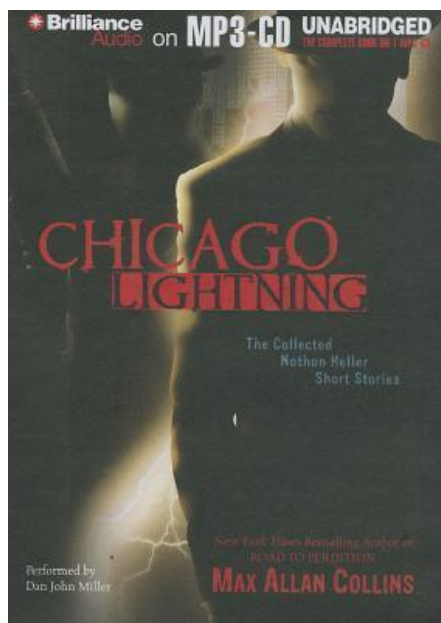




Chicago Lightning

Max Allan Collins

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Tough, cynical, and clever, Nathan Heller has been called "the perfect private eye", the best investigator that Chicago (where 'lightning' means gunfire) has to offer. In this engaging collection of thirteen stories, Heller encounters gangsters and petty crooks, noble doctors and quacks, loving wives and wanton women, and even the occasional honest cop. All of the stories are based on real cases of the 1930s and '40s, meticulously researched by award-winning writer and Road to Perdition creator Max Allan Collins. Heller's adventures feature some of the biggest names in twentieth-century American crime history: Eliot Ness, Frank Nitti, Mickey Cohen, and Jack Ruby, just to name a few. Whether he is investigating a union shooting, going toe-to-toe with the female leader of a vicious hold-up crew, or playing a homeless man to pose as bait for an insurance racket, Heller's humorous, wryly cynical tone, and knack for keen social observation make for a cracking good read.

Chicago Lightning Details

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Author : Max Allan Collins

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Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Short Stories, Detective, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review Chicago Lightning for online ebook

Dennis says

I enjoyed this, a nice blend of historical fiction. If I get a chance I'm gonna check out some more Nate Heller detective novels. I would have given this 5 stars, but the book had a couple of author's notes out of order and Halsted was misspelled once. The one thing my Chicago-area based book club found unusual was that despite the Chicago connections in this collection we couldn't find this book in any metro Chicago library.

Randy says

"CHICAGO LIGHTNING" - 30s gangland slang for gunfire.

All of Max Allan Collins' Nate Heller short stories collected together. Set in chronological order, they cover the thirties and forties, stories based on real crimes of the period. Collins skillfully weaves his fictional private eye into the stories and after each is bit about where he found the case, a book, a magazine article.

There's also a good introduction about how he developed the character, his efforts to get it published as he'd wrote it (against the advice of one powerful writer) and the encouragement of another equally powerful writer.

A worthy addition to the novels and sometime soon another collection of longer Heller stories will be published.

Rob Ballister says

Max Allan Collins' CHICAGO LIGHTNING is a great collection of short stories surrounding the author's Private Eye hero, Nathan Heller. No stranger to crime drama (the author wrote the graphic novel ROAD TO PERDITION, which eventually became a movie starring Tom Hanks), Collins easily captures the mood of the seedier side of Chicago while setting up Heller as a genuine hero all readers can enjoy.

The stories range from early in Heller's career, when he was inexperienced, brash, and poor, to the highpoint of his career, when he is established, has a reputation, and his detective agency spans two cities. Each story is told in first person, with Heller's dry sense of humor, has plenty of action, and sets up the private eye as the reluctant hero who almost does good by accident. He's certainly not perfect, but he's loyal to his clients and willing to dish out a little street justice when called for, even in his later years.

I particularly enjoyed the way the author rolled in many historical cases, both the famous and the not-so-famous, into his stories, mixing the fictional with the factual to weave a very interesting, believable, vibrant tapestry in each mini crime story. As a fan and student of organized crime persona, the true life gangsters found in the stories were very realistic, and behaved in these fictitious scenarios the way they did in real life.

Only down side was that it entirely skips over his war experience, which is pretty important in developing Heller's character after the war. The stories allude to his service on Guadalcanal, but not enough to fill in all the blanks.

I don't give many "five star" reviews, but this was enjoyable from start to finish, completely genuine, and a hell of a lot of fun to read. Highly recommended to fans of gangster novels, private eye works, and crime or mystery dramas.

