



Strip Search

William Bernhardt

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She likes the sudden seconds of sheer terror. The neon dreams fit perfectly with the dreams that wake her up at night: about the man she loved and lost, about the constant temptations in her life, and about the odds that inevitably she'll be in the right place at the right time to look naked, human madness in the eye.

Welcome to the world of Susan Pulaski, an unconventional and unusually subversive Las Vegas police behaviorist who's already been canned once and has never been needed more. In the Sin City, someone is ritually murdering handpicked victims, each with dirty secrets in their past. The killer's gimmick: Not only does he leave behind parts of the victims' bodies, he also writes obscure mathematical formulas—in their blood. Pulaski doesn't have a clue what the codes mean. But she knows someone who will.

Darcy O'Bannon is a twenty-six-year-old whose autistic savant skills are perfect for unraveling such mysteries as how many rivets are in the Eiffel Tower and how many Elvis impersonators there will be in the year 2020. As it turns out, innocent Darcy can also think along the arcane lines of Vegas's most savage serial killer, peering into a numerological mystery that stretches back hundreds of years.

With her own life one spark away from going off the rails, her department turned against her, and the lives of those she cares most about in jeopardy, Pulaski hunts for dangerous prey in the shadow of the Strip—with herself as the perfect bait. And the closer she gets, the more terrifying and intriguing the case becomes, for the person she's tracking possesses truly ingenious powers—and a heart full of hate.

The incomparable William Bernhardt brings to life America's most fascinating city and the people who police it, while he invites the reader to join one woman's fight to stay sane, stay alive, and keep a killer from making the most shocking score of all.

From the Hardcover edition.

Strip Search Details

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Author : William Bernhardt

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Cynthisa says

Definitely a weaker effort compared to Dark Eye, the first book in this series. But I simply find the Susan/Darcy dynamic really compelling -- unlike any other books out there. Plus, a good serial killer tale is always a plus. Will be interested to see where the author takes these characters on the third round -- if there is another. This second one was perilously close to repeating the first in certain key ways, so the third book will be make or break.

Robin says

This was a fast and furious suspense/thriller with elements of psychology and descriptions of gruesome mutilations (the book starts with a man getting his face "deep-fried"). This is the second in the series featuring Susan Pulaski (first one is DARK EYE), a Las Vegas police behaviorist and her sidekick, Darcy O'Bannon, an autistic savant and son of the police chief. Susan is hired to profile the killer that is targeting people who have in some way neglected a past offspring. A past alcoholic and quite obnoxious at times, Susan isn't a particularly likeable character, but the story barrels along quite nicely despite knowing from the start who is masterminding the killings. One issue I had with the book was that at times I felt part of the explanations of autism and part of the plot was borrowed from THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME (an excellent novel of an autistic teen).

Julie Cordova says

I picked this book up looking for comparables to my own writing. I loved that I got caught up in the story so much I forgot why I picked the book up. I stopped being a writer "working" and just read.

Brian O'Leary says

Some unique stuff, including some math, which as a math teacher, I always appreciate.

Glenda says

Suspense, genius, madness, math, addiction, sex, birth, cancer ... and a perfect cozy-type ending.

Looking forward to discussing this one with book club.

Victoria says

This was, I suppose, a relatively solid sequel to *Dark Eye: A Novel of Suspense*, but it wasn't as exciting or engaging as the first. I certainly would not recommend reading it without first reading *Dark Eye: A Novel of Suspense*. This set of serial murders revolves around math. I am not particularly inclined towards math, so I certainly did not catch any errata there, and found the premise to be more engaging than I would have otherwise expected. The book's main flaw fell into the realm of character development. In *Dark Eye: A Novel of Suspense*, Susan's weaknesses are well-grounded and explicable. Here, her addictions take a new and far less credible turn. The role her supposed "new best friend" plays is downright unbelievable, and caused a general lack of sympathy for both her and Susan. Susan's relationship with Darcy was still interesting, but also became less and less credible, and though it seems this is where the series ends, the conclusion is open enough that Bernhardt left room to continue their arc. Perhaps he ran out of ideas for Susan's addiction to turn? I did think that the autistic angle made for an interesting premise, but ultimately this one did not really measure up to the first book.

Don says

This was my first William Bernhardt book, so I may give him another chance but...

This book made me yell at certain pages like some people yell at a movie screen when something completely stupid happens. It would take pages to discuss all of the problems with this book so I will just give a few of the bigger ones here.

1. The characters are not well developed. It was all but impossible to know any of the people in the book well enough to care about what happened to them along the way.
2. On a scale of realistic situations between 1 and 10, with 10 being the most realistic, this book gets a .05. There were dozens of examples of things so outlandish that I wanted to call the author and ask if he was serious or if he allowed some young relative to write certain chapters.
3. Most of the premises meant to build "drama" or "suspense" lacked foundation. In one part the main character is said to have bungled the investigation in many ways and was hanging on by a thread. The problem was there were no mistakes made, just the usual process of putting the pieces together. The author just made other characters over-react to create tension.

