



Pop. 1280

Jim Thompson

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Nick Corey is a terrible sheriff on purpose. He doesn't solve problems, enforce rules or arrest criminals. He knows that nobody in tiny Potts County actually wants to follow the law and he is perfectly content lazing about, eating five meals a day, and sleeping with all the eligible women.

Still, Nick has some very complex problems to deal with. Two local pimps have been sassing him, ruining his already tattered reputation. His girlfriend Rose is being terrorized by her husband. And then, there's his wife and her brother Lenny who won't stop troubling Nick's already stressed mind. Are they a little too close for a brother and a sister?

With an election coming up, Nick needs to fix his problems and fast. Because the one thing Nick does know is that he will do anything to stay sheriff. Because, as it turns out, Sheriff Nick Corey is not nearly as dumb as he seems.

In *Pop. 1280*, widely regarded as a classic of mid-20th century crime, Thompson offers up one of his best, in a tale of lust, murder, and betrayal in the Deep South that was the basis for the critically acclaimed French film *Coup de Torchon*.

Pop. 1280 Details

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Author : Jim Thompson

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From Reader Review Pop. 1280 for online ebook

Tfitoby says

EDIT: Another great novel selected as part of the HRF Keating Crime and Mystery: The 100 Best Books list and therefore part of my challenge to read the entire 100. Keating mentions that the novels of Thompson are without good taste and this one has the least taste of all thanks to a hero who kills somebody and kicks the dead body because he'd always wanted to, indepth discussions of bodily functions. But he also praises Thompson for the serious purpose and darker vision of life that lies behind the vulgarity. He uses the term *bleak* four times in his review. That should tell you more than enough about the content and the way it was received in its own time.

Jim Thompson sure does have a way with words. In his protagonist, Nick Corey, he has a perfect vessel for displaying his talents.

"I ain't saying you're a liar, because that wouldn't be polite. But I'll tell you this, ma'am. If I loved liars, I'd hug you to death."

Easygoing Sheriff of Potts County Corey is one lazy man, or that's what he would have you believe. You might also be mistaken in thinking that he is a first class moron, able to be pushed around by his "bettters," because when you get to know Nick Corey the first thing you realise is that you've been manipulated from the first moment he laid eyes on you.

This tale of small town America is littered with pimps, whores, crooked lawmen, private detectives, women no better than they ought to be, incestuous men, wife beaters, murderers, corrupt politicians, vindictive women, peeping toms, mentally challenged cuckolds, religious zealots and plenty of sex. Of course on top of that there's Sheriff Nick Corey, a noir protagonist the likes of which you may never have seen.

"Well, sir, I should have been sitting pretty, just about as pretty as a man could sit....I had it made and it looked like I could go on having it made as long as I minded my own business and didn't arrest no one unless I couldn't get out of it and they didn't amount to nothin'."

Narrating in the first person he portrays himself as a buffoon, a bumbling idiot who talks in circles, unwilling to directly criticise or disagree with any voting citizen but through careful slips in his facade Thompson provides you with a look at the workings of a manipulative, cold blooded killer intent on living the good life as he sees it no matter the cost to others.

Of course nobody in this story is innocent, that would go against the mood of the piece. Corey thinks everyone has sinned in some way or other and so they are painted as the kind of filth that might populate the New York landscape of Travis Bickle or Matt Scudder.

And yet you don't think about that until it's all over, Thompson gets you inside the mind of Corey with such great skill that you don't question what you're told until it's too late. In Corey he has created a truly memorable literary creation, complete with accurate speech patterns, ticks and mannerisms. It's not only Corey it is every character, however minor, that gets the full fleshed out treatment making for a rich world

for the story to take place in.

Thompson seems to have influenced a whole lot of American authors, both in the noir genre and others of a literary persuasion, recently I've enjoyed great modern authors such as Cormac McCarthy, Donald Ray Pollock, Daniel Woodrell and Tom Franklin, all of whom owe a lot to the work of this man for example.

Pop. 1280 was adapted in to a movie by French director Bertrand Tavernier in 1982, pre-dating the Hollywood fascination with the rediscovered works of Thompson by 8 years. Tavernier moved the story from small town redneck USA to French colonial Africa under the title *Coup de Torchon* using the subject matter to highlight some of the inequality of colonial rule. The biggest change however is the lack of subtlety in the character of Corey (renamed Cordier) who is played as a complete buffoon that reacts or by some miracle gets lucky rather than plotting his evil. It's an enjoyable film all the same and well worth investigating for fans of the book, the author or the genre. Interestingly Tavernier later directed the adaptation of another American noir, this time set in America, *In the Electric Mist With Confederate Dead* starring Tommy Lee Jones as Dave Robicheaux, which again is a crime film well worth checking out.

Tom Mathews says

I've read one other Jim Thompson book, *Savage Night*, and I was hard-pressed to believe that the same person wrote both. *Savage Night* didn't really appeal to me but I found Nick Corey, the small-town Texas sheriff in *Pop. 1280* to be an absolute Machiavellian delight. Everybody may think he's a lazy, dimwitted good ole boy whose favorite line is "*We'll, I'm not saying you're wrong but I'm not saying you're right either.*" Everybody would be wrong.

I was intrigued to hear that Thompson's father was a Texas sheriff. I wonder how much of this story was drawn from real life.

