



Eight Ball Boogie

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Harry Rigby is having a rough time. His relationship is on the rocks, he's hitting the bottle, and his long-lost brother, the amoral Gonzo, is out of prison. Harry investigates the death of a politician's wife - was it the work of an unholy trinity of loyalist gunmen, a rogue Garda and Gonzo?

Eight Ball Boogie Details

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Author : Declan Burke

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From Reader Review Eight Ball Boogie for online ebook

John Gaynard says

This is the first novel of Declan Burke's I have read, although I have enjoyed his blog CRIME ALWAYS PAYS for quite a while. There is a hell of a lot of information packed into the first few pages, to set the context, and then the story takes off and becomes a real, if brutal page turner that lifts the lid on a toxic concoction of Irish parochial politics and the psychopaths who make a living on its edges.

The writing brings to mind other hardboiled Irish writers of the past few years, such as Ken Bruen or Sam Millar, or even the Scottish writer Allan Guthrie, but what makes Burke his own man is the mouth-jockey resilience of his hero, Harry Rigby and the great characterization of some of the essential bit players. Groucho Marx would have been proud to put his name to quite a few pages of the dialog. The plotting and the way the clues all click into place in the final chapters show Burke's mastery of the genre.

Maddy says

RATING: 4.25

Harry Rigby works as an investigator, the kind who looks for the bad stuff that's happening so that he can sell the story to a tabloid, or documents the naughty for a divorce case or searches for lost objects—definitely not a Sam Spade sort of PI. His newest client, David Conway, has an easy task for Harry to perform, which is to observe his wife, Helen, to see if she is having an affair. From this simple situation, a tangled web is woven involving both sides of the law in drug dealing, murder and political tomfoolery. The common element is that Harry is the convenient fall guy for almost everything that happens.

Harry's life has been teetering on the brink of disaster for quite some time, anyway. He's living with a woman who doesn't love him; they haven't had sex in 14 months and the future looks just as barren. His black-hearted brother, Gonzo, has just been released from jail. It's likely that Gonzo will slip a shank between his ribs when they have their welcome hug; he's just that kind of guy. The only bright light in Harry's world is his 4-year-old son, Ben; his love for Ben is the one thing that keeps him functioning in a world that gets uglier by the moment.

EIGHT-BALL BOOGIE is right on the line between hardboiled and noir. Gonzo is an irredeemable sociopath; he screwed the woman who was Harry's true love just because he knew it would hurt him. In spite of the gritty world at the center of this book and the fact that Harry manages to bring some new trade to the local funeral parlor, there is an air of nobility about him. The motivation for everything that he does is protection of his son. He has no self interest in mind; he is not after money, drugs or fame. He only wants to provide a secure place for Ben, and that leavens the darkness of the book with a sense of optimism.

The plot of the book was overly complicated and a bit hard to follow. At times, I found what was happening to the protagonist to be rather implausible, particularly the number of physical injuries he incurred almost without pause. Bullet in the guts? Ooch, ouch, off to the next adventure. But despite these weaknesses, this is a book I highly recommend, a very special book indeed. And that is because of the Burke's writing ability. He has a way of phrasing things that is unusual, sometimes humorous, sometimes touching, but always unique. For example:

"I ghosted back across the street, ducked into the alleyway. The snow had finally stopped falling, the frosty

air causing the snow to harden, crunch underfoot. It was nearly as cold as the marble slab in my chest, the one someone was chiseling my name into, or maybe that was just my heart thumping. The ache in my side was a blunt knife grinding on stone. My stomach was churning eggs, and the ulcer was emitting the kind of high-pitched scream only musically inclined dogs can hear."

There were segments like this scattered throughout the book, and I found that although I was engaged by the plot and characters, I was more anticipating the next wonderful passage than anything else.

EIGHT-BALL BOOGIE is Declan Burke's first book. As time goes on, he'll achieve mastery around plot and characterization. But what he has already in spades is a great gift, the ability to use language in wonderful and innovative ways.

