



The Boys from Santa Cruz

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When troubled teen Luke Sweet is left orphaned and homeless, the court ships him off to a treatment program for juvenile delinquents in Humboldt County. Little Luke has a twisted past, though, and when several members of the group turn up dead, he quickly becomes the number one suspect. Agent Pender must track him down before anyone else gets hurt. But when clues about another psycho-killer surface, the case becomes much more dangerous-and deranged-than anyone thought possible.

The Boys from Santa Cruz Details

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From Reader Review The Boys from Santa Cruz for online ebook

Irl Newham says

Interesting main character. I feel like I started in the middle of this author's books about this character. I have so many different character series going I don't think I will start another one though Pender is a compelling character.

Pisces51 says

THE BOYS FROM SANTA CRUZ (E.L. Pender Book 5) By Jonathan Nasaw
MY REVIEW TWO STARS

I just finished reading the last installment of the E.L. Pender series, published in 2010, thus likely to also be the final book from Nasaw that features his colorful one-of-a-kind FBI Special Agent. Perhaps not surprisingly this novel tells the tale of a case from Pender's rich past of hunting serial killers. It begins in 1985 when Pender was still actively engaged with the FBI's Liaison Division, then jumps ahead ten years to the mid-90's, still at a point in time where Pender was employed by the bureau.

The beginning of the novel is interesting enough in that a deranged "couple" who were serial murderers that profited from a career of making "snuff films" get their just dues---albeit both by taking the coward's way out and eating their respective guns. The alpha male in this happy couple ("Big Luke") leaves behind a 15-year-old son named (yeah, that's right) "Little Luke".

The story unfolds using the author's preferred method of alternating first person accounts between (or in some cases among) the characters who populate the book. In this instance, the reader primarily "hears from" the young Luke Sweet, who has a lot to say beginning with the long distance phone call from this dad that is answered that day in a ramshackle trailer in the middle of nowhere. The sound of that ringing telephone signals the end of "Little Luke's" world as he knows it.

This is the fourth novel I've read by Jonathan Nasaw so I was accustomed to his style of writing. Specifically, the author allows the reader to experience through first person accounts the thoughts and feelings of the victims, the killer or killers, and of course the protagonists. This is done by alternating chapters which is essentially how the entire story both unfolds and is told. It has been a remarkably effective method that has previously created unputdownable serial killer thrillers.

That said, I found myself about 1/3 of the way through this book, and had no idea where the author was trying to lead me. I was reading the tragic tale of a teenage boy ("Little Luke") who was NOT a killer and whose life experiences following the suicides of his father (and "Big Luke's" paramour) went from bad to worse. The kid did make some errors in judgment, but more significantly it appeared that virtually no authority figure in his universe would listen to him with an open mind or treat him fairly. Catastrophes that were not of his own making kept befalling him like a hail storm from hell, which in turn kept sinking him deeper into trouble with his remaining blood relatives and the legal authorities.

FBI Special Agent Pender (and his partner Rizzo) encounter the boy following the death(s) of his dad and his father's lover. The teenager provides an unvarnished, albeit sensational, account of the events surrounding the death of his dad's lover there at the dump, and the means by which a boat load of damning evidence was torched and destroyed by her. The kid is labeled an incorrigible psychopath right out of the box. FBI Special

Agent Pender was not even willing to look at the forensic evidence in the case and was clearly prejudiced. Pender's actions were never clear to me, that is why, when the factual forensics did not coincide with his own pre-conceived characterization of the young man did he not modify his own profile.

I did consider that I had been reading the first person account provided by the boy. However, readers who were not privy to a thoughtful, sensitive, and intuitive Pender from prior books would not know to question whether or not the kid's account was (I don't know---self-serving, delusional?) It is all the more confusing because the teenager's account of the shooting death of his father's lover was proven to be accurate by the forensic evidence collected at the scene and the autopsy results. Pender just basically scoffs in the face of contradictory findings that clearly challenge his notion that the 15-year-old was an active participant in the "family's" snuff film enterprise, holding firm to his conviction the boy is a psychopath who cannot be saved and needs to be culled from society.