Gavin Armour says

1964 erschienen, gehört *POP. 1280* (Originaltitel) deutlich zum späteren Werk des Misanthropen, Zynikers und Erkunders der dunkleren Seiten der amerikanischen Seele Jim Thompson. Vergleicht man es mit früheren Großwerken wie *THE KILLER INSIDE ME* (so auch im Deutschen – 1952) oder *AFTER DARK, MY SWEET* (s.a.i.D. – 1955), fällt schon auf, daß Thompson immer verbitterter wurde, seine Sicht auf die amerikanische Gesellschaft immer düsterer und sein Wille, dies auf die ihm eigene Art zu dokumentieren, immer – ja, was? – dringlicher? Bis hin zu den letzten Widerlichkeiten in *KING BLOOD (DER KING-CLAN* – 1973), sind es von hier aus nicht mehr allzu viele Schritte. Der vorliegende Band zeichnet sich durch einen oft überdrehten Humor aus, einen nicht mehr sarkastischen sondern längst zynischen Humor, mit dem die Ungeheuerlichkeiten, die Thompson dem Leser auftischt, erträglicher werden – der Leser muß sich aber der Tatsache stellen, daß er bereit ist, der Erzählung Nick Coreys, Sheriff in einem kleinen texanischen Kaff namens Pottsville zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, oft schmunzelnd zu folgen. Und diese Erzählung hat es in sich.

Seinem Bruder im Geiste, dem Deputy Lou Ford aus dem viel älteren Roman *THE KILLER INSIDE ME*, in

nichts nachstehend, weniger einem Drang, also einer Determination folgend, sondern eher dem Lustprinzip verpflichtet, weiß dieser Kerl sich grundsätzlich dümmer zu stellen, als er ist, was ihm meist den Vorteil bringt, mehr zu wissen als alle anderen. Und dieser Überschuß an Information (die durchaus auch mal aus Nichtinformation bestehen kann, so z.B. wenn er wilde Gerüchte über etwaige Kontrahenten streut, nein, nicht einmal das: Er berichtet einem nahen Vertrauten schlicht, es gäbe da Gerüchte – allein das reicht, um eine soziale Vernichtungsmaschine in Gang zu setzen) gibt ihm nicht nur den entscheidenden Vorteil im Handeln, oftmals löst er Coreys Probleme, und zwar final. Anekdotisch erzählt uns der Sheriff davon, wie er sich seine Wiederwahl zu sichern gedenkt, denn – so erklärt er dem verdutzten Leser ganz unverblümt – er könne nichts, weshalb lediglich ein Job in Frage käme, bei welchem er eben nichts tun müsse, was nunmal nur der Job des Sheriffs im Profil zu bieten hat; er erzählt uns aber zugleich auch, wie er sich Respekt verschafft, indem er nicht nur jene Zuhälter über den Haufen schießt, die ihn schlecht behandelt haben, davon, sondern auch, wie es ihm gelingt, den Verdacht auf eben jenen Mann zu lenken, der ihm erstmal den Tipp gegeben hatte, daß und wie er sich zu wehren habe; und last but not least berichtet Corey dem Leser von der Problematik, mit einer Furie, die einen übers Ohr gehauen hat, verheiratet zu sein, deshalb bei jeder sich bietenden Gelegenheit mit derer besten, weil einzigen Feundin das Bett zu teilen und dabei EIGENTLICH jener Frau hinterher zu schmachten, die man hatte heiraten wollen, wäre da eben nicht die Furie dazwischen gekommen...Nick Corey, so teilt er uns recht beiläufig mit, hat einen Schlag bei den Damen.

Nick Coreys gewaltiger Vorteil bei alldem ist, daß er über kein Gewissen verfügt, keine Skrupel kennt, wenn es für ihn eng wird. Er hat einen wachen Blick: Er sieht, daß die Schwarzen hier vollkommen unterdrückt werden, er weiß, daß er es mit einer verlogenen und bigotten Gesellschaft zu tun hat. Er verachtet diese Gesellschaft, zutiefst, verändern will er sie nicht. Er betrachtet sich lediglich als deren perfekte Ausgeburt: Er weiß sich alles zunutze zu machen, v.a. die „öffentliche Meinung“, wie ein Fisch schwimmt er in den Untiefen seelischer Abgründe – allerdings denen der anderen. Ob es die Eitelkeiten eines Machos sind, die Gutgläubigkeit einer Frau, die Vorurteile seiner Bekannten oder das Wissen darum, wie man jemand bestimmtes dazu treibt, einem die Dreckarbeit abzunehmen – der scheinbar so einfältige, dumme, faule und – das vor allem! – feige Sheriff spielt mit den Eigenarten der andern, wie ein Marionettenspieler seine Puppen tanzen läßt. Thompson breitete das mit einer Konsequenz aus, die einen bei allem szenischen, v.a. dialogischen Humor immer wieder frösteln läßt.

Stilistisch ist das elegant, es gleitet diese Story an uns vorbei mit einer Leichtigkeit, die dann eben durch manchmal ultrabrutale Schocks zerrissen wird. Doch gerade in dieser Eleganz, in der Leichtigkeit, der Beiläufigkeit, die Corey als Ich-Erzähler anschlägt, verbirgt sich der Fallstrick für den Leser, denn wir lassen uns durch eben diese Facetten des Textes mindestens so einlullen, wie es den von Corey becirkten Damen, Bürgern und Kollegen passiert. Wir gehen ihm lesend auf den Leim, was dem Roman einen perfiden doppelten Boden verpasst. Thompson will uns nicht nur etwas vorführen, er will uns durchaus einen Spiegel vorhalten.

Man merkt dem Roman die tiefe Verbitterung seines Autors an. Dadurch, daß er die Geschichte um 1905/1910 spielen läßt, ist die Nähe zu dem, was später „der wilde Westen“ genannt wurde, schon hergestellt, um so einfacher fällt es ihm, der selber aus dem staubigen Südstaat Oklahoma stammte, eine Gesellschaft zu skizzieren, die ‚Recht und Ordnung‘ eigentlich nur vom Hörensagen kennt, die brutalisiert ist, allein schon durch eine lebensfeindliche Umwelt, die sengende Sonne, die flirrende Luft, eine Gesellschaft, die sich eines Menschheitsverbrechens schuldig gemacht hat und nicht davon lassen kann – und all das überträgt Thompson ziemlich eindeutig auf seine Gegenwart. Nick Corey ist letztlich das perfekte Endprodukt dieser Gesellschaft: beliebt, von den Frauen umschwärmt, freundlich und manierlich, dabei extrem individualisiert, brutal und ohne Empathie. Und von einer bestialisch aufblitzenden Intelligenz beherrscht, die ihn das richtige – in seinem Sinne – im richtigen Moment tun läßt.