Helena Mulkerns says

The rest of the week is coming on hard and its brakes are shot to hell. Harry Kirby, Eight Ball Boogie

By the end of the third paragraph of Eight Ball Boogie, we have a good idea what to look forward to in the rest of the book. Harry Rigby, a man of dubious profession, scant means, dark humour and not a whole lot of luck, is a gumshoe who has stumbled on a potential goldmine. A local politician's wife has been murdered, and along with his trusty side-kick, Herbie, an anorak of classic proportions, he's one of the first on the scene.

A hardboiled cop challenges, "You're a sick man, Rigby" while our hero snaps back: "It's terminal too." Police chiefs are tough: "He had a Desperate Dan chin and you could have landed a helicopter on his chest in a gale." And we are happy to see the arrival of the first live blonde on page 23: "petite, five-two at most, the kind of late twenties that takes years of practice".

With its seedy street feel, its nocturnal scenarios, its crooked cops, gangsters or all-time losers and its irresolute cynicism, Eight Ball Boogie is both a genre shake-down and an irresistible page-turner. It has style, pace and a fierce, gut-kicking humour that pulls the reader into its dangerous bosom like a cackling old madame.

Burke's Film Noir sensibilities are seen throughout the book. There are repeated nods throughout the text to elements of classics such as The Killers (Robert Siodmak, 1946), The Big Sleep (Howard Hawks, 1946) and Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, 1944). The clincher is that he grabs them from the old-time silver screen and slots them into an Irish framework, with hilarious results. His description of Katie could be a dame like Gloria Graham in Sudden Fear (David Miller, 1952), except that "Her accent had the faintest of northern drawls", which delivers up a babe from Monaghan instead. When she says she wants to stick around to see the "local colour", Harry tells her: "Try grey. We have forty shades."

"What's this?" "They call them newspapers. People read them. You could always look at the pictures." Harry Rigby to crooked cop, Eight Ball Boogie.

The book is full of fabulous small scenes, unforgettable characters and dialogue and one-liners worthy of Bogie on a good day. Like the one in the bar, where Harry sees crazy Baluba Joe (Travis Bickle via Ballyhaunis).

“Alright Joe?”

“Fuggoff.”

“Sound”.

His characters are solid or delightfully outrageous. Nobody could argue with a character like Gonzo, Harry himself is endearing if misguided, and we know that people like Paul Conway, Galway and “The Pros” are all in our midst – Burke has just slotted them all into a wild Irish, post-modern, latter-day noir context that has to be read to be appreciated. Its charm is that it takes one classic genre and metamorphoses it into another that reflects a present day situation with a sharp wit and a stunning, cinematic eye.

Seth Lynch says

I really enjoyed this book: it’s dark, it’s gritty, and it’s funny. The main character is a detective (by any other name) hired to spy on a man’s wife. He is also trying to dig the dirt on a murder to get a scoop in the press. He gets more than his fair share of beatings and more than his fair share of one liners.

As you settle into the book it’s the humour which first gets you. It feels like reading a novel by Raymond Chandler – had he stayed in Ireland rather than going back to The States (and lived for another 60 years or so). This is an Irish book set in modern-day Ireland (of a few years ago) The country is riding the end of a boom, the politicians are feathering their own nests – whilst shitting in everybody else’s – the cops are more likely to dish out a beating than write out a ticket. In that way Burke’s Ireland is much like Chandler’s L.A. The plot of this book hangs together through the twists and turns (there is a nice ending – a nice Noir ending that is). The main character is well-developed; behind the cocky wise cracks he knows he’s gone in too far and is genuinely scared that he won’t be getting out again.

I don’t want to say anything else about the book in case I spoil it for you, because you will be buying it. If you can be arsed to sit there and read this post then you can click on the link below and buy yourself a copy – you won’t regret it. ‘If I fell into a barrel of tits I’d come out sucking my thumb’ – that line alone is worth the entrance fee.

Sandi says

A pretty good debut crime novel set in Ireland featuring a freelance journalist who is a research consultant on the side. Dark humor mixed with violence and snappy dialogue were the main highlights though the plotting was a bit lacking.