The unsympathetic character of FBI Special Agent E.L. Pender is not featured prominently during the early part of the book. "Little Luke" narrates his story until where he is deceived by a crippled self-professed "bounty hunter" and delivered not to the legal authorities but rather to a nuthouse. The boy is committed to a lockdown long-term psychiatric facility, and kept anesthetized on "big gulp Thorazine" until his mid-twenties. Luke, the man, literally "explodes" out of the crazy house with his list of those folks who robbed him of his youth. He was labeled an incurable psychopath and they threw away the key. He was not tried as an adult in the legal system for his alleged crimes, which included murder. Thus, the reader is not privy to any conclusive objective evidence.

The book "time jumps" to a decade after Luke Sweet's "false imprisonment" and long-term chemical restraint. The individuals on "Little Luke's" fantasy hit list start dying horrible deaths, beginning with the grandparents who signed him into the psych facility in the first place, ostensibly to avoid the 15-year-old's prosecution as an adult. A few people suspect that Luke Sweet, now a grown man, did not die in the carnage of the destroyed psychiatric facility as reported. There becomes a conscientious effort on the part of FBI Special Agent E.L. Pender to determine whether the number one suspect in the suspicious deaths could still be alive and killing the people on the list of people he believed were culpable in the destruction of his life.

It is in the latter part of this book when the focus is shifted to Pender's hunt for a serial killer, namely the adult Luke Sweet. It is not my intention to regurgitate every twist and turn of this novel as part of my review. Likewise, I do not want to spoil any the surprises that the author has in store, albeit very late in the game. However, I feel that I have to exploit how that so many methods that are deployed by Nasaw in his prior books just fall flat in this singular outing.

Pender and an unlikely ally in the crippled PI Epstein (the self-professed "bounty hunter" who delivered "Little Luke" to the nuthouse) wind up at a retreat led by one of the final three victims, one Dr. Oliver (Pender and his cohort being the other two). All of the participants on the retreat willingly take a powerful hallucinogenic drug to enhance their experience at the conference led by the "enlightened" Dr. Oliver (the psychiatrist who treated Luke---- at the psychiatric hospital). To be fair, Pender and his partner are pretending to be journalists and are thus hoodwinked into taking the psychedelic drug by Dr. Oliver's right-hand man. In any case we then have everyone except the would be assassin drugged out of their collective minds, including our two undercover heroes. The mission-oriented killer is out of his mind without the aid of LSD which still gives him a major advantage in zeroing in on and eliminating all three of the remaining men on Luke's fantasy hit list. I entertained the possibility that the author was attempting to inject a dose of levity in providing a look-see into the minds of Pender and his good-natured companion who are both completely stoned and hallucinating and can't form a lucid thought between them. That possibility gained a little traction with me when I thought about how the mentally ill, well, completely nuts is more accurate, killer may be hallucinating only a little less at the time of the big showdown at the end of the book.

If it was meant to be funny, it fell completely flat with me. I had about 30 minutes left in the book and I

dragged it out for three nights in a row because I just didn't care about the ending.

Here are just a few of the reasons that I did not like this book, and rated it accordingly. Pender is not likeable in this installment, nor is he prominently featured until well into the novel. There is no antagonist that you hate, or even dislike. The adult Luke Sweet elicited more sympathy from me than either Pender or the crippled PI who were ostensibly the "good guys". Black humor didn't work at all in this book, and that is a first. Finally, the plot doesn't work for me, in part because I don't understand it. The plot twist at the end of the book, while not anticipated, didn't feel like an especially interesting or satisfying or even a "you got me" kind of surprise.

Frankly, if I didn't know better (as people are prone to saying) I would think that Nasaw didn't even write this book. It did not work on ANY level for me as a dedicated reader of several of his novels at this point. I wasn't thrilled with the prior installment (TWENTY-SEVEN BONES) but it is a masterpiece compared with this outing circa 2010.