In einer der ergreifendsten, gewalttätigsten und wahrhaftigsten Szenen in Thompsons Werk erschießt Corey einen Schwarzen, der, gefangen in den Fallstricken seiner sozialen Rolle, die Leiche eines Weißen nicht auf der Straße liegen lassen kann, weil ‚man‘ das als Schwarzer nicht tut, er darf aber auf keinen Fall mit der Leiche eines Weißen erwischt werden. Also lädt er sie vor der Tür der Ehefrau des Toten ab und kommt damit Coreys Plänen in die Quere. Und so erklärt Nick dem zitternden Mann, der den Sheriff kennt seit der ein Kleinkind war, der ihm traut und glaubt, in ihm einen der wenigen Verständigen für das Los der Schwarzen gefunden zu haben, warum er einen Dreck wert ist – oder auch nicht, daß es aber auf jeden Fall vollkommen gleich ist, schlicht, weil er ein Schwarzer ist und es niemanden kümmert, wenn ein Schwarzer umgebracht wird und daß solange die einen die anderen eben einfach nicht der menschlichen Gattung zuordnen, deren Wert schlicht einen Dreck darstellt. Es kommt darauf an, wer die macht hat, zu definieren, wer wieviel Wert besitzt. Zu glauben, nur weil jemand BEGRIFFEN hätte, daß das Unrecht ist, dieser jemand auch anders handeln würde, sei einfach dumm. Dann drückt er ab.

Jim Thompson hatte einen scharfen und sezierenden Blick. Er sah genau, wo diese ach so freie und demokratische Nation ihre dunklen Flecke hatte. Und wenn man liest, was der Mann schrieb, was er ausdrücken musste, fragt man sich, ob es in dem ganzen Dreck auch irgendwo einen sauberen Ort gibt? Etwas Lichtes? Wahrscheinlich nicht.

Melki says

Some might say that Sheriff Nick Corey does not play well with others.

They would be wrong.

Sheriff Nick Corey plays **VERY WELL** with others!

No one can deny that his shit-kickin', good ole boy, down-home-hick act endears him to the townsfolk he is sworn to protect. More's the pity there is no one to protect **them** from **him**.
Corey schemes and manipulates himself out of any crisis, and he'll do whatever is required to keep his cushy job. But now, he's facing his toughest challenge yet - the upcoming election.

At first, this book seems light years away from Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me*. Here, the author seems to be going for laughs. Corey's lazy lawman routine is good for plenty of chuckles . . . which makes it all the more disturbing when bullets start flying and the bodies start piling up.

Turns out, Corey has quite a bit in common with "Killer's" protagonist, Lou Ford. They are both charismatic psychopaths who use their badges and positions of power to prey on those unfortunate enough to encounter them.

Another good tale from a master storyteller.

Mara says

As sheriff in Potts County, Nick Corey's job (as he sees it) is to *punish the heck out of people for bein' people*. Oh, and also *to gloat over folks in trouble*. So, really, none of what happens is Nick's fault. Or, as he would say *people who go around sniffing crap with their mouth open, and acting surprised as hell when someone kicks a turd in it*.

This is another dark and, at times, funny Jim Thompson tale involving a small town sheriff. I'm not sure that it's better or worse than *The Killer Inside Me*, but I guess I found Nick to be a less likable depraved psychopath than I did Lou (which could easily be a product of the order in which I read the books). However, if you're hoping for a chance to ride shotgun with a man with no morals while he toys with the people around him, then you won't be disappointed.

Also, extra points for the reference to Robert's Rules of Order.

Kemper says

Poor Nick Corey. He's got so many problems with his wife and people who actually expect him to do his job as sheriff of a small town that he can hardly eat more than a few pork chops at dinner or sleep more than 8 or 9 hours a night. But Nick has figured out a way to deal with some of his issues, and if that means shotgunning a few folks, then you can hardly blame the poor man.

The obvious comparison here is to Thompson's other novel about a small town law man with a serious dark side, *The Killer Inside Me*. Both Lou Ford and Nick Corey hide their real intelligence and contempt for most people behind a mask of pure good old boy redneck, and they take great delight in using their seeming stupidity to tie people into knots. However, Lou's insanity was more of a personal revenge kind of thing mixed up with his sadism while Nick's was actually more disturbing to me with it's nihilistic nature hiding under his lazy persona.

What makes this book extra creepy is that it's just so damn funny along the way. Nick comes across as stupid on a Homer Simpson level at first, but as the story progresses, you realize just how smart he is at playing people as well as how batshit insane he really is.

This is a great example of Thompson's noir genius.

Darwin8u says

"a heck of a lot of things are bound to go wrong in a world as big as this one.

And if there's an answer to why it's that way - and there ain't always - why, it's probably not just one answer by itself, but thousands of answers."

? Jim Thompson, Pop. 1280

Small towns can be a drag. Especially when you are the High Sheriff. Especially when you are also a psychopath who is just a tad smarter than you let on. You've got these liberal and soft feelings toward minorities and social ills. You want to find a nice woman and settle down, but with all these women you are sleeping with and all these clowns in town things just can't get right (with either you or the Lord) until a couple of these buggers are dead. I mean don't feel bad about it. Dead isn't that much better than life in a town in Texas (or was it Oklahoma?) with a population hovering around 1280 and some of those 1280 aren't rich or white. People in town might want you to do stuff. No, not really. They keep electing you because that is exactly what they don't want you to do -- stuff. And if they knew the stuff you did, they certainly wouldn't want you to keep on doing it.

