



The Smack

Richard Lange

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Rowan Petty is a conman down on his luck. Tinafev is a hooker who's tired of the streets. Their paths cross one snowy night in Reno, and they hit it off.

An old friend of Petty's turns up with a rumor about a crew of American soldiers who smuggled two million dollars out of Afghanistan and have stashed the money in an apartment in Los Angeles. He thinks Petty's just the guy to steal the cash. "You wouldn't even have to grab all of it for it to be a great score," the friend says. "Getting your hands on just some would make you a happy man."

Petty decides to drive down to L.A. to investigate. Tinafev decides to go with him. Bad move, Petty. Bad move, Tinafev.

The Smack Details

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Author : Richard Lange

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From Reader Review The Smack for online ebook

Alecia says

I really liked Angel Baby, Richard Lange's previous book. So when I saw he had a new one out, I was very happy to begin reading. This new one is as good, if not better, than his last, and I would give it 4.5 stars. For those readers who enjoy a well-written, fast-paced noir thriller (not so easy to find), try this one. There is a blurb on the back of the book that I would totally agree with by Gerald Petievich: " The Smack is much more than a crime novel. It is a novel about life itself. Lange's sensitivity and pacing are reminiscent of Raymond Carver, Charles Willeford and Jim Thompson".

When the novel opens, Rowan Petty is a down on his luck con man, swindling people with a phone scam. He meets a hooker (with the handle Tinafeey) whom he actually likes, and a relationship of sorts starts up between them. But things are looking very grim for Rowan until he agrees to a meeting with an old friend, who tells him about a big score of two million dollars. This score involves army money smuggled out of Afghanistan, and on the chance this rumor has credence, Rowan (and Tinafeey, unaware of this big score) head to LA to investigate this story. Rowan also tries to rekindle a tattered relationship with his grown daughter, which adds a poignancy to this story.

There is a humanity inserted into all these bad guys (and girls), and somehow Lange pulls it off. The plotting and characterization are very good, and I look forward to his next one.

Chris says

(4)-Thanks to Mulholland Books for providing me with an advanced reading copy of "The Smack". I've enjoyed Richard Lange's books since his first release, "Dead Boys", a collection of short stories published in 2007. I've found his prior books to be riveting with brutally honest portrayals of people living on the fringes of society. I think that this is lighter (just a little) than much of the author's previous work, but the characters, a cast of low level grifters and con-artists, are well-drawn and complex, especially the middle aged protagonist desperate for an elusive big score and his unlikely female companion. The vivid descriptions of the cheap motels, dives, casinos and other places in the world these characters inhabit add depth and authenticity to the story. While the plot seemed a bit of a stretch at times, I thought everything ultimately worked together to make this a fast-moving, solid and entertaining read.

Lou says

Casino
Deals
Money
Ex-cons
Army
Veteran
Mucho dineros
Cash

Hustle
In over your head
Divorced
Estranged daughter

Modern noir written in the strain of the masters like Jim Thompson and Raymond Chandler. Desperation intertwined, money intertwined, lives on the line, and just how it will all pan out has you unflinching reading on to the rumination on affairs. A one or two sitting page burner, clear and crisp, well written dialogue, potent prose and scenes. The main protagonist has a need, and eventually a real by all means necessary need, he has a quandary of affairs to settle with plenty in the balance lives from past and lives for the future. Layered in just the write length a noir tale like this needs to be with the right amount of description and not too deep but with a character in too deep. Some more heart of darkness for end of July 2017 with a diamond in the center of it all.

"The Boulevard by day looked hungover, woozy. Its bruises showed through its powder and rouge. The sidewalks were empty, the trash cans overflowing. Steel roll-up doors decorated with ugly paintings of the stars of black-and-white movies covered the storefronts, and a noisy flock of ravens that was perched on the art deco flourishes of an old building put Petty in mind of vultures waiting for a meal to drop."