Margarette says

This is a collection of 13 short stories written in the noir detective fiction style of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Nathan Heller is an ex Chicago cop trying to make a living as a private eye in the Great Depression era. The author makes good use of history, with several mentions of Capone and his ilk. Heller even works with Eliot Ness more than once, including cases the author notes are based on true Ness cases. All of the stories are based on truth, and the author follows each one with notes on his research of the true crime. Knowing they're based on truth added a lot of interest to the stories. They also took me back to when I enjoyed reading James Cain, the 87th Precinct books, and loved watching The Untouchables and Dragnet on TV.

Heller's honesty in a corrupt system is the reason He's an ex cop and why he's very unpopular with other cops. He also has his own sense of justice, and sometimes justice is best served by not turning in the perpetrator of a crime. Since I also just read the first book in Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch series, I couldn't help but compare the two ex-cops turned PI. Although they're from different times, they're very similar characters. I really liked these stories. Heller is an interesting character, the writing is good, and I loved the true history behind the stories.

Jim says

As the title says, this is a collection of short stories featuring Nate Heller, a Chicago private detective. I haven't read any of the author's full length novels featuring this character but I really enjoyed these stories. He lays out the stories, not in the order written, but in the timeframe of the lead character's life from the early 1930s to the late 1940s. So we see a young Nate Heller near the beginning of his Chicago PI career to an older Nate Heller residing, at least part time, in LA.

The stories all involve real crimes into which the author has inserted his character. Following each story, he cites the research done for each story and the actual outcome of the "case". While the title also refers to gunfire (lightning) in Chicago, the stories take place in Chicago, Cleveland, and Los Angeles. Two of the stories feature Eliot Ness in a supporting role (real cases Ness was involved in). As a fan of old movies from the 40's and 50's, I particularly enjoyed his descriptions of how the characters were dressed - the old movie images came leaping into my mind's eye.

In my younger years, I tended to read a lot of short fiction, mostly SciFi, but drifted away from it. I think the form works well for the mystery genre. I recently read Grisham's "Ford County" and thought it was some of his best work. So, if you are a fan of gangster/PI myteries and a fan of short fiction, you may want to give this book a try. It is available as and-book from Amazon.

Victor Carson says

I enjoyed these short, classic-style detective stories, but not as much as the original Nate Heller novel, True

Detective. Like the novel, the stories are set in the 1930s and 1940s, mostly in Chicago. A few are set California, among the movie stars and mob figures of the day. The stories are sexier than the classic private eye stories of the 30s but maintain the quick, direct style of detective magazine pieces. The names and locations are interesting and the fact that each story has a basis in fact makes the reading experience fun and diverting. The longest story in the group would take no longer than 20 minutes to finish. Try the novel, True Detective, first for a more complete background for the detective, Nate Heller, his brief stint with the Chicago police, and his involvement with Al Capone, Frank Nitti, and the assassination of the Mayor of Chicago in the 1930s.

Casey Harris says

This was a Kindle book that I picked up while it was on sale, as an introduction to the Nathan Heller PI character. I only knew a little bit about the author, that he was the guy who wrote "Road to Perdition," a Tom Hanks/Paul Newman movie that I've always wanted to see but haven't gotten around to yet.

I didn't think I'd be making it all the way through this one, as it oozes dime-store pulp detective fiction from the '30's and '40's, but I'll have to admit the stories quickly grew on me, not the least reason why being that all of the cases in the book were based on actual crimes. I soon came to realize the writing style was purposely made to echo the old detective stories, and was quickly able to play along with the author. The stories aren't for everyone...there are some fairly adult situations (which aren't too gratuitous, for the most part) and rough language, but if you're intrigued, it might be worth a try. I spent a buck on my e-copy, so it wasn't a big risk and it paid out pretty well.

Nev Thomas says

Good short stories of tough guy private eye of the 30's

Cat. says

OK, these were good stories. I may have to read the novels now, if they are also based on real cases from the early/mid-20th century in Chicago. Nate's kind of a jerk in a lot of ways, at least when viewed through the modern eye, but he is a perfect example of noir fiction, which is fun. I guess what I'm saying is that if unenlightened comments re women, minorities, LGBT people, and anyone other than non-white men are going to piss you off, consider yourself warned.

It was fun to watch Heller evolve over the decades these stories cover, from about 1930 into the '50s. And the snippets of background after each story were fun too, giving a good anchor into the reality of the times.