Thompson seems to grab the humanity by the nuts and just squeezes the truth out of it. Like Jim had a whole town on the rack and after a bit of pulling the town's ugliness just seems to spill out. Don't think your big towns are any better and don't think your suburban sprawl doesn't contain the rats, the hypocrites, the dark motives and strange bedfellows that seem to exist in the front room of Jim Thompson's brain. Your town is the same, just more so. And if so, think of how many 'high sheriff's' your town has protecting you.

And, if you have any lingering questions, just go check out *The Making of a Murderer* on Netflix.

Dan Schwent says

Nick Corey is the High Sheriff of Potts County and kind of a simpleton. He doesn't arrest anyone and mostly stays out of trouble, other than affair he's having with another man's wife. Or is his genial nature a cover for something more sinister... ?

Yes. Yes it is. It's a front for the fact that he's a manipulative, cold-blooded killer. He kills two pimps and tricks another sheriff into taking the blame. He launches a smear campaign against another man running for sheriff. He does a handful of other despicable deeds and is so slick you almost forget what a scumbag he is.

Jim Thompson is an undiscovered gem, light years ahead of the other pulp writers of his day. *Pop. 1280* is told in the first person and to say Nick is an unreliable narrator is putting it lightly. Even though he's clearly a psychopath, the book has quite a few blackly comic moments. Even though he's a scumbag, watching the master manipulator in action is something to behold. It's definitely a page turner after the first couple of pages.

Jim Thompson is the real deal. I can't recommend this enough to fans of crime fiction.

Erin the Avid Reader ?BFF's with the Cheshire Cat? says

Terrifying. Brilliant. Hilarious. Thought-provoking. Intelligent. Philosophical. Violent. Adulterous. Breaks the Status Quo. Interesting.

All these words apply to "Pop. 1280", possibly one of the funniest, scariest, most brilliant stories ever written. It is more than just a story about a deranged psychopath that kills on a whim. It's about a man that you'd find normal, if not somewhat of a blowhard and an idiot. However, underneath his outer simpleness and ignorance lies a philosophical, intelligent, dualistic mind trying to figure out the people (or as he calls it, 'souls') around him. Their actions, intentions, needs, desires...what is masked under so-called 'Christian values', puritanical mindset, and love for harming others with lies, slander, and gossip.

You'd think for a cheap paperback it was gonna be a big badly-written bloodshow, right? Haha you are all so wrong. Jim Thompson doesn't play that simple game. He wants to get deep into your skull and surprise you with twists, turns, and hyperboles...or are they hyperboles? The main character, Nick, is so untrustworthy you have no idea what he says or claims are lies or truths.

Even though "Pop. 1280" is not written in a complicated manner, it takes analyzation and a reading more than once to really figure out what the hell is going on. However, you could probably read this in multiple ways: As a simple crime novel, a thorough examination into the mind of a psychologically disturbed man, a strange string of conversations over a period of days...there are so many possibilities.

I planned on digging into this book as deep as I could...but the thing is...I've explained it as best I could. It needs to be read instead of having it explained. Interpretations of Thompson's work seem to be incredibly vast. This is why I highly recommend this book to everyone. If you see it at Goodwill for 50 cents...buy it. If it's at your library...check it out. If it's a rare enduring being sold for hundreds...FOR GOD'S SAKE BUY IT!! I could not recommend this book highly enough.

Here is a quote from William S. Burroughs that acts as a fantastic synopsis for the main character of this story:

"A psychotic is a guy who just figured out what's going on."

Panagiotis says

Η ζω? ?χει εκπλ?ξεις – δεν ε?ναι γεμ?τη απ? δα?τες, ειδ?λλως τι σ?ι εκπλ?ξεις θα ?ταν; Ωστ?σο υπ?ρχουν, εμφαν?ζονται τ?σο σπ?νια για να δικαιολογ?σουν την ταυτ?τητ? τους. Εμφαν?ζονται και στους αναγν?στες για να διαλ?σουν τις αυταπ?τες μας: πως ε?μαστε μεγ?λοι, τα ?χουμε δει ?λα, πως το μερ?διο της σπ?νιας χαρ?ς απ? την γνωριμ?α με εκε?να τα 2-3 βιβλ?α, την ζ?σαμε. Τ?πος στα νι?τα. Σαν τους στιγματισμ?νους απ? τον ?ρωτα. ?σο, ?μως, κυκλοφορε?ς στα αναγνωστικ? μονοπ?τια, δ?χως προσδοκ?ες αλλα με τσαγαν? και τ?λμη θα ανταμειφθε?ς.

Ο Τ?μον μου συστ?θηκε ποικιλοτρ?πως (απ? κ?ποιον αναγν?στη, κ?ποια πρ?ταση, κ?τι που δι?βασα εγ?), ως ?να αν?γνωσμα για ?σους αρ?σκονται στην λογοτεχν?α του Αμερικ?νικου Ν?του: α?μα, ιδρ?τας, αργκ?, ?νθρωποι δ?χως πολλ?ς ελπ?δες και με μια ζω?δη θ?ληση για επιβ?ωση και συντριβ?. Το ξεκ?νησα ?ντας σ?γουρος πως θα περ?σω καλ?, κ?ποια κερα?α μου συντον?στηκε προ αν?γνωσης και ?πιασα μια γειτν?αση συγγραφικ? με τον εξαιρετικ? Ντ?ναλτ Ρ?ι Π?λοκ. Δεν ?πεσα ?ξω, αλλ? ο?τε ?μουν προετοιμασμ?νος για αυτ? που θα ακολουθο?σε.

