



The Angry Buddhist

Seth Greenland

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It is the week before a local election in Palm Springs. Incumbent, Randall Duke, is dodging scandal while courting the Christian vote. His opponent, Mary Swain, a sexy, well-financed newcomer, does not have a firm grip on American history or elemental economics. Meanwhile an anonymous political blogger, "Desert Machiavelli" is exposing new secrets daily.

The Angry Buddhist Details

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From Reader Review The Angry Buddhist for online ebook

Tony says

THE ANGRY BUDDHIST. (2012). Seth Greenland. *****.

This is a new author for me, and the first thing I have to do is to find his earlier two novels and have my library put them on hold for me. It is an excellent novel that deals with politics (mostly dirty), sexism, murder, and – by the way – Buddhism. The setting for the plot is the area in and around 29 Palms. The central theme is the race for office between the incumbent, Randall Duke, a man who has already served three terms, and his challenger, Mary Swain, a former stewardess and wife of a very wealthy man. Mary has had no prior experience in politics, but, as most of the prospective voters will tell you, she has great legs. Randall has vowed not to lose to Mary, and we soon learn of all the dirty tricks he is capable of, though all executed through second parties. Randall also has two liabilities: his youngest brother Dale, who he is in the process of getting out of jail early, and Jimmy Ray, a cop on administrative leave from the police force because of an infraction of the rules and a set-to with the chief of police. Having two brothers like this is not an asset, so Randall turns it around and makes “family” one of his planks. He embraces both of his brothers and tells voters that he puts them first in his life – ahead of politics – and that the world would be a better place if all of us embraced family. Randall doesn’t have a good marriage, either. His wife recently ran off for a long weekend to Mexico with another woman, where she had her first lesbian experience. That would have been OK if it had only been kept quiet! But...in a haze of margaritas, the ladies stopped in a tattoo parlor and had identical anime princesses etched on their buttocks. Where’s the Buddhist? Our ex-cop Jimmy is always in the process of trying to reach some sort of inner calm and understanding through meditation, and consults – on line – with a Buddhist guru who advises him on his program. It doesn’t always work. The novel trots out these diverse characters and gives them a chance to mix it all up to see what happens. The plot, however, is not random. All of the characters by the end of the book seem to have met their proper come-uppance, though not what we as readers would have predicted. Mr. Greenland’s writing reminds me of the styles of Elmore Leonard and Donald Westlake. He is now on my list of “to read” authors, and will likely get on yours too after you finish this book. Highly recommended.

Monica says

Sex, money and politics in SoCal- a series of soft targets for political satire. There are some funny moments as the three Duke brothers hurtle towards self-destruction in this screwball noir saga, and some pithy observations.

"Mary Swain's danger lies in her cheerful erotic charge. When fascism arrives it will not be in jackboots but, rather, wrapped in an American flag, carrying a cross and wearing fuck-me pumps."

I like the concept of the Angry Buddhist - Jimmy Ray Duke's occasionally successful approach to (court ordered) anger management - and I like the Desert Machiavelli blog comments on Randall Duke's disintegrating political campaign interspersed throughout the story.

Aharon says

There's hard-boiled, and then there's overcooked.

Timothy says

I liked this read a lot. The characters are believable though most certainly crazed in one sense or another--much like real life people--and the action is interesting and well paced. The novel's main unanswered tenet is worthy: how do individuals relate to their own moral compasses--and does everyone even have one?

Greenland's artfulness comes into play as a weaving of this central issue of the individual's sense of morality around the curve balls that come from life in general. As characters in our own stories, do we get knocked off course by these curve balls or do we muddle through? Do our actions always take the high road or do we, for example, just go off and start spraying bullets into convenience stores, become an all-wise blogger and blabber of secrets, or try to play politics with our constituency of voters, family, and friends?

Occasionally one of us saves an innocent dog or two from needless destruction. Occasionally we save ourselves from similar fates as well. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. Occasionally even would-be buddhists have a lot to be angry about.

Susie says

I gave this book 3.25/5 stars on InsatiableBooksluts.com.

Review excerpt:

"Real live politics clearly influenced *The Angry Buddhist*. Swain is a stand-in for Sarah Palin in many ways, campaigning with loads of good looks and a "folksy" demeanor, but without much professional experience to back herself up. Randall's campaign manager, Maxon, seems to be a smaller-time Karl Rove-type character, a man who will do anything to win even if it's not legal or moral. The book delves into the messier side of politics, cranking up the intrigue and scandal factor considerably higher than we see on the news. It read a bit like a caricature for me, though--or maybe I was just sick of dirty politics in general, I don't know.

I also had a really hard time giving a damn about most of the characters, to be honest. A lot of the book hinges on Randall's campaign. I didn't like Randall or his wife, so I didn't really care if they crashed and burned or not. (I did like the daughter quite a bit.) The hero of the story is Randall's brother Jimmy, who does his job perfectly well, but with whom I never really connect well enough to care about the stakes against him. The plot was intriguing and I read through it quickly to find out what happened, but it's not a story that lingered or stuck with me. Political-mystery joyride with flashes of literary writing here and there."

You can read the full review [here](#).

Anne Kadet says

I hope no one ever finds out I read this stupid book.

Michael Shilling says

Structurally sound but relentlessly stock in characters and predictable in plot. Biggest problem is the bland dialogue that reads like it's from a screenplay - that is, it's dialogue that only gives readers the broad outlines of a communication / motivation, from which the actors, with the help of the director, will realize / color in etc. So, TAB is a useful book for writers to see the difference between the role of dialogue in the two forms.

Jay says

I loved Seth Greenland's first two novels and this one is his best.