"The rain began to beat down again with a hiss like radio static. Petty cracked his window so the windshield wouldn't fog, and the air that rushed in reeked of gasoline and scorched rubber. Driving a dead man's car. He was driving a dead man's car."

review @ <http://more2read.com/review/smack-richard-lange/>

Paul Vidich says

The Smack, Richard Lange's new novel, is the story of Rowan Petty, a street smart, down-on-his-luck grifter, who is drawn into a swindle involving US currency stolen in Afghanistan by a Marine, and shipped to Los Angeles. The Los Angeles setting recalls the best of Raymond Chandler, updated to the present time. Lange's ear for dialogue is as pitch perfect as Elmore Leonard's. His characters, even his minor characters, are brilliantly painted with a deft touch. All this adds up to a bleakly optimistic story in the best tradition of LA Noir. Petty is the man who finds himself in middle age with a failed marriage, a daughter on dope, and a wallet of maxed out credit cards. A great read.

Ron S says

Tautly written noir about a down on his luck grifter. Pitch perfect characters, believable situations, story and place all seeming painfully real. One of those read in a single sittings then look for everything else the guy wrote kind of books.

Fred says

I found this to be a fast-paced, touching, action-filled crime caper and overall a great read.

It's a little noir, a little crime caper, a little family drama, and a lot of fun. This was the first book by Lange I have read, and it was a nice introduction to this author.

Rowan Petty is a down-on-his-luck antihero scammer. He's middle-aged and his best years seem to be behind him, when he is approached by an old colleague who offers him a scenario that may or may not be true: there is a cool 2 mill sitting in a safe of a particular army veteran. Rowan at first says no go; family complications urge him to take the deal and see if that money exists and if he can extract it.

Rowan, his girlfriend Tinafe, and the cast of characters here are finely drawn and realistic. The dialogue is zippy and true-to-life as well, and the exploits fun to follow. I recommend it highly.

Thank you to the author and publisher for a review copy.

Rachel says

Working at a bookshop after college, I was expected to be able to recommend a book for any taste. The hardest sort of book for me to recommend to customers was anything in the thriller genre. Classic noir/pulp/detective novels were always a little too sanitized to capture my interest, and current thrillers that I've tried tend to suffer from cardboard characters and cliched dialogue.

I wish that I had known about Richard Lange when I was a bookseller, because without question, he would be my go-to recommendation. If you like crime novels about cons, heists, and chases as opposed to whodunits, you have *got* to read his books. I was genuinely excited to be offered a galley of this latest in exchange for review by Mulholland Books (and I was glad to receive it on the eve of a weekend where I had nothing planned, because I expected to be lost in it).

As it turns out, *The Smack* is just as totally engrossing as *Angel Baby*, and has the unsparing, realistically unsentimental worldview that I was stunned by in *Sweet Nothing*. Lange continues to impress as a writer who can convey that world of tacky superficial wealth masking day-to-day sadness and just getting by that belongs to gamblers by profession and conmen (if you've been to Las Vegas or Atlantic City, you know exactly the vibe I'm talking about) in a way that seems true, not cheesy. *The Smack's* antihero Rowan Petty, who spends his days scamming people on Airbnb in between bigger jobs, and his unlikely prostitute girlfriend Tinafe, seem like real people; they could easily have become cartoons in the hands of lesser writers. It helps that Lange has a great ear for dialogue and his prose is so good as to be transparent.

I don't want to say too much about the plot, because 1.) frankly, you can read the book's description for that, and 2.) I don't want to spoil the story's turns. Needless to say, there are a few punch to the gut moments (see what I said above about "unsparing, realistically unsentimental worldview"). There is no guarantee anyone is going to make it out alive by some deus ex machina. True to the world of the conman, there is no guarantee that someone else isn't running a double con.

I gave this four stars, but it's a high four stars, leaning closer to five than four. I will read anything Lange

writes in the future. He is criminally underrated.

