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James Swain

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Tony Valentine has a gift for grift: He can walk into a casino and spot a cheater across a crowded floor. A man who still uses pay phones and won't spend more than a buck for coffee, Tony has protected Atlantic City gambling palaces for twenty years and learned every trick of the trade—until a new one blows him away.

With his old partner murdered in a bomb blast, Tony returns to A.C. to retrace Doyle Flanagan's last case. Investigating a six-million-dollar casino takedown, a square cop soon meets a whole lot of bent people, from a beautiful lady wrestler to some Manhattan mobsters; from a trio of beautiful casino "consultants" to a team of Eurotrash blackjack card counters. But while everyone around Tony Valentine (including Tony's own son) is playing some kind of angle, Tony is determined to find a killer who is playing for keeps. . . .

Funny Money Details

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Author : James Swain

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From Reader Review Funny Money for online ebook

Patrick says

This is pretty grim stuff. Decent premise — Tony Valentine can spot the cheaters and makes his living doing so. Okay.

But we've got the scene in Florida and the old lady answering the phones and the dopey son and his cool fiancée who are tangled up with the mobsters oh and don't forget the female wrestlers and the martial arts guru and the hot lady wrestler and the casino tycoon and the three women he keeps on a leash and the dead cop and the Serbs and the...

Jeez, enough already. Too much plot, too many stories, too many coincidences - and no laughs. If this was a big sprawling comic novel it might work.

But it isn't. And it doesn't.

Kara Jorge says

Retired cop turned casino consultant Tony Valentine returns to his hometown of Atlantic City when his ex-partner is murdered. Doyle Flanagan had been investigating a group of casino cheats when a car bomb ended his life. Tony is hired almost immediately by the Bombay's owner to take over the investigation, but things aren't adding up. In addition, Tony's ne'er do well son Gerry is being chased by some mobsters who want their \$50,000, but Tony isn't about to pay them. Things get really interesting when Tony takes up with a professional wrestler and winds up part of her act. Between crooked cops and casino employees trying to kill him, the Mollo brothers out to harm his son, and a band of Croatians who don't quite fit in the picture, Tony Valentine has a lot on his hands.

Tony is a likeable and flawed character, smart but often rubbing other people the wrong way. His relationship with Gerry is complex; loving his son while being disgusted with the choices he's made. Another fun character we meet mostly over the telephone is Mabel, Tony's retired neighbor from Florida who fields his phone calls and tries to keep him in line. Tony's the kind of guy who's only slept with one woman in his life, so it's quite amusing when he finds himself in the arms of a professional wrestler named Kat.

Though some of the information about cheating casinos is a bit confusing to a non-gambler, this book nonetheless showed an interesting, inside view of life in an Atlantic City casino, as well as delivering a mystery with many twists and turns. This casino mystery series is well worth reading.

Robert says

Tony Valentine is back for another casino adventure. This time he will be investigating his former P.D. partner's death in Atlantic City. This is a great series for anyone interested in learning about casino cheats.

The character Valentine is well versed in the trade and capable of digging deep enough to create a major s**t storm. And where one thread leads many more are sure to follow. Lots of action and good plot twists to keep the reader entertained to the very end.

Kellie says

2nd in the Valentine Series. Pretty good. This one takes place in NJ and involves people close to Tony. " Tony Valentine has a gift for grift: He can walk into a casino and spot a cheater across a crowded floor. A man who still uses pay phones and won't spend more than a buck for coffee, Tony has protected Atlantic City gambling palaces for twenty years and learned every trick of the trade—until a new one blows him away. With his old partner murdered in a bomb blast, Tony returns to A.C. to retrace Doyle Flanagan's last case. Investigating a six-million-dollar casino takedown, a square cop soon meets a whole lot of bent people, from a beautiful lady wrestler to some Manhattan mobsters; from a trio of beautiful casino "consultants" to a team of Eurotrash blackjack card counters. But while everyone around Tony Valentine (including Tony's own son) is playing some kind of angle, Tony is determined to find a killer who is playing for keeps."

James Thane says

Sixty-two year-old Tony Valentine is retired from the police force in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He now lives in Florida and runs his own consulting service, Grift Sense. Tony has an uncanny ability to spot "crossroaders"—people who are cheating at casino games, and he is often hired by casinos to spot cheaters that are outwitting the casinos' own personnel.