Cphe says

Harry Rigby is an information resource kind of guy based in Sligo. He doesn't quite go looking for trouble as trouble usually comes knocking on his door pretty regularly.

This time Harry is involved in murder, drugs, politics, and dubious double crossing friends and family - the usual for Harry Rigby.

I like the character of Harry Rigby, although I wouldn't want him living next door to me. He attracts trouble like a magnet. Harry is a wise cracking guy with some wonderful one liners, and no matter what life seems to throw at him he always seems to bounce back.

I have to confess that I read this book and Slaughter's Hound around the wrong way but I had always wondered about Gonzo and Harry's relationship. The pace was fast in this book, but some leaps of faith were required by the reader with plot development.

I enjoyed it...

Michael Donnelly says

This piece is a detective/mystery novel set in Ireland with all the grittiness that goes along with it. The protagonist is deeply troubled with enough problems to make anyone feel good about their life - fractured family, drugs, alcohol, depression - add to that a mix of psychopaths bent on routine beatings and you have a nice mix.

It was difficult to suspend disbelief that one man could take as much punishment as the protagonist. I also wondered if the author didn't resort to violence as an easy way to move the plot along, and if a bit of nuance wouldn't have been more realistic.

The use of jargon/slang was difficult at first, and takes some work, but once the reader gets the rhythm the reading gets more entertaining.

This is not fine art, but still worth a read.

Seana says

Although this is the first novel Burke wrote--or anyway, had published--I came to it second, after reading the grand *The Big O*, for the simple reason that that was the first and so far only one to be published in the U.S. in regular book format. Although I did manage to get a copy of the print version of *Eightball Boogie*, with it's recent availability on Kindle, many American readers will have a chance to take a look at the book for the first time.

The Big O could justly be called an Elmore Leonard style caper book, with a madcap carnival of characters keeping the action going. Though *Eightball Boogie* could never be accused of being less than lively, and plotwise it is probably just as complicated, the story is perhaps a bit more grounded in the character of its protagonist, one Harry Rigby. Rigby's got all the usual P.I. problems--women trouble, cop trouble, and smart mouth trouble. Unlike some similar protagonists I've read recently, I'm not all together convinced that he's a good guy. But he does have one core value, and that's protecting his son Ben. Trace that through, and you'll see that everything he does is motivated by that one objective. Everything.

In one aspect, anyway, this book is a straight up homage to Raymond Chandler, and of course it's a brave thing to offer yourself up for comparison to an American master of detective fiction. But in my book, Burke is up to it. There are countless throwaway lines that show the same kind of spark of cleverness, and I think the first one where I realized I should slow down and start paying better attention was: "Conway lived two miles out of town, the house only three drainpipes short of a mansion." This is the kind of books that fans

will love to dig such nuggets out of, but why should I spoil your pleasure by revealing more?

There are many plot twists in this story, and some of them I did manage to see coming. But there is one great piece of finesse that figures in towards the end, and I admired it immensely. I think there is something in this one for everyone, though I will say that as with much Irish crime fiction I've read, there was one moment of brutality that was a bit beyond my tolerance level. Well, make that two.

But hey, if you're going to read Irish crime fiction, you're going to have to get used to this stuff.

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Josh says

Harry Rigby is a research consultant; a PI who also sells scandal to the tabloids as well as the usual workings typical of the profession. In *EIGHTBALL BOOGIE*, Rigby is hired by a shady but prominent community figure to find proof of his wife's infidelity. Seems simple enough, however, when the path of the investigation crosses another one involving murder, family drama, and his own safety, Rigby soon learns what its like to stand a little too close to the fire.

Set in Ireland, author Declan Burke really instils a sense of time and place which separates EIGHTBALL BOOGIE from the Americanised hardboiled tales. However – fans of Spillane will pick up similar speech patterns in Harry Rigby comparable to Mike Hammer (only slight but it's there). Yet it's the omnipresent gray that shrouds Rigby's every move that proves to be most memorable. For what appears to be a light-hearted protagonist, he's no stranger to dishing out punishment – though not quite as frequently as he absorbs it. Every lie uncovered places Rigby in more danger than the last. The constant threat to his and his family's life hangs over the story like a storm cloud waiting to rain down.