Dave says

Confidence Men, Flim Flam Artists, & Hustlers

Con men! Hustlers! Backstabbers! Scheme after scheme, hatched and unhatched in a Never-ending game to get that big score. It's a tough life that has you drifting here and there, never trusting anyone, never wanting to get close, always looking over your shoulder.

From the casinos of the little town called Reno to the sun-drenched beaches and taco stands of Los Angeles, Petty thinks he finally has a lead on the score of a lifetime, but it all may be no more than a tall tale in a prison yard, yet another scam. He's run out all his luck on everything else and has no other leads.

Petty's got no one to turn to, not his old allies, not the wife who ran off thirteen years ago with another guy, leaving Petty with an eight year old to care for, not the daughter he should have taken care of instead of leaving her with grandma. Well, maybe there's one person he can trust -a hooker he met on casino row with a violent ex-husband, but, hell, she's gaming him too, hustling him.

It's a quick-moving, dark, gritty, nasty tale of trust, mistrust, greed, and vengeance and reading it is just like striking gold -well, sorta.

Michael says

My starred review for this super-fun thriller was published online by *Library Journal* on July 6, 2017:

Professional con man Rowan Petty is at the end of his line: down to his last five grand in Reno, NV, calling rubes on Thanksgiving about a real estate scam for ten percent of the take. Not even a rendezvous with his favorite hooker Tinafev ("Like that white lady on TV, but all one word") goes right. Then a blast from the past meets Petty with a rumor of a score that could mean early retirement, something about \$2 million smuggled out of Afghanistan currently being stored in a wounded vet's Los Angeles apartment. Petty knows he might be getting played, but the lure—of the money, of the hunt, of spending quality time with Tinafev—is too tempting to ignore. Plus he'll get to see his estranged daughter Sam, whose medical condition quickly gives him a far more urgent reason to find the money. **VERDICT** Like his protagonist, Dashiell Hammett Award winner Lange (Angel Baby) knows how to reel in his audience with a seductive story and plenty of misdirection. There's nothing criminal, however, about this rollicking, diamond-cut thriller shot through with elegance and heart.

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Tiger says

Very slick and entertaining caper of a book where professional con man Rowan Petty sets out to steal \$2 million that has been smuggled out of Afghanistan and may be hidden in L.A. Along the way he forms an odd, but somewhat heartwarming alliance with a hooker, runs afoul of a hitman or 2 looking for the same big score and reconnects with his long estranged daughter. Full of action and with quirky, yet compassionate characters, this was a full, fun read.

Ben Brackett says

This is written for people who don't actually care about what they are reading.

This is maybe the laziest writing I have ever read. It's a genre book, where the author makes zero effort in any character development. Each situation is pre-ordained by a cookie cutter character, so how they act, their reactions, etc. are cliché and without any motivation being established prior. Lange seemed to feel needed no substance or building to anything. He takes the laziest short cuts to move the plot without making any effort beyond hey, this girl has a heart of gold, this girl hates him but you know for the story they got to reconcile, of course there's the threatening ex, etc. It's like a JJ Abrams movie - he knows what a good scene looks like, but has zero narrative ability to tell a story to make that scene actually impactful, or give the characters motivation to do what they do other than hey that looks cool and pushes them into another scene.

What is so bitterly disappointing is I love Lange's more literary short stories, and know he can do wonderful things with characters. Here he's either just selling out or cashing in.

Ross Cumming says

My son had just read this book and recommended it to me as he thought it would be too my liking. Rowan Petty is a grifter and conman who is down on his luck and is scrabbling about trying to find his next score when an old partner tells him about a rumour that he heard about a group of soldiers who have been syphoning money from Afghanistan and stashing it in L.A. With nothing to lose Petty heads off to see if the rumour is true and if so, how can he grab a piece of the action. He takes Tinafeey, a hooker who he has just met, along for the ride. Things take a turn for the worse when his estranged daughter, who is living in L.A., takes ill and ends up in hospital and Petty tries to do the right thing by her. Petty confirms that the rumours of the stash are true but he's not the only one after the cash and initially decides the risk is too big. However with potential astronomical medical bills for his daughter's future care looming he sees that the cash offers him and his daughter a secure future.