Katrin says

Das zweite Nasaw Buch das ich abgebrochen habe. Nach 100 Seiten hatte ich keine Lust mehr, weil es mich absolut nich angesprochen hat.

Abgesehen davon, stimmt der Klappentext auf der Rückseite nicht wirklich mit dem überein was wirklich Sache ist.

Carol says

What Did I Think?

As you can see from the rating...not much. I'm not a prude and I have certainly read more than my share of crime novels that was full of dirty language and over the top sex... but this was even too much me. One of the big draw-backs was that it's hard to get behind a book when you completely dislike the main character...or for that matter, all of the characters in the story. In the end I was left with actual disgust for Agent Pender and the great majority of the other characters. It didn't come across for me as a thriller but just a very sad commentary on life...the inadequacies of the justice system and the breakdown of the family structure. If this was what Mr. Nasaw indented to do then he succeeded admirably. The 2 Star rating was more than generous.

Stephanie says

I wish we could do 1/2 stars...I would rate this a solid 3 1/2 stars. Great thriller, lots of mind screwing, just a little slower paced at times so I couldn't give it quite a full 4 stars.

Poor kid grows up in a family whose father is in charge of snuff film ring, his mother died when he was young, and whose step-mother has both boobs and a penis. He lives in a beat up school bus outside of the family home and sleeps on a dirty mattress. You want to feel so badly for him and actually through most of the book I did, Nasaw does a great job at making you ask "wait...does this kid really have such shitty luck, or

is he really a raging manipulative psycho?". The truth doth reveal itself.

BlackWolf1272 says

"Der Sohn des Teufels" hat mich durch seinen Klappentext und seinem Cover so sehr gelockt, dass ich mit hohen Erwartungen an das Buch herangegangen bin. Und doch muss ich sagen, dass das Buch mir nicht das gab, was mir versprochen bzw. Was es mir vermittelt hat.

Hier möchte ich auf drei Punkte eingehen: 1. Der Klappentext und 2. Die Charaktere und 3. der Plot.

Zum Klappentext muss ich sagen, dass er in vielen, vielen Dingen, besonders Einzelheiten, nicht dem entspricht, was im Buch vorkommt! Es ist verständlich, dass das nicht das einzige Buch ist, bei dem Klappentext der totale Mist ist, aber der Verlag sollte sich doch Mühe geben, vor allem, wenn es der Heyne Verlag ist, den ich wirklich sehr gerne mag. Allerdings weiß ich persönlich auch nicht, wer den Klappentext eigentlich schreibt.

Nun aber das, was falsch ist. Der erste Satz ist schon mit den komplett falschen Wörtern geschrieben worden, denn seine Stiefmutter wurde nicht von den Aasgeiern AUFgefressen worden, sondern es wurden nur wenige Stücke von ihr abgebissen. Wenige, das bedeutet nicht AUFgefressen! Oder? Außerdem zeigt sich das Grauen nicht recht bei Luke. Außerdem denkt man beim zweiten Satz, dass es sofort in der Psychatrie losgeht, was nicht stimmt. Das ist nun wirklich nicht schlimm, aber doch etwas verwirrend am Anfang. Doch eines der schlimmsten Dinge ist, dass seine Entlassung nicht näherrückt! Er wird nicht entlassen, er wird niemals entlassen! Niemals! Eine Entlassung wird nicht erwähnt, ganz und gar nicht. Außerdem bringt nicht der FBI Typ Luke in die Psychatrie, sondern jemand vollkommen anderes! Derjenige, der den Klappentext geschrieben hat, muss das Buch überflogen haben, anders kann ich es mir nicht erklären.

Ein Klappentext sollte doch das wiedergeben, was im Buch ist.

Zusammengefasst war ich nach dem Lesen des Buches sehr enttäuscht über den Klappentext.