Το μεγαλ?τερο ατο? του βιβλ?ο ε?ναι ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς. ?νας ?ρωας που ?μοι? του δεν ?χω βρει στην λογοτεχν?α: ο Νικ Κ?ρει, ?νας σερ?φης σε μια πολ?χνη, που δεν κ?νει και πολλ? πρ?ματα. ?χει, φαινομενικ?, μια εντελ?ς παθητικ? στ?ση στην ζω?. Και δε?χνει και ελαφρ?ς βλ?κας, ?τοι

?πως ?ρχεται σε πρ?τη επαφ? μαζ? του ο αναγν?στης, μ?σα απ? τους πρ?τους διαλ?γους του ?ρωα με τον περ?γυρ? του: την μον?μως εξαγριωμ?νη μαζ? του γυνα?κα του, τους εξ?χοντες πολ?τες που προσπαθο?ν να τον πε?σουν να κ?νει την δουλει? του και να μην κοιτ?ει το ταβ?νι, τις ερωμ?νες του. ?μως ?λοι ?χουν συμφ?ροντα, κ?τι που φα?νεται να ?χει καταλ?βει πολ? καλ? ο Νικ. Γιατ? η φαινομενικ? βλακε?α του αποδεικν?εται πως ε?ναι ?να κουκο?λι μ?σα στο οπο?ο ?χει καταφ?γει. Βλ?πει την πραγματικ?τητα, και αυτ? που βλ?πει δεν του αρ?σει καθ?λου. Ε?ναι ?νας κυνικ?ς που δεν προσβ?λλει καν?να. Μ?λλον προσαρμ?ζεται στην ανοησ?α των γ?ρω του και πα?ζει το παιχν?δι τους. Ε?ναι πραγματικ? μια αποκ?λυψη για μ?να πως ο Τ?μσον συν?λαβε αυτ? την περσ?να και πως ?χτισε την συνακ?λουθη κλιμ?κωση. Τι μπορε? να κ?νει ο ?νθρωπος για την επιβ?ωσ? του; Τα π?ντα. Αυτ? κ?νει και ο Νικ, ?ταν απειλο?νται οι αν?σεις του: ?νας μισθ?ς, ?να καθαρ? σπ?τι και ?να ?νετο αφοδευτ?ριο – πρ?γματα που συνοδε?ουν την θ?ση του σερ?φη και που δεν ε?ναι λ?γα για εκε?νη την εποχ?.

Οι ?νθρωποι ε?ναι παραδομ?νοι σε αδυναμ?ες. Ε?ναι ?ρμαια της βλακε?ας τους και των κοντ?φθαλμων επιδι?ξε?ν τους, και το να βλ?πεις ?ναν χαρακτ?ρα ?πως ο Νικ, να την φ?ρνει σε ?λους, να κ?νει πραγματικ? ?να τσ?ρκο τις ζω?ς των ανθρ?πων που ?θελαν να τον πατ?σουν, ε?ναι μια απ?λαυση. ?πως απ?λαυση ε?ναι η γραφ? του Τ?μσον που με ?κανε να γελ?σω ντρανταχτ? –δεν υπερβ?λλω!- και ?λλες στιγμ?ς να ξ?νω το κεφ?λι μου με την ευφυ?α και τις ιδ?ες του.

Το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι καταπληκτικ?, διαβ?ζεται ?νετα, ε?ναι μικρ?. Ε?ναι μια απ?λαυση. Ε?ναι σ?γουρα το καλ?τερο βιβλ?ο που δι?βασα απ? τις αρχ?ς του προηγο?μενου χρ?νου και ?να απ? τα καλ?τερα βιβλ?α που ?χω διαβ?σει τα τελευτα?α χρ?νια. Ακ?μα περισσ?τερο θα ε?ναι ?να απ? εκε?να απ? τα βιβλ?α που θα μου ?ρχονται πρ?τα στο νου ως «καλ?», ως προτειν?μενα, ως αγαπημ?να.

Τ?ρα, στα γερ?ματα, ερωτε?τηκα.

Maureen says

some people prefer the killer inside me, jim thompson's earlier take on this story, to pop. 1280, but i am not one of those people. this is my favourite jim thompson novel, by turns and all at once charming, horrifying, funny, and wise. i posted this quote, this flashpoint of the novel for me, really, on myspace many moons ago, where this book was first recommended to me, after i chose the "wrong" jim thompson book as my first jim thompson book. i have it posted up on my wall, and i read it over, and think about it a lot. the wisdom of nick corey:

"Yeah?" I said. "So ain't we all relatively inanimate, George? Just how much free will does any of us exercise? We got controls all along the line, our physical make-up, our mental make-up, our backgrounds; they're all shapin' us a certain way, fixin' us up for a certain role in life, and George, we better play that role or fill that hole, or any goddamn way you want to put it or all hell is going to tumble out of the heavens and fall right down on top of us. We better do what we were made to do, or we'll find it being done to us."

"You mean it's a case of kill or be killed?" Barnes shook his head. "I hate to think that, Nick."

"Maybe that's not what I mean," I said. "Maybe I'm not sure what I mean. I guess mostly what I mean is that there can't be no personal hell because there ain't no personal sins. They're all public, George, we all share in

the other fellas' and the other fellas all share in ours. Or maybe I mean this, George, that I'm the savior himself, Christ on the Cross come right here to Potts County, because God knows I was needed here, an' I'm goin' around doing kindly deeds -- so that people will know they got nothing to fear, and if they're worried about hell they don't have to dig for it. And, by God, that makes sense, don't it George? I mean obligation ain't all on the side of the fella that accepts it, nor responsibility neither. I mean, well, which is worse, George, the fella that craps on a doorknob or the one that rings the doorbell?"