In conclusion, I know that everyone has a different taste in books. This author has obviously sold a few copies, but I would not give this book more than fifty pages, if you don't like it, don't waste any more time. I won't give his next book more than that, if I find one I will even consider.

Diana says

This book is why we should never judge a book by it's cover, or in this case it's title. My husband got this book for free and I almost didn't read it because the title made me think it was something entirely different than it turned out to be. After reading the description on the back, I was intrigued. It turned out to be a pretty good read with enough twists and turns to keep the reader interested.

Steve says

I liked Susan and Darcy's characters. I find the sexual abuse of children by parents to be more graphic than I wanted and more pervasive as a topic than I wanted to read in escape fiction.

Down to 2 stars due to the child abuse.

I do understand why he included it since it was a contralto motivation.

But as a mandated reporter, I don't want my leisure reading to include it.

Sorry!!!

Welcome to the world of Susan Pulaski, an unconventional and unusually subversive Las Vegas police behaviorist who's already been canned once and has never been needed more. In the Sin City, someone is ritually murdering handpicked victims, each with dirty secrets in their past. The killer's gimmick: Not only does he leave behind parts of the victims' bodies, he also writes obscure mathematical formulas—in their blood. Pulaski doesn't have a clue what the codes mean. But she knows someone who will.

Darcy O'Bannon is a twenty-six-year-old whose autistic savant skills are perfect for unraveling such mysteries as how many rivets are in the Eiffel Tower and how many Elvis impersonators there are in Las Vegas.

Rick Ludwig says

When I reviewed the first book in this series, a specific aspect of the violence described put me off. This second journey with Susan Pulaski also contained graphic violence, but this time my enjoyment of the tight story and intriguing complexity involved was in no way diminished. The characters were more vital this time around and the motivations well defined. This was a fine read. It was also exciting in a way that many books try to be, but aren't. I read it in a single sitting because I could not put it down. This is Bernhardt at the top of his form. I look forward to more stories with this protagonist and her astonishing assistant, Darcy.

Denise Going says

A bit gory and violent - but I liked the way it was presented. Good story.

Avid Series Reader says

Strip Search is the 2nd book in the Susan Pulaski series by William Bernhardt. Susan is a psychologist working as a behaviorist consultant for the modern-day Las Vegas Police Department. Susan was a full-fledged officer for years until her husband's death and her alcoholic breakdown. Lead homicide detective Granger resents Susan for two reasons: he only got the lead job when she lost it, and her husband was his partner. Chief O'Bannon appreciates Susan's skill as a profiler but fears she may no longer be able to handle the stress of a tough murder case. Susan has a strong friendship with the chief's autistic son Darcy, and his brilliance has been key to solving previous investigations. Darcy wants to be a detective and has a powerful crush on Susan.

A serial killer is dismembering victims and leaving behind mathematical equations as clues. Darcy would be a natural to solve the math clues, but O'Bannon forbids Susan to include Darcy on the case due to the danger. Susan's best friend Amelia is a crime scene analyst who provides friendly "down time" support with dinners after work. Under mounting pressure, Susan finds herself unable to make significant progress profiling the murderer, and copes with tranquilizers (rather than alcohol).

The story effectively portrays how situations go wrong: Susan sabotages her ability by her weakness, and O'Bannon and Granger hamper the investigation by preventing access. Susan and Darcy must break the rules and place themselves in extreme danger to solve the case.

Toni says

Strip Search involves a homicide investigation, as seen through the eyes of two people: Susan Pulaski, a Las Vegas police behaviorist, and Darcy O'Bannion, an autistic savant.

Part of the story is told from Darcy's point of view, with stream-of-consciousness paragraph-long sentences in which he treats himself like a computer, forcing himself to stop and reboot on occasion when he gets so overloaded with facts that he can't communicate. Those sections are an enlightening look at how an autistic person's thought processes may actually work. Even for those who don't like police procedurals or suspense/mysteries might enjoy reading Strip Search for the insights it gives into an autistic savant's mind and character. For those who do like this type of mystery, it's also an exciting story.

Darcia Helle says

This is a fast-paced read that I can best describe as an intellectual thriller. The plot revolves around intricate math, philosophy, and religion. For me, the math really overpowers the story. This aspect is quite detailed, and at times feels as if we've shifted into textbook reading.

The characters feel secondary to the plot. They aren't especially well developed or believable. Susan has a background in psychology, yet is unable to grasp the most obvious cues in her personal and professional life. Granger, Susan's nemesis, is a one-dimensional stereotype. The 'bad guys' are a muddled mess. I think, in the end, the author was going for sympathetic appeal, though it just didn't work for me. The only character I connected with and enjoyed was Darcy.

A major incident between Susan and her supposed best friend is just absurd. I don't want to give spoilers, and it's hard to clarify this without doing so. But this incident is a major turning point for Susan, and the fact that neither Susan nor her best friend foresaw the outcome, particularly given their levels of intelligence and experience, simply lacks credulity.

The writing itself flows well, and did keep me reading to find out what happened. But, in hindsight, I wouldn't choose it to read and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone else.

Jerry King says

2007