Die Charakter waren allerdings unglaublich vielfältig und ich hab da so meine Lieblings- und Hasscharakter. Kommen wir erst zu Luke Sweet. Luke Sweet ist 15 Jahre und geht nicht in die Schule, kiff und trinkt sogar ab und an mal ein Bierchen. Ich muss gestehen, dass Luke Sweet mein Lieblingscharakter ist. Trotz allem, dass er als Psychopath gilt, mag ich ihn eher als den FBI-Beamten E.L. Pender, der mich in einigen Situationen zur Weißglut trieb. Kann sein, dass es nur mir so geht, aber ich mag diesen Typen nicht, der ist mir total unsympathisch. Doch glücklicherweise kommt dieser anfangs nicht so häufig vor, wie es in der Mitte des Buches ist. Jonathan Nasaw ist es sehr gelungen die Charaktere zu gestalten. Er hat Luke zu einem besonderen Menschen gemacht, er gibt ihm dieses Etwas, das jeder Psychopath hat, aber doch ist er anders. Man kann miterleben, wie sich sein Charakter verändert, wie er sich immer mehr nach Rache sehnt und man selbst kannst sich so gut in seine Wut hineinversetzen.

Zu E.L. Pender muss ich sagen, dass ich ihn nicht leiden kann. Er ist mir nicht so ein FBI-Beamte, der er hätte sein sollen. Sein Charakter war mir ebenfalls nicht geheuer und sein Gesamtbild....

sympathischer war mir dagegen der Privatdetektiv. Um nicht zu spoilern sage ich nicht viel zu ihm, da er eine recht wichtige Rolle spielt. Sein Humor, seine Weise und sein Denken beeinflusst einen doch etwas mehr, als man denken mag.

Die Charaktere sind meiner Meinung nach sehr gelungen, denn man braucht doch auch Charaktere, die man nicht leiden kann und manchmal ist es sogar der, den man vielleicht mögen hätte sollen.

Der Plot ist ebenfalls super, wenn man das Gesamtbild kennt. Anfangs war ich so begeistert vom Buch, dass ich nur davon schwärmen kann. Die Schreibweise hat mir sofort gefallen, es ist etwas anders, etwas frischer (für mich) und fließend. Aus Lukes Sicht zu lesen, hat mich immer wieder erfreut, es hat mir immer wieder

Spaß gemacht seinen Gedanken zu folgen und versuchen zu verstehen. Doch in der Mitte des Buches, nachdem Luke in der Anstalt war, hatte ich meinen Tiefpunkt, bei dem ich nur noch sagen kann, dass ich es nicht verstanden habe und dass ich mehr als enttäuscht war. Ich fühlte mich regelrecht betrogen. Ich dachte mir, dass etwas nicht stimmen konnte, dass da etwas falsch ist, doch falsch gedacht. Ab einem gewissen Zeitpunkt, ab einer gewissen Passage, klärt sich alles auf und du atmest erleichtert auf und verstehst es endlich. Trotz der großen Enttäuschung in der Mitte des Buches, habe ich jedoch nie daran gedacht es abzubrechen, denn es ist doch noch spannend und gut geschrieben. Die Spannung lässt nie nach!

Es kommt immer was neues, es fesselt dich und es reißt dich mit.

Ich habe zudem ein anderes Ende erhofft, wobei es von Anfang an klar ist, dass das nicht passiert. Welches Buch hat auch kein gewisses Happy End für die Hauptprotagonisten? (Ja es gibt Ausnahmen, wie Alligiant! Aber das ist etwas vollkommen anderes!)

Fazit: Bei diesem Buch hatte ich meine Höhen und Tiefen, was völlig in Ordnung ist. Wer richtig brutale Thriller mag, sollte sich "Der Sohn des Teufels" nicht kaufen. Ich hatte es mir doch brutaler vorgestellt, als es eigentlich ist.

Allerdings muss ich auch sagen, dass es für niemanden geeignet ist, der eine Abneigung von aufgespießten Menschen und Aasgeiern in deren Nähe haben.