Monica Willyard says

I remember reading in a magazine in the early 80s that private eye books and movies were dead, never to be resurrected. Supposedly, psychological crime fiction was the wave of the future. I am so glad that writer got it wrong! :-)

The stories in this collection are all hard boiled private eye fiction reminiscent of Dashiell Hammett, Ross McDonald, and Raymond Chandler. While I noticed undertones of each of these authors, these stories are all unique and have their own unique voice. Each story combines the facts of a murder case from the 1930s and 1940s with the authors speculation on how the crime was committed and who did it. The detective he has created is honest enough that we want to cheer for him but isn't gullible or as clean as a Boy Scout. He is tough, but he can feel pain and even fear. He loves the ladies, and some of the ladies love him. Others try to get something over on him and find themselves in a heap of trouble.

The descriptions of scenery and characters seem almost real, as if I were watching a movie instead of reading a book. I like that very much.

After reading this collection, I can confidently say this is the kind of detective I would want on my case were I in trouble. I haven't read any of the novels from the series, and I plan to rectify that as soon as possible.

Kath says

A delightful mix of reasonable length complete stories which are based on real life crimes from that era. The style is easy to read, not needlessly overdescriptive, the characters are all fleshed out nicely, and the stories flowed well and ended smoothly, not in a rush like some short stories I have read. Some of the descriptive prose did make me giggle and I wish I had bookmarked some examples. There were obviously words and phrases that I didn't completely follow, being English and not familiar with 1930's US slang, but these were easily guessed given the context and didn't detract from my overall enjoyment or understanding of the stories.

As I do not normally read this genre I do not know how these stories or style compare to others, however I know what I like to read and so I did a bit more digging and found out that all the Nathan Heller back catalogue have been released on Kindle at Amazon and at a pretty good price too. Have to admit I one-clicked the lot!

HBalikov says

Collins offers a unique blend of true crime and hard-boiled detective. His P.I., Nate Heller, is based in Chicago during the 1930s and 1940s. The cases are as realistic as the settings and Collins gets it all right. The short story format makes for fast-paced action rather than character development, but the Nate Heller at the beginning has changed (or evolved) by the time that the last case is put in the file.

This is my first exposure to Collins and Heller and I am sufficiently captivated that I will try one of the novels in the near future

Rob Wickings says

Not the sort of thing you'd normally consider when you think of histfic, but Max Allen Collins has impeccable credentials and knows both his era of choice and how to make a story jump off the page and grab at your throat.

Let's do the count. Multi-Shamus winner, the man that Chester Gould trusted to bring Dick Tracy into the 21st century, writer of the graphic novel The Road To Perdition, that was adapted into the highly successful movie. Mac Allen Collins knows Prohibition-era America, and his Nate Heller stories show him at the top of

his form.

Chicago Lightning is an anthology of Nate Heller stories, tracking the mob-friendly gumshoe's rise from a one-man operator on the mean streets of Chicago to the sick glamour of Golden Age Hollywood. Each of the stories are rooted in real-life cases, scandals and murders. Heller wasn't there, but Collins is convincing enough in the details to make you think he could be.

This is a quick read, but a juicy and substantial one. Recommended if you like it hard-boiled and shot through with black humour and noir style.

Michel Brooks says

Good set of short stories. Historical fiction is the best way to describe set back in the 1930's and 1940's. Good author.

David Williams says

Chicago Lightning is the second collection of Nathan Heller short stories that Max Allan Collins has released through Amazon's Thomas & Mercer imprint. The first volume, Triple Play featured novellas and longer short stories. This volume covers the more standard sized short stories. This collection of thirteen stories fill in some gaps in the Heller cases. A few are cases that are referred to in the Heller novels.

Collins says that he prefers to write novels more than short stories, but you wouldn't know that from the stories in this collection. Heller is at some of his finest. In "The Perfect Crime" he is bodyguard, and avenger of Thelma Todd. In "The Strawberry Teardrop" he helps Elliot Ness track down, and then cover up the identity of the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run. The novel Angel in Black is a sequel to this story. In "Scrap" Heller does a job for an old neighborhood friend named Jake Rubenstein. Rubenstein is a minor racketeer mixed up in a crooked union. We meet Rubenstein again in Collins' novel Target Lancer. Of course most of us know Rubenstein by the name that he used when he moved to Dallas: Jack Ruby.

These are good stories and it is enjoyable to occasionally see Heller work on a case that doesn't involve a famous character. The more I read the Heller novels I don't know why someone hasn't jumped on the chance to make these into a series. These short stories prove that Heller isn't just a vehicle that Collins uses to talk about famous cases. Of course those of us who have read the books could readily attest to Heller's likability. I for one would love to see Heller developed by a station like HBO or Showtime. Of course I would only like to see it if Collins were part of the project. Nothing would be worse than seeing these fun, well written stories messed up. Don't wait for a TV deal. Get the Nathan Heller novels and story collections by Max Allan Collins and enjoy some really great hardboiled, noir fiction.