"The Angry Buddhist" weaves story lines involving politics, sex, police work, and--of course--Buddhism, into a novel that grabbed me from the first page.

Plus there are good dogs and dog-loving cops alongside the corrupt politicians, regular crooks, and sex-confused citizens of Palm Springs and the shores of the Salton Sea.

Read this book! I guarantee it.

Amy says

I might have liked this one better if it hadn't been such a hot mess in terms of editing/proofing. When you misuse "its/it's" multiple times--in the same sentence, even--it's time to bring in the copyeditor.

Alan says

Decent enjoyable novel. Greenland is a good writer, enjoyable to read.

John Luiz says

Greenland is a terrific writer, and I enjoyed this book very much, although maybe not quite as much as his previous novel, *The Shining City*. Here he tells the story of political shenanigans on the run up to an election for Congress. The story focuses on the Duke brothers -- Randall, the Congressman, Jimmy, an ex-cop who got kicked off the force and is now working for the DA's office, and Dale, the youngest brother an ex-con just out of jail whose career as a criminal got its start when he took the rap a crime his oldest brother committed so that Randall's promising career wouldn't be derailed. Added to that mix are Randall's wife, Kendra, who had a weekend affair with a young woman, and Hard Marvin, the chief of police who fired Jimmy, and who strikes up an extra-marital affair with the young woman who had the brief fling with Kendra.

Greenland does satire with just the right mix of humanity and humor. He gets to skewer American politicals by showing the cynical, and often criminal maneuverings Randall and his chief aide committ in order to hold on to power. And he makes the political shenanigans going on in this southern Californian races see very topical because Jimmy's opponent is a Sarah Palin-character, a demagogue whose chief drawing card is her beauty.

Jimmy is the moral compass here, and everyone around him is rather despicable.

Things take a very violent turn in the middle of the novel, as Nadine, the lover of Kendra and Hard Marvin tries to blackmail them both and then pays a heavy price for it.

Watching how the characters deal with it, is enough to make you depressed about how rotten American politics is.

Throughout the novel, we get updates from an anonymous blogger who skewers all the parties, revealing how shallow and manipulative they are. It's nice to see that for all their hypocrisy, one party is pulling the curtain aside to show the public just how tainted the entire process is.

It's not a novel that wraps everything in a neat bow, but it's a brutally honest look at how corrupt our political system has become.

Rob Forteath says

The narrator of this book has the Coen brothers' type of detached-but-not-alloof (if that makes sense) relationship to the characters and story. Sordid events and very imperfect humans are regarded wryly but with empathy.

There are more characters than you might initially think the book can hold, even with its substantial length. Fortunately, the characters are drawn quickly and skillfully, each provided with a more or less nuanced backstory. Most can be quickly assigned an archetypal label, but they are not clichéd or wooden. As these characters drive the story along with one poor decision after another, the detached narration helps prevent you from any "Don't go into the basement!" exhortations. From your poolside deck chair, you may occasionally lower your book and take a sip from your Mojito as you disapprove.

It's not that you don't care about the consequences you know the characters are bringing onto themselves -- it's just that you know these consequences are inevitable because the characters' poor choices are inevitable. The scorpion stung the frog who was ferrying it across the stream, dooming both to drown, because it was in the scorpion's nature to sting. Just as it is in Harding's nature to drive into the gated community. "Oh, Harding", you sigh, "whatever are you thinking? Mmm this is a tasty Mojito."

This attitude on the part of the reader is crucial to appreciating the story as more than just an ordinary tale of sordid politicos. It is achieved not only by the just-right level of detachedness, but by the insertion of occasional Buddhist thoughts (this is done in a hilarious way, with an unlikely character and an unlikely medium).

Susan Eubank says

Here are the questions we discussed at the Reading the Western Landscape Book Club at the Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden.

- Were you able to have any sympathy for any of the characters? Why? Why not?
 - What did you think when you were reading the physical descriptions of all the people in the book? Why?
 - What did the ending mean to you?
 - If there was one thing you would change about the book what would it be?
 - What part of the book would you be sure not to change?
 - Were you surprised when the author of the blog was revealed? How did that revelation shape your reading?
 - Many of the characters in the book don't appear "likeable." How did this affect your reading experience?
 - What were the author's best descriptions of the landscape?
 - What did you take in from the "dog book" and the Buddhism?
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Ben says

There aren't enough stars. It's not as bad as a two star rating would imply, but it's not as good as Johnathan Franzen's *Freedom*, which wasn't good enough for four stars.

It's readable, characters are many and varied (none too deep, though), the pages were all printed the right way up and there weren't loads of crimes against grammar and cliché. (just some). The email exchanges between the eponymous character and his guru are faintly shoe-horned-in sixth-form psychology (maybe that's the point?) and slightly ridiculous, but not so that you tear pages out in frustration.

If someone gives it to you as a present, read it. If you're in a bookshop browsing for something page-turny and not desperately annoying, it'll do if it has a big "5 pounds off" sign on the front.

Charles Kerns says

If you write a satire, you must go over the edge. Like Carl Hiaason with his Fla swamp people. Not far enough and you have a tragedy (no matter what Larry David's book blurb said). Greenland's CA desert characters might as well be chasing alligators (or vice versa). They don't even have dreams worth chasing-- they just stumble around: some shoot at snakes, some at store clerks. Some run for office, some run after tanning salon clerks, all try to run from their marriages/relationships, but not their dogs. A Sarah Palin look-alike, a cold-eyed political op, and three canines play big supporting roles. And meditation 101 runs thru the chapters as on again-off again cop Jimmy works on his anger problem. A solid three-star book.