Often Tony can do this from the comfort of his Florida home. A casino security team sends Tony a video recording of the suspected cheater and Tony can analyze the recording, spot the cheater's moves and report back by phone. But then Tony gets a call from his long-time police department partner, Doyle Flanagan, who has also gone out on his own and who is investigating a blackjack player who has hit an Atlantic City casino for six million dollars. Flanagan is stumped and could use some help, but before Tony hardly has a chance to look at the video, Flanagan is killed in a bomb blast, presumably set by the people he was investigating.

So this time, it's personal. Tony flies up to A.C. and takes over the investigation. It's clear that some very strange things are going on in this casino, especially at the blackjack tables, but Tony is initially baffled. He knows that the big winner is playing with a partner and that they have to be cheating—no one could be either that good or that lucky. But even with all his experience, Tony can't figure out how the cheaters are working the scam and before long, he finds himself in the sights of the same people who killed his friend.

If all of that weren't bad enough, Tony also continues to have problems with his practically worthless excuse for a son, Gerry. Tony has bailed out his son time after time, and even though he attempts to practice something approaching tough love with the stupid kid, Gerry just keeps digging himself deeper and deeper into trouble. In this case, Gerry has lost \$50,000 to some mobsters who are threatening him with great bodily harm—or worse—if he doesn't pay up. As always, unable to stand on his own two feet, Gerry comes running home to Papa, hoping that Dear Old Dad will pull his chestnuts out of the fire one more time. In consequence, Tony will find himself under fire from this front as well.

All in all, this book is a lot of fun. Valentine is a great character; there's a lot of humor, and along the way,

the reader learns a great deal about the myriad of ways in which cheaters try to find an edge against the casinos. This is a very worthy sequel to the first Valentine novel, *Grift Sense*, and one looks forward eagerly to Valentine's next appearance.

Alex says

FUNNY MONEY (Pub. 2002) by James Swain was a really great read. The cover flap dubs the author as the creator of a new genre, "casino noir", and after reading the book, I'd say that's an apt description.

I really enjoyed this one because it is a different read, and yet still follows the standard detective-mystery-thriller vein in many ways. The story is about a retired police detective, Tony Valentine, a 62-yr old man who lost his wife a couple years previously. He's taking a pension from the police force and meanwhile has opened a one-man consulting business for casinos around the world. He specializes in pinpointing the scammers who find various ways to cheat the casinos. The author manages to make Valentine being capable of kicking butt at 62 plausible, and gives him an old-timer's wisdom mixed with a youthful approach to things. Valentine comes off very believable, and I found myself thinking he's just like Jack Reacher will be in his 60's. And I enjoyed the story every bit as much as a Reacher novel, which is a HUGE compliment from this reader.

What I liked best about the story was the main character's approach to things -- practical, professional, and yet human. Valentine is a guy who rolls with the punches but doesn't hesitate to swing back when it's needed or deserved, and sometimes even when not needed. The quick spurts of 'casino insider information' and methods scammers use to rip off casinos are interesting, but don't bog the pace of the story down. It was like being immersed in a world I don't normally experience, a glimpse behind closed doors.

FUNNY MONEY is a mix of crime-solving and murder mystery. The author has done an excellent job of seamlessly blending the two, while bringing strong characterization to not only the main characters, but the minor ones as well, and all in a very organic way that doesn't drag for a minute. The writing style is fun and a little breezy without being kitschy, and still somehow manages to be a serious crime/murder story, with a get-the-job-done and some revenge while you're at it kind of vibe. It's really great stuff. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys mysteries and detective stories in general. I will definitely be reading more of James Swain's stories.

Douglas Cavanaugh says

I received this book from a friend in a stack of others. It was the first book I've read from this author. I enjoyed it. I could tell the author knows a lot about the subject the book's plot covers, namely, cheating within the gambling industry. Mr. Swain presented subtly to the reader and didn't force it which was a nice touch. The plot was well paced and was more or less believable. The ending was a bit tame (as opposed to lame, which it was not) and I want to read another book from this author to see if that detail shows some improvement. If I had paid for the book I felt I would have gotten my money's worth. It was a very good book.

Book Concierge says

Tony Valentine is a retired Atlantic City cop, now living in Florida where he runs a consulting business, helping casinos ferret out cheats and grifters. When his ex-partner, Doyle Flanagan, calls and asks Tony to take a look at a surveillance tape, he's happy to help. But before their conversation is over Doyle is killed and now Tony is working for the casino boss who had hired Doyle.