The plot stated off relatively simple and seemed like a true to formula PI story before evolving into a much more complex mystery with three distinct plot threads interlocking in a smart and convenient way that's quite plausible. While some readers may disagree with the ease by which the threads come together, I for one, thought Burke did a great job at planting the seeds to wrap them in a single bundle.

This was my first read of a Declan Burke book and it certainly won't be my last. Harry Rigby is as an original PI type as there is and I look forward to reading more stories about this interesting character, particularly after the events of EIGHTBALL BOOGIE.

Karen says

It really shouldn't work. Even in something as dark and noir styled as EIGHTBALL BOOGIE, there should be limits. Sure, hero's can be wise-cracking, dry, lone wolf investigators, or "Researchers". They can obviously have fraught personal lives, and goodness knows Rigby's personal life - what with a son he adores and an on again-off again live in partner, mostly pissed off with him in the extreme falls at the very least, into complicated territory. They can have mates that can be turned easily, enemies around every corner, cops, crooks and all. They can even be somewhat risky friends to know. They can have decidedly dodgy family members but somehow keep waiting for the Christmas cards to arrive. But really, can they possibly be shot, bashed, thumped, beaten, shot, beat up a bit more, and shot again (I lost count), and not have the reader feel the occasional WTF moment. Apparently, when you're this reader, and it's this book, you can.

Who knew.

It's undoubtedly something to do with the crisp, sharp, pointy, sticky, dark, hilariously funny writing throughout the book. It really got to the point where I didn't care if the hero got shot yet again, as long as he rose to his feet with a nice little aside out of his mouth. I confess at one point I was worried about the beatings - but if I'm being honest - only because of the possibility of a broken jaw and what Burke would do to keep the hero wise-cracking. At no stage did I worry for his longevity, and he really is the sort of engaging character that you'd like to think is propping up a bar into his dotage, as long as it's not my local. Sure the plot probably needed a tourist guide, a very good torch and maybe a cheat sheet, but I ... simply ... did ... not ... care. I loved the whole package and frankly, had a ball reading it. Giggled like an idiot at points.

This is Declan Burke's first book, which I cannot believe I've not read before. Especially as I'd loved The Big O.

You'd think I'd know these things by now.

<http://www.austcrimefiction.org/revie...>

Al says

Imagine an Elmore Leonard book written by an Irishman, and you'll have a good idea of what to expect from Eightball Boogie. Harry Rigby is a hanging-by-his-fingertips private eye who bills himself as a "research consultant." His relationships are complicated and not always what they seem (to us or to him), and in this case he's in over his head from the start.

Although I loved the story, what I found impressed me the most was Burke's way with words. For example, this line:

"Down in the Old Quarter, two times out of three you flip a double-headed coin, it comes down on its edge. Last time, it doesn't come down at all."

Or Burke's description of his favorite pub:

"The benches were upholstered in worn red velvet. The carpet was pocked with tiny scorch marks. The low ceiling was tuberculosis brown."

Or when Harry said he'd "have spotted Helen Conway with one eye tied behind my back." I'd be reading on cruise control, taking the story in, and then hit a line that had me do a double take because it was different, but also evocative, in a way you don't often see. Eightball Boogie gets all the stars and thumbs pointing at the ceiling that I have to give.

**Originally written for "Books and Pals" book blog. May have received a free review copy. **

Michael says

I did this book two disservices. First, I waited a few weeks to write a review. The details are lost, all that remains are my impressions.

Second, I read it in fits and starts over the course of a few weeks. This is the type of book that would be much more effective in one sitting if you have that kind of time.

The great thing about this book is the prose. It crackles with life and intensity. Burke tosses off noir-inspired quips at an amazing rate. Dozens of lines would've been the best in your average Hammett. Very fun to read.

Reading it in spurts, however, I got a bit lost as to the characters and their motivations. Also too much violence for my tastes, but that goes with the noir territory, and it was never gratuitous.

Altogether a fun read. Highly recommended. 3.5 stars rounded up for the quality of the prose.
