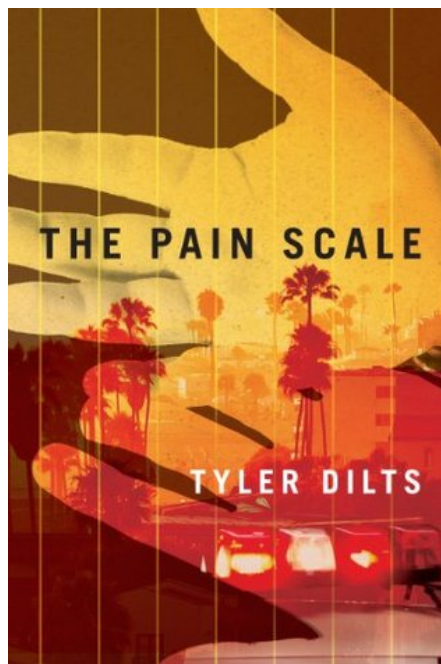




The Pain Scale

Tyler Dilts

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Long Beach homicide detective Danny Beckett returns from a year-long medical leave badly scarred and in constant pain, yet determined to prove he still has what it takes to do the job.

He gets his chance when a call comes in that shocks even the toughest guys in the squad room: A California congressman's daughter-in-law and grandchildren have been brutally murdered in their upscale home. At first glance, it looks like a robbery gone wrong, but Danny's not so sure. Something doesn't quite add up.

With state and local law enforcement in an uproar and the media circling like vultures, the pressure's on for Danny and his partner, Jennifer Tanaka, to solve this one. Too much is at stake...and not just politically. Even if they manage to crack the case, there's no guarantee the stress won't derail Danny's recovery...

...Because while the doctors can treat his physical pain, no one can erase the agony of the past that haunts every step he takes—and threatens to destroy his career once and for all.

The Pain Scale Details

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From Reader Review The Pain Scale for online ebook

Jim says

Of all the books I have read this year, my favorite find has been Tyler Dilts. On Kindle, my attention was drawn by the subtitle: "Long Beach Homicide." I started with **A Cold and Broken Hallelujah**, which I read while in Peru. When I returned to L.A., I read **A King of Infinite Space** a month later. With Pain Scale, The I have read all three novels in the series -- with not a clinker in the bunch.

With this story of a ghastly home invasion murder of a wife and two small children, the plot keeps spiraling outward, bringing in more people, until I wondered if Dilts could keep control of his material. He not only managed to control a list of dozens of characters -- police, politicians, lawyers, and suspects -- but he never skipped a beat. When the end comes, in a most surprising way, all I could do was let out a long sigh.

Now I will have to wait until Dilts writes another novel, preferably with Detectives Danny Beckett and Jennifer Tanaka, that most congenial pair of homicide investigators.

Elise says

I liked this one, but not as much as A King of Infinite Space, the first in the series. This one had a lot more players and kind of confused me sometimes. I'll still read the next book, though. They're entertaining.

Lindsay says

I'm not much for a murder for hire crime but I truly enjoy this author; so I hoped it would have had a bit of a spin... no such luck.

IslandRiverScribe says

Thirteen months ago, Long Beach Homicide Detective Danny Beckett had his left hand all but severed at the wrist when a murderer wielding a wicked machete-type combat knife attacked him. Multiple operations later, Beckett still has his hand and about 90% of its function. But he also has chronic pain, not just a continual ache or a low-pulsing throb, but a shooting fire that consumes his left arm, at its worst, from the scar on his wrist to the cords of his neck.

Beckett has only been back at work for three weeks when his first major case hits. The daughter-in-law of the area Representative to the U.S. Congress has been brutally murdered along with her two young children. In addition, the floor safe has been ripped out of the master bedroom's closet and is nowhere to be found.

The children were shot multiple times but were not brutalized like their mother. Therefore, Beckett and his partner, Jennifer Tanaka, first consider robbery with an opportunity for a side of sadistic rape topped off by collateral damage to be the initial scenario. The husband has a 3000-mile alibi and is now, presumably, a basket case and held at arm's length from police interrogation by his attorney. And then, within hours of the Congressman being notified of the deaths, the FBI shows up.

Surprisingly, the two-man FBI team is cooperative and, out of stereotype, does not want control of the investigation. All they ask is to be copied in on all reports and findings. But when DNA results on the trace found under the mother's fingernails come back within 3 days instead of 3 months, Beckett and Tanaka know that someone, probably the Congressman with the help of the FBI team, is pulling a lot of strings. At this point the team decides to be extra careful concerning what goes in their reports.

The DNA evidence leads to a low-level Ukrainian mobster who soon gives up his partner in the crime. Knowing whom these men work for, Beckett now surmises that the death of the woman is a murder-for-hire with the contents of the safe being the reason for both the murder and the sadistic rape. The question now is who contracted with their boss for the hit.

However, when the stakeout on the Ukrainian's partner coincides with a sniper hit on that same person the moment he steps into view, Beckett and Tanaka have another question to answer. It seems they have a leak – or, worse yet – they have someone using the Patriot Act to monitor their computers and their phones.