This is book two in the series, though I don't think I was missing much by having skipped book one. I liked the premise fairly well, and like Tony's neighbor-now-receptionist, Mabel. I learned a little about the underside of the casino business. The book is fast paced and there are several twists in the plot. That being said, I had figured out the bad guy about half-way through, and long before Tony. I was also bothered by the number of dead bodies Tony left in his wake, with barely a backward glance, and apparently no consequences.

Vince Curley says

I could not identify with the main character at all. His age (62) seemed to be his major defining characteristic and was alluded to at every opportunity. I can see that other people may find this comfortable or charming, but I found it distracting and unnecessary.

A couple phrases caused me to pause and think, "I'm not the target for this book."

1) "Valentine had a senior moment and dribbled coffee onto his shirt." Would a senior appreciate that? I know that it felt out of place to me and took me out of the story. In fact, in reading it I decided I didn't want to read any more.

2) "The atmosphere was not serious enough, the place better suited for a happy-clappy John Tesh convert, with thirtynothings sipping overpriced wine and talking on cell phones." Again, this was a ham-fisted age play that may appeal to some but not to me.

It's too bad the age angle was so overplayed because the little I read of gifting and crossroaders was interesting. But I could not suffer through the bad even with the promise of the good.

Ed says

#2 in the Tony Valentine series. Tony is a retired Atlantic City cop and an expert on casino cheats.

Tony Valentine's ex-partner Doyle Flanagan has been blown to pieces by a car bomb. Shortly before his death, Doyle had been filling Valentine in on the details of his latest case -- an impressive \$6 million blackjack scam at Atlantic City's legendary Bombay casino. Valentine determines that the only way to bring his friend's killers to justice is to crack the Bombay heist himself. But standing between Valentine and his

goal is a head-spinning assortment of ruthless gangsters, crooked croupiers, eccentric millionaires, and Croatians with bad haircuts. His only ally: an irresistibly enigmatic female wrestler.

Addam says

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By: James Swain

Funny Money is a very interesting book what kept me reading was when Valentine's best friend from the force was killed in a huge explosion which the people that planted the bomb was the people that were about to get caught so the planted a car bomb on Valentines best friend's car. I would not recommend this book to anyone I thought that this book was poorly planned out. My favorite line from this book was "your just filled with ideas, and not conclusions!" If this book was a movie I would choose Tom cruise to play Valentine. My favorite character of this book is Valentine because he has gone through so much in his life and he gets a break at the end. My least favorite character is the widow because she is so freaking negative. I couldn't guess the ending of this book because it is a mystery book and it just kept me guessing the whole way. It kind of blew my mind how the book ended, but that was the only good part. I think why the author wrote this book is to always keep the ones closest to you and never let them go.

K says

Like a good tub of popcorn, Grift Sense is fun, light, unsubstantial but just plain difficult to put down. It's a lot of fun and I enjoy the author's explanations of the various scams used to cheat casinos.

Sure, I can see where this style begins to tarnish, but a pretty good plot kept things percolating enough so as to offset any irritation it might create. I also like the 62 year old protagonist, Tony Valentine, even though he sometimes seemed a whole lot younger physically. But then, this is fiction after all and I was glad to see him end up with a much younger and rather voluptuous love interest.

On the whole, this is a very enjoyable read-- 3.5 stars rounded up for fun factor. I will read more of the series.

Donald Houston says

James Swain has another winner here. It was an exciting read with a well developed plot, a very well developed set of characters and it took place in a world of glitz, action & glamour. All-in-all a very good read!

Dave says

Swain's specialty is writing about grifters, cheats, and the detectives and casino security experts who are after them. Swain's Tony Valentine series features a cranky retired ex-cop who has a nose for grift.

Funny Money continues a number of the motifs from the first book including Valentine's joking with his neighbor, his no-good son who can't keep out of trouble, and all the cheaters and fakers running around trying to outsmart the casinos. This volume moves the action to Atlantic City and Valentine has a long history there and lots of old memories about his deceased wife and his old partner who ropes him into a new investigation. It's not just earning a paycheck for Valentine here. He's got personal reasons for breaking this scam open and all the backstabbing and dirty dealing. If anything, this volume has even more explosive action than Grift Sense and takes the reader into the world of professional wrestling, international intrigue, and more. Most importantly, it is a thrilling, action-packed book and it's just plain old great storytelling.

Susan says

This is the second Tony Valentine. This is not a great book but something about it is really compelling. Maybe it's the characters. I don't know. I just know that even though it's terribly flawed, I still kept reading and enjoying. Tony Valentine is a retired detective who is a consultant to casinos who need help catching gambling crooks.