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

Jim Thompson, you sneaky summabitch. I went looking for something specific. You presented yourself like that something I was looking for, and then you changed almost immediately into something else entirely. But that, too, was a trick, because you sure as Shinola changed on me again. A trick within a trick within a trick, this novel is a long con in the best way.

What I was looking for was a noir thriller, a quality crime drama centering on murrrder, from the smartypants psychos who commit the crimes to the smartypants detectives who hunt them down. I've been in a particularly itchy headspace for this lately due to being recently caught in the clutches of Harrelson and McConaughey's new serial, *True Detective* (and if you haven't sat down to watch the three existing episodes of that Next Great Drama, first of all color me envy green, and second: *dear god go remedy that right now*), which is everything I always want cinematic crime thrillers to be, more often than not finding myself largely disappointed. While the handful of quality thrillers I've seen are some of my favorite, most infinitely repeatable movie experiences, there are simply not enough of them to satisfy my appetite. It's pretty annoying, really, considering the sheer number of murder movies and television procedurals that get made these days. For every *Silence of the Lambs*, there are a thousand or more pieces of crap like *The Bone Collector* or *Saw CCLXXVIII*, and as for television, well, I can't think of many instances - save *The Killing* on occasion and *The Fall* in its thus far entirety - of anyone really getting it right, the more straightforward procedural elements of *Twin Peaks* or *The X-Files* being exceptions. Of course, those weren't even so much gritty crime thrillers as supernatural spookfests that were marginally and only occasionally hinged on events which could actually occur in the physical world. And then, as if sent by a dark angel, there was *True Detective*. Hours and hours and hours of murder thriller procedural perfection? A *Seven* that goes on and on and on, maybe even for several seasons? Sign me the f up! Well, when I found out that this week's episode would be skipped thanks to the Snoozeperbowl, I went fumbling through my fairly meager book collection for something to sate me in the grueling meantime. This novel and this novel are what I had to choose from. It was, as I said, not what I was looking for, but that didn't even matter in the end. I wanted what this book had to offer, and I didn't even know it.

In the beginning, this novel presents itself as grim slapstick, the tale of a bumbling 1920's small-town Sheriff, an incompetent but well-meaning fool who is the butt of everyone's jokes. Ahh, but is he, though? I mean, he's the narrator, and in his snaky way, he says as much without actually saying as much. With his Gump wisdom and his hayseed pathos, he draws you into a distorted version of his world where you think you know your role: the wise omniscient who tsk's and sighs from the bleachers, all the while wishing you could just smack and cradle this antihero and explain to him just how tragically misinformed he is about the way things are. Don't be so sure of yourself, though. Jim Thompson may have different plans for you.

In a nutshell, this is a bang! bang! ultra-violent, black-as-pitch farce which follows the trickeries of a narcissistic sociopath (redundant?) as he plots and schemes and slithers his way through increasingly

elaborate methods of getting what he wants - power, freedom from attachments, casual sex, exactly zero criticism from anyone, and eight square meals a day - to the detriment of anyone in his path. You seriously do not want to be this man's enemy, and by enemy I mean minor inconvenience. And oh man, it is hilarious. Thompson is so good at gallows humor that he could make you laugh at your own execution party. I don't want to say much beyond that, because this is a book recommendation I will stand by for those of us out there with strong stomachs and cynical hearts.

So no, this wasn't what I was looking for, but finding it was a happy accident. I am still open to suggestions for character-driven noir with strong prose, though, since hunting for gems in the mountains of mass market soccer-mom thrillers out there is just something I don't have the time or motivation for, me being most likely about halfway through my conscious earthly existence. I will, on the other hand, be reading more Jim Thompson, and I feel pretty confident that it will be time well spent, gleefully flailing about in the gutters of humanity.

Bring it on.

mark monday says

hee haw! a rambunctious, heartwarming delight! loveable and sweet-tempered Nick Corey, Sheriff of Potts County, has more problems than you can shake a stick at. poor guy! all he wants to do is kick back and hold on to his dippity-doo-da job not-arresting people. that's not too much to ask, is it? but things are always getting him down. pimps, bitches, and in-laws - the works! what's an amiable, peace-loving soul to do? well, happily, Nick's also a Medici-level manipulator, stone-cold killer, and demented psychopath. whew, close call! Inner Maniac saves the day! or does he?

what i enjoyed most about this grotesque and mordant death-farce was how simultaneously likeable and unlikeable Thompson made Nick. he IS lazy. and petty. and a maniac. but he's so much smarter than anyone else around him and he does such a good job at fooling everyone into thinking he's a useless lackwit that he becomes bizarrely appealing. well, shucks... since Nick is a hideous representation of the cold-blooded reptile mind that exists within us all (including each of the characters in this novel), i suppose i am simply responding to him on a subhuman level, reptile brain to reptile brain. right? or not. who knows, let's just say i was led like a lamb right into *uh oh, i'm rooting for the bad guy* land.

this is a classic. bleak and misanthropic and evilly hilarious. Jim Thompson hates humans. Humans Off Earth Now!

Algernon says

Potts County has a small population, so small that one law enforcement officer is enough to keep the peace around. Keeping the peace is something High Sheriff Nick Corey tries to avoid as much as he can, preferring instead to complain about how little time he has for sleeping and for eating. The town leaders don't seem unduly disturbed by his laissez-faire philosophy, and he usually gets re-elected on his libertarian platform.

"I'll ask you just one question," Robert Lee cut in. "Are you or aren't you going to start enforcing the law?"

"Sure I am," I said. "I sure ain't going to do nothing else but."

"Good, I'm relieved to hear it."