Ich bin froh das Buch gelesen haben zu können, sodass ich den Kauf eher denen empfehle, die es runtergesetzt finden, die den Autor mögen und denen, die weder schwache Nerven noch richtig Brutale Szenen erwarten.

lindsay says

This one was a page turner right from the start. I really enjoyed all of the characters and was pleasantly surprised with all the twists and turns that was all packed into this page turner of a story.

Levian says

after his dad shot himself to refuse being taken into custody and his stepmom committed suicide after burning their trailer down, Luke was left orphaned and homeless. the court sent him off to a juvenile program. but after several members of the group turned up dead, Luke became their number one suspect again. former agent Pender was assigned on the case, insisting on tracking the kid down before anyone else got hurt. but soon, he came across more clues about another psycho killer, who turned the case into a much more dangerous situation than it originally was.

Pender often reminded me of some giant bear in colorful clothes and checkered hat. the story took a decade to tell the story of Luke, where he was a 15-year-old teenager who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time for more than once, which landed him in a mental hospital that took things into their own hands and neutralize their psychopathic patients by adding chemicals into their daily dose. by the time he regained a clear mind, it was 10 years later. Pender was brought back into the old and unsolved case of Luke, which again, was led by his gut intuition. it was difficult not to be amused or entertained by Pender, a huge man with such humor and characteristic who always manage to catch the bad guy.

my review: here

Jenn says

Nasaw's current books are not nearly as scary and gross as his earlier ones. Which is a real shame. Yet I keep buying them and following Pender's experiences.

I almost feel that thus net at a climax and then just withered away at the end. I expected a big clash and was a wee bit disappointed. Still, I wonder where Pender will be sent next for his next big case.

Bobby Love says

The Boys From Santa Cruz was a disturbing and graphic thriller. It was about a 15 year old boy named Luke Sweet, who is the main character and narrator. Luke was growing up in a trailer in the hidden hills of Sierra Nevada's just outside Marshall City, California. Luke lived in the trailer with his step mom and his dad, one day he got a phone call early in the morning from his Father. His dad sounded panicked and told him to quickly give the phone to his mother. On the phone his step mom had started crying and repeatedly said ok, she handed the phone back over to Luke. Luke could hear people yelling from the phone saying "put your hands up," and things like that. Luke's father then said, "I want you to run away to your Grandparents house in Santa Cruz," then hung up. Luke's Step mom walked back into his bedroom and said to Luke "if you're here when I come out I'll kill you." Luke went outside and hid, when his step mom followed him outside he watched her set a suitcase on fire and shoot herself. The story goes on to continue the detailed life of his parents, who it turns out were drug dealers and generally horrible human beings. Luke's problems are just beginning. His life continues to be tangled in his parents criminal past. He is running from the law, including an FBI agent, named Pender. The book goes back and forth with Luke and Pender being the focus. Pender is a character in other Jonathan Nasaw books. His specialty is chasing serial killers. That is one of the twists in this book as Luke's dad turns out to be one. The evilness that 15 year old Luke is exposed to, is just overwhelming and unbelievable. The story was so confusing and graphic it was hard to read. It included horrible things like his parents raping young teenage girls and videotaping it. Luke was the only character who was remotely likeable and was barely that. At some points the book became so disturbing that I didn't want to finish the book. I read the book only because it was on The New York Times bestseller list. I think it was on the list because of how graphic and how much detail there was in it. I liked the writing style the author had, but I hated the story and plot.

Diane says

When Luke Sweet Senior takes a few bullets and dies in a robbery attempt, his teenaged son, Luke Junior, is left to the mercy of the courts--and the misnomer that justice prevails. It does not prevail, in many cases, and the wheels of justice do grind slowly, not always in the right direction. The youngster is treated to the horrors of survival in a world of indifferent and often vicious adults. What this does to his life will appall you, I am sure. A bit of fiction that runs closer to reality than we'd care to examine, I'm certain. Fiction imitating life.

