted and amusing ride instead!

Special agent Mac is a donut loving cranky bald guy. He's also a little chubby. So ever since he started a diet the donuts are off-limit. Hence the cranky part. Then there's his non-existing love life... but hey, at least he's good at his job! That is, until he manages to let an important witness to a murder disappear from right underneath his nose. Said witness, the young and charming con man Henry Page, soon discovers that fooling a sugar-deprived FBI cop was perhaps not his best idea, as he tries to outrun both Mac and the murderer's hit

men...

There's a lot to love about these authors' promising first book in a brand new series, that vaguely reminds me of a M/M version of Janet Evanovich' bestselling Stephanie Plum series. It's fast-paced, uncomplicated and pretty damn funny. Whereas the chemistry between the MCs doesn't convince me entirely, any lack thereof is made up for by their snicker-worthy dynamics. And I applaud the authors for making Mac bald and giving him a bit of a paunch. It's always a relief when I don't have to read ongoing twaddle about MCs resembling six-packed Ken dolls.

"I know what I'm not good at."

"Let's start there. What aren't you good at? Besides running."

Mac opened his mouth. "Running?"

"Yeah. You run with your arms kind of flapping."

Was this little shit seriously criticizing the way he ran? "May I remind you that when you saw me, I was running after the guy who'd just tried to kill you."

"And maybe you'd've caught him if your arms weren't flapping."

If you enjoy solving crimes along with your well-developed MCs, this book will possibly leave you with an empty stomach though. It's the equivalent of junk food — of a fresh donut with chocolate sprinkles on top — after all. The focus is on the banter between the guys, resulting in a sadly neglected crime plot. The MCs may find themselves in life-threatening situations, there's no sense of real danger to really keep you on the edge of your seat. It isn't until the last quarter that the character development turns serious, with the first hints of drama kicking in (more like what you'd expect from Henry & Rock). It feels like a departure from the preceding cheekier tone and I wonder if it's partly to blame for the ending that just seems... to fizzle out?

Also be forewarned that the ending will leave you hanging due to both a cliffhanger and numerous failed attempts at the 'insertion of tab A into slot B' due to a persistent case of force majeure. The sequel is expected to be published in February 2015 though, so luckily it's not that long a wait!

Wart Hill says

I received a free ARC from the publisher.

That ending! Are you guys trying to kill me?!

I love this book so much, I'm writing my review on my tablet because I'm too impatient and want to get all my flaily love out there for you guyz as soon as possible! Because I love this book!

So Henry Page is a con man and he's currently conning a mobster's granny. This ends about as well as can be expected: Henry witnesses said Mobster shoot a guy and, ignoring his self preservation instinct, calls the cops and becomes the person who's testimony will put this mobster behind bars. Finally.

Except Henry likes the whole living and breathing thing, so he books it. He bullshits an FBI agent - one Ryan McGuinness (or Mac) - by successfully convincing him he's a cop. And thus begins the hilarity that is Henry and Mac's general interaction: Henry annoys Mac, Mac gets annoyed, Henry is amused. Wash, rinse,

repeat.

Except shit gets pretty real pretty fast for Henry. After returning to FBI custody and escaping it again, he's holed up in a motel working on his disguise, when he gets found. By the FBI, and by a hit man.

So there's a leak somewhere and no one knows where so Mac takes Henry and they head into hiding. The two of them. Alone. In a cabin. And they have to deal with their attraction to each other along with their (in Mac's case) frequent annoyance at each other. Because they're cooped up. In a cabin.

This book is wonderful. It's hilarious, serious, *real*.

I love the characters, the plot, the writing. I love everything about this book. The Shakespeare references. Henry's love for the bard. Everything. This book kept me reading as straight through as possible (drat you work and sleep and NaNo! :P)

And it's got me feeling all fannish!

Which means I'm already thinking up weird AU fanfics to write.

I. Love. This. Book.

Pardon me while I go start book two. Even though I shouldn't.

Meags says

4 Stars

Suspenseful, fun and witty AF. Book, I liked you, a lot.

This is the story of when the FBI agent and the con man go on the lam together, and kind of maybe begin to develop some fuzzy feelings for one another amidst the chaos.

There are some bad guys and some good guys, and a lot of eggs.

Shakespeare is quoted righteously. (Twins named Sebastian and Viola? Seriously, perfection to thine own ears.)

Onward, to the next book!!!