"Yes, sir," I said. "I'm really going to start cracking down. Anyone that breaks a law from now on is goin' to have to deal with me. Providing, o' course, that he's either colored or some poor white trash that can't pay his poll tax."

In the introduction to this dark masterpiece plumbing the abyss of a twisted mind, Daniel Woodrell hits the nail of meaning squarely on the head : *In this novel Thompson attacks just about all of the big ogres of American existence - poverty, racism, labor, social hypocrisy in general, and the relaxed enforcement of laws for those who have amassed gold, the brutal enforcement for those who haven't.*

1280 'souls' are more than enough for Thompson to represent a whole society, one built on inequality and dissimulation, on envy and greed. Nick Corey might have cared about this society at one time or another, but by the time we make his acquaintance, he is as disillusioned and cynical as the rest of them. (*Me, almost anyone can make a better speech than I can, and anyone can come out stronger against or for something. Because, me, I've got no very strong convictions about anything. Not anymore I haven't.*) He is only interested in taking care of his well being, a ruthlessness of purpose that he has learned how to hide from the others behind a harmless bufoon persona, a down-to-earth humorous banter and a sly meekness that leaves him henpecked by a predatory wife, bullied by the town's two pimps and kicked in the behind by his best friend as a lesson in self-assertiveness. It is very easy to laugh at the self-deprecating manner of speaking and at the crazy situations Nick finds himself entangled in (like waiting outside an empty toilet cubicle), but there is a chilling undercurrent that will soon tranform the comedy routine into a devil's playground. I sort of wish for a movie adaptation with Heath Ledger in the role of the 'joker' Nick Corey. If he were still with us, Heath looks to me like the spitting image I have of Nick corey. Here's an early example of what I'm talking about, with Nick trying to wheedle some 'attention' from his wife:

"And just what", she said, "do you think you're doing?"

I told her I was getting ready to take a trip over to the county where Ken Lacey was sheriff. I'd probably be gone until late that night, I said, and we'd probably get real lonesome for each other, so maybe we ought to get together first.

"Huh!" she said, almost spitting the word at me. "Do you think I'd want you, even if I was of a mind to have relations with a man?"

"Well." I said. "I kind of thought maybe you might. I mean, I kind of hoped so. I mean, after all, why not?"

"Because I can hardly stand the sight of you, that's why! Because you're stupid!"

"Well," I said. "I ain't sure I can agree with you, Myra. I mean, I ain't saying you're wrong but I ain't saying you're right, either. Anyways, even if I am stupid, you can't hardly fault me for it. They've lots of stupid people in the world."

One of my friends in the Pulp Fiction group remarked that Nick Corey is a poster boy for the psychopathic criminal, showing all the symptoms associated with this deviant behaviour : always putting the blame for his troubles on the others, showing no remorse or empathy for the plight of these others, paranoia, selfishness, cunning at covering his thoughts behind an amiable public persona. Chillingly, his rants made me think of that Swedish guy who went on a rampage on an island, believing he will remedy in this way the ills of society. Any sympathy I might have had for a tortured mind was quenched when Nick started to hear voices from on high, telling him he is on a God given crusade to cleanse to world of sinners. He is guilty of picking and chosing from the holy texts only the parts that suit him, forgetting the parable of the stone throwing and forgiveness.

It's what I'm supposed to do you know, to punish the heck out of people for bein' people. To coax 'em into

revealin' theirselves, an' then kick the crap out of'em. And it's a god-danged hard job, Rose, honey, and I figure that if I can get a little pleasure in the process of trappin' folks I'm mighty well entitled to it.

Another chilling factor for me was the familiarity of the author with his chosen subject. So powerful was the presence of Nick Corey that it got me to wonder what kind of experience did Thompson had in his childhood with a vile tempered father, coincidentally a sheriff of a small southern town. And what kind of disillusionment crushed the young leftist author's dreams for a better society to turn him into the bitter writer who felt so comfortable writing about deranged killers in hellholes like Potts County. For me as a reader, the worst part of the novel were not the actual murders, but the casual, rampant racism (... *no doctor is going to do a post mortem on a Negro. Why, you can't get a doctor to touch a live Negro, let alone a dead one.*); the cynicism of double standards in law for the wealthy and for the poor; the degrading attitude towards women, the readiness of those 1280 'souls' to believe and spread outrageous rumours about a political candidate competing with Nick for the sheriff post:

... and before long, there were plenty of answers; the kind of stinking dirty dirt that people can always create for themselves when there ain't none for real.

With or without Nick Corey, Potts County is not high on the list of places I want to visit and of people I would like to meet. I would like to be able to claim Thompson exaggerates, uses hyperbole and satire to lay bare what Woodrell calls 'the big ogres of American society', but I only have turn on the TV and scroll through the news channels to find racism and domestic violence, vile rumours presented as truth and corrupted justice alive and kicking strong into the third millennium. Nick Corey doesn't have the answers to the problems he sees around him, and I still believe in my heart that the decent people outnumber the ogres, but it saddens me that it is these ogres that make all the noise and get all the notice.

I figure sometimes that maybe that's why we don't make as much progress as other parts of the nation. People lose so much time from their jobs in lynching other people, and they spend so much money on rope and kerosene and getting likkered-up in advance and other essentials, that there ain't an awful lot of money or man-hours left for practical purposes.

Nick Corey made laugh, I admit, with his folksy, Bugs Bunny repartees, his pretend dumbness like the evil twin of Forest Gump, but the aftertaste of the novel is a bitter pill to swallow, a feeling of helplessness that make you reach for the hard liquor to drown your conscience and get ready to sink into a troubled sleep , ready to get up in the morning as if nothing was wrong with the world.