Jonathan Nasaw has written a great thriller. The characters are colorful, right down to the FBI agent's rather bizarre dress code, and their motives are clear. The story has a winding, twisting plot that kept this reader turning the pages. With the last crumb of mystery unveiled, a sense of sadness prevailed, along with the troubling thought that many people slip through the cracks of society and it appears it cannot be helped.

This story takes you on a thrill ride that spans judicial indifference and human error that will chill you and

keep you on the edge of your seat. If you are like me, you will experience anger and frustration, as well as the pain of the character, Luke Sweet Junior, whose life is in the hands of strangers. Strangers who jump to conclusions, compounded by delusions and miscalculations.

Highly Recommended.

Pat says

This is the first book by this author that I have read. If this doesn't scare you and make you look around you at other people with new eyes, nothing will. I would love to know what training and/or experience Mr. Nasaw has had to prepare him to see inside and understand the mind of a serial killer as he does.

David says

About halfway through a scholarly 600-page tome on the reign of the Tudors, I needed a break, so I picked up this thriller at the downtown library. It was my introduction to Mr. Nasaw and I liked what I read.

His ear for dialog is spot-on and his characters ring true. True to the *genre*, some of the situations are a tad contrived but he's skillful enough to keep you guessing until the very end.

I'll be reading some of his other things when I need another respite from "serious" reading.

Josh says

Jonathan Nasaw has long been one of my favourite crime writers. FEAR ITSELF and WHEN SHE WAS BAD are perfect examples of his ability to craft a well defined crime tale that goes the extra mile. THE BOYS FROM SANTA CRUZ is no different in terms of engaging the reader and satisfying that criminal appetite for genre junkies.

Like a lot of crime fiction, Nasaw's E.L. Pender is a lone wolf-type working liaison for the FBI who steps outside the boundaries of 'safe law enforcement' in order to catch the bad guys. In taking a step back from the present day tone of the series, Nasaw turns our attention to Pender investigating an earlier case in his career involving Luke Sweet, a damaged young man presumed to be a ruthless killer and victim of his upbringing (he was on the phone to his father just prior to his death and saw his father's lover commit suicide, the drug peddling and snuff films his parental figures were involved in doesn't add well to the mix). However, Luke, is really misunderstood and ends up being someone the reader can sympathize with – he's notorious throughout the novel for being in the wrong place at the wrong time; a victim of circumstance and deadly coincidence.

What I love about this book is the shift in perspective and changing point of view. Primarily narrated by Sweet with alternating chapters focused on Pender, we see both sides of the story spread over the course of decades (Luke is admitted to a mental health institution which takes him out of action for some time) which really gives a feel of realism and depth (not all cases are clean cut, this is a perfect example of the blow burn crime fiction).

Not without its humour, Nasaw balances out the macabre nature of his fictional killing spree with light hearted characters and a side bar featuring the personal side of Pender.

THE BOYS FROM SANTA CRUZ, whilst part of a series of crime books featuring Pender, can be read as a standalone (I haven't read the preceding novels for some time yet found this easily readable as a self contained novel) or enjoyed as part of the series. Another highly recommended novel by Jonathan Nasaw.

Tricia says

This is the fifth E. L. Pender book in the series. I have read all of Nasaw's books and I think it is better to read these in order, starting with "The Girls He Adored."

E. L. Pender is a retired FBI agent who was never your typical agent. Noted for his mismatched and colorful clothes, Pender reminds me of a giant teddy bear.

In this novel, the story shifts back to 1985 when Pender was an active agent on a case involving snuff films. During this case, Pender's investigation connects him with a teen, Luke Sweet, whose father was the one linked to the snuff film ring. Luke appears to also be connected with his father's business and eventually ends up in a rehab camp.

The story then brings the reader to 1995. Pender comes across names from the past that remind him of his prior case of Luke Sweet, which brings him back to California to pursue his gut intuition that his older case was never resolved.

Nasaw writes a solid thriller which is fast paced with twists that make this novel hard to put down. I love his Pender character because of his humor, wacky dress code, and his ability to catch the bad guy.

I look forward to reading the next Pender book.