This book had me hooked from the start as we read about the various scams that Petty and his various acquaintances have used over the years and Richard Lange must have had someone 'in the know' in order to research these cons both old and new. Petty comes across initially as a man with no conscience, as he is prepared to scam anyone to get the cash but his relationships with his estranged daughter and Tinafeey, which goes initially from lust to eventually love, show he does have a heart. Petty can work a con but is not so good at the strong arm stuff and uses his tongue rather than the gun. There are also a fine cast of supporting characters all of which add additional colour to the plot. My only criticism would be that I felt that there was a lull in the pace of the story towards the middle of the novel when Petty is dealing with his daughter's illness but the story reaches a thrilling climax with an added twist at the end

Melki says

"You can't cheat an honest man," Petty said.

"Oh, fuck that," Don said. "I can cheat anybody."

Lange's *Sweet Nothing: Stories* was one of the best books I read in 2015, so I was really looking forward to reading his new novel. And, yippee! -it's another great effort, so good that I hadn't even finished this one before I went online, and ordered the rest of the man's titles.

Con man Rowan Petty is bumming around Reno when he gets wind of a really big score - two million bucks sitting in a safe in L.A. Petty heads for the City of Angels accompanied by his new pal - a hooker with a heart of gold the name of a former SNL cast member - Tinafey. But, other people are after the money, and Petty finds himself in a deadly treasure hunt for the cash he so desperately needs. More than once he will ask himself the question that troubles all grifters now and then:

"Am I taking or being taken?"

This is a well written thrill ride that I suggest you take.

Thanks to the publisher for an advance reading copy of this book.

Steve says

Meh. It's OK. Basically *The Smack* is a caper book (not, IMHO, Noir), with Elmore Leonard like dialogue and plotting. Where it differs from Leonard is there appears to be genuine hearts in some of the characters, in particular con man (and main character) Rowan Petty, his girlfriend and former prostitute, "Tinafey," and Petty's daughter, Sam. You would think that would be a strength, but it isn't. When it came to characters, Leonard held back by design. You saw the hard surfaces, and the general goood-bad-inbetween drift of each character, but the inner soul (if any) was for the reader to ponder. I found myself largely bored by *The Smack*, often wondering if this was yet another book that was totally geared toward a possible movie. It would probably make a good movie, but also a forgettable one. Kind of like the book. The various "cons" were not memorable, the violence, when it erupted, was pretty cool and messy, but the competing machinations for the dirty millions ripped off from Afghanistan were tenuous and too often coincidental. (The nearly novel long "sick bed" thread was too precious for my tastes.) I found the dialogue to be the best part of this book, but it wasn't enough to float me.

BookBully says

Richard Lange rarely disappoints but in this case I'm giving him 3.5 stars. *THE SMACK*, his fifth book and third novel, centers around Rowan Petty, a down and out con man who finds himself desperate for a big score. That's when an old friend tells him about a rumor surrounding a possible two million dollar payoff, ripe for the picking. As Petty begins to track down the legitimacy of the tale, he runs afoul of a psychotic

soldier; an ungrateful nemesis and several other unwelcome folks from his past. To complicate matters, Petty falls deep for a hooker with a feisty mouth and Buddha-like wisdom. Oh, and his beloved but estranged daughter is seriously ill.

Dizzy yet? No worries because Lange is a master of juggling colorful characters while keeping his story moving along. The reader won't be bored but they may feel a bit used. There's a plot point at the end that had me shaking my head, calling "foul." But my biggest complaint was with his depiction of Petty: I never felt I had a strong sense of who he was. I realize that's often the case with noir fiction but in this case I came away disappointed.

Overall I think I'm a bigger fan of Lange's earlier work. If you haven't read **DEAD BOYS** and/or **THIS WICKED WORLD**, do yourself a favor and pick one or both of them up. You won't be sorry.