Because my labors were mighty ones - ol' Hercules didn't know what hard work was - and what is there to do but eat and sleep? And when you're eatin' and sleepin' you don't have to fret about things that you can't do nothing about. And what else is there to do but laugh an' joke ... how else can you bear up under the unbearable?

Most readers will probably remember the book for its scarily realistic lead character. I believe what will stay longer with me is the portrait of a small town beset by poverty and anger, by soul crushing pettiness and despair.

And suddenly the emptiness was filled with sound and sight, with all the sad terrible things that the emptiness had brought the people to.

There were the helpless little girls, cryin' when their own daddies crawled into bed with 'em. There were the men beating their wives, the women screamin' for mercy. There were the kids wettin' in the beds from fear and nervousness, and their mothers dosin' 'em with red pepper for punishment. There were the haggard

faces, drained white from hookworm and blotched with scurvy. There was the near-starvation, the never-bein'-full, the debts that always outrun the credits. There was the how-we-gonna-eat, how-we-gonna-sleep, how-we-gonna-cover-our-poor-bare-asses thinkin'. The kind of thinkin' that when you ain't doing nothing else but, why you're better off dead. Because that's the emptiness thinkin' and you're already dead inside, and all you'll do is spread the stink and the terror, the weepin' and wailin', the torture, the starvation, the shame of your deadness. Your emptiness.

[edit for spelling]

José Manuel says

Creo que no he leído antes nada con personajes tan manipuladores (todos y cada uno de ellos) y con tanta mala leche. El libro se lee en dos “sentás” no tiene ni un momento de respiro y lo único que te pide es que tengas pocos escrúpulos. El final me ha hecho plantearme si me perdí algo o si todo era un nuevo sueño de *Resines*.

No había leído nada del autor, ahora tengo ganas de más, buena señal.

Mike Puma says

About a year and a half ago, ages ago it now seems, there was a flurry of activity around this title among some GR friends and those I whose reviews I stalk, so I bought it—probably the title in a purchase that entitled me to free shipping. It sat here and sat here, garnering little attention, working its way down the list of those I was anxious to read, and then it happened, the event that would send this to the top of my priority list...I started reading *Gravity's Rainbow*, and all of the sudden **anything** else would do: in this case, large print was a plus, suggestions that it was humorous appealed to the I-need-that-right-now part of my brain, and besides, I'll acquire a better sense of the *noir* that others seem fond of and which I've only experienced in reviews (shameful, my neglect of Hammett, Chandler, et al.), with an additional perk—the possibility of using *chiaroscuro* in a review, sounding brighter than I am (or aspire to be)—win, win.

In I plunged, ready and willing, only to learn the novel is written in Rube-Speak! Not the dialect of some Southern state or region. Not accents. Not regionalism. Not even the horrific drawl of Haley Barbour (which a responsible parent would have rectified through intensive speech therapy in his youth). No, sir (or ma'am), Rube-Speak! Things were looking bleak. I continued reading reluctantly, ready to abandon another book others liked. And then it happened...the clod, Sherriff, who narrates the novel sets up and accomplishes an amazing feat of treachery, entrapping a blow-hard rival, and murdering two annoyances in the process. Oh boy! The entirely unlikable and unreliable narrator continues his connivery and mayhem, by wit and good luck. At times predictable, frequently funny, one for when you're reluctant to pick up something else more demanding.

Michael says

High Sheriff Nick Corey acts like a simpleton, he doesn't arrest anyone, he doesn't stir the pot, he acts and behaves the exact way everyone wants him to act; well at least the way he thinks he should act. But this kind and gentle nature is just a cover from his sinister attitude. But has this side of Nick always been there, or was this just a result of always acting the way he thinks he should?

The way Nick Corey acts, the lies and manipulating as scary; it's like Jim Thompson is holding a mirror up to the reader and says 'See, this is how you act' (well maybe it was just for me). But with all the raging I was doing at Nick Corey, I almost missed just how brilliant this book really is.

Jim Thompson is very experimental with his writing, and while he never really got the recognition he deserved when he was alive, his books are dark, gritty and always ringing an element of truth in it. No one has ever done characters quite like Jim Thompson; characters that always hide their true nature and acting the way people want them to act, while hiding the darkness. Fans of pulp novels will enjoy this book, but people looking for a light, easy read then this book will not do.

The Shayne-Train says

A great noir/Western mash-up with a main character who constantly keeps you guessing. Is he a long-suffering good-ol'-boy? A master manipulator? A criminal mastermind? A downtrodden coward?

Maybe he's just out-of-his-mind NUTS?

Well, I wouldn't say you were right, but I wouldn't say you were wrong...

Patrick says

Someone recommended this book to me years ago. More than five years ago, in fact. They gushed about it about it to such an extent that I went out and bought several of Thompson's books.

Then they sat on my shelf for the next five years.

I just read this one, and it was every bit as good as my friend implied. It's not my usual genre, almost a bit of a western (but not really). But it's told in first person with such an amazing voice that I really wish I hadn't waited so long.

I'll be getting to this guy's other books much sooner than later.

Lou says

"I said I meant I was just doing my job, followin' the holy precepts laid down in the Bible. "It's what I'm supposed to do, you know, to punish the heck out of people for bein' people. To coax 'em into revealin' theirselves, an' then kick the crap out of 'em. And it's a god-danged hard job, Rose, honey, and I figure that if I can get a little pleasure in the process of trappin' folks I'm mighty well entitled to it."

This excerpt from Thompson's novel sums up the sheriff who's a sociopathic murderer. This story is similar to his other novel *The Killer inside Me* which was a better novel and the sheriff in that was more screwed up. This novel is funny at times. There's quite a few racist characters in this story I suppose the writer is trying to tell you how it was in a town back in the old days.

This sheriff is not short of tricks and is smarter than he let's out. You not going to get grand story telling but a story about one dirty dog life in it's truest form.