At this point, the team goes to burner phones, shutting their personal phones off in the field to foil remote GPS surveillance. Then they shift their computer work to the private, camouflaged digs of the detective who specializes in electronics research for the team. But they are not experienced enough in the field of special ops to evade those who are. Soon, more hurt, pain and death are upon them, not only to several persons of interest but also to a member of their own team. Finding the puppet master has now become personal as well as professional.

Tyler Dilts has used Beckett's chronic, fiery pain as the structure, the virtual backbone, upon which this second book of the series is built. Everything, from the sectional headings to the chapter titles to Beckett's every motivation relates to the pain scale. His realizations, his rationalizations, even his relationship with his partner, Tanaka, revolve first and foremost around his ever-present, ever-fluctuating level of pain. Even his nightmares are focused on the pain in his arm and the only way he knows to end that pain forever.

Dilts writes the character of Beckett as a man who is often quite self-aware and who takes responsibility for his opinions and his behaviors. He is not perfect, saintly or a martyr; he simply will not lie to himself. And while he rarely wallows in self-pity, he will wallow in Vicodin and vodka if it will dull the pain in his arm and give him just the briefest respite of sleep.

The theme of chronic pain is not restricted to Beckett in the storyline. The author also weaves that theme from the emotional paralysis of the bereft husband through the dying friendship and professional partnership between Beckett and Tanaka. Then it travels on to the mental and physical ravages of cancer that has beset the retired detective who has befriended Beckett during his convalescence.

But don't think for a moment that this story is filled with whining and crying and oh-woe-is-me. In the end, it is a story about how one horrible event serves as the catalyst that pushes Beckett to stop focusing on the pain, be it from his wife's death or from his arm. And it is a story of how he must use the pain and move with it in order to get past it, so that he can not only survive, but live.

In that vein, two passages within the story symbolize the play within the play, so to speak, that Dilts has crafted to compare the unbidden pain inflicted by another person versus unbidden pain inflicted by one's own body.

The first comes from the scene where Harlan, the retired detective, has just received test results from his doctor, while the second comes from the scene after Harlan survives surgery:

Beckett: "What if I don't want to play the banjo [as physical therapy]?"

Harlan: "What if I don't want stomach cancer?"

Beckett: “I thought you couldn’t play [the banjo] anymore. Because of the pain [from arthritis]. It doesn’t hurt?”

Harlan: “It does. But the pain’s different now.”

DEFINITE SPOILER FOLLOWS

My only complaint with Dilts’ crafting of the story line, and I dropped one star from the rating for it, is one sentence, spoken by Beckett, early in the work: “When my wife, Megan, died, she was pregnant and hoping for a girl.” You wouldn’t think that 13 words could contain so much damage that it could lower a book’s rating, but in those 13 words, Dilts radically changes the backstory of Beckett’s deceased wife.

In the previous entry in this series, in very specific and detailed scenes, we are told that when Megan burned to death in the accident, she was on her way to visit her mother, the ONLY person she had told about her pregnancy. And she was not hoping for a girl, she was seriously considering an abortion. The only way Beckett even finds out about the pregnancy is through the autopsy results.

It is the grief and the guilt of losing a wife whom he didn’t even know was leaving him and the grief over losing a child he didn’t even know existed that formed the backbone of Beckett’s character in that first book. Therefore, those 13 words in this entry are a complete contradiction and that contradiction stands out as bright as a neon sign on the Vegas Strip.

An author simply cannot deviate from the biographical and demographic data he establishes for a character in the baseline novel of a series. He can add to it, but he cannot delete something as if it never existed. Nor can he change one thing into something else entirely – not a birth date, not a physical condition, not one word of previously published dialogue.

To do so, to be even superficially careless in this regard, will cost the trust of the dedicated mystery reader. That reader is already looking for the lies and obfuscations of the characters, and he does not need, or even wish, to navigate a minefield of author-based errata. It might be an old and oft-used statement, but that does not make the words “the devil is in the details” any less the truth.

Michael Sherer says

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again. John Grisham can tell a story, but he can’t write worth a damn. Wallace Stegner could make music with words, but he couldn’t tell a story to save his life.

Tyler Dilts is one of that echelon of authors that breathes rarified air, some exotic blend of gases that give them the extraordinary literary superpower of being able to tell a ripping good yarn with language that makes me want to laugh, cry, dance, sing and all manner of things. Is he a master of metaphor and simile like Chabon? No, but Chabon’s linguistic tricks grow tiresome after a few hundred pages.

Rather, it would seem Dilts has taken a master class from the likes of Kellerman, Hurwitz, Winslow, Crais, Piccirilli, Parker (T. Jeff), Burke, Flynn, French, different stylists all. That is, he uses language to great effect without it ever getting in the way of the story, without jarring the reader out of the world he’s created for his characters.

And, oh, what interesting characters inhabit the world of THE PAIN SCALE. Detective Danny Beckett of the Long Beach P.D. is on his first case after coming off more than a year of sick leave due to an on-the-job

injury that almost claimed a hand. Beckett still has the hand, though his use of it is limited, but now also has an uninvited consequence—chronic pain which he tries to control with Vicodin and Grey Goose. Turns out the only thing that helps is the case.

The case is a good one involving the triple homicide of a mother and two kids. Dilts spins out the tale in solid police procedural fashion, and the investigation not only leads to more murders and subsequent twists and turns but to Beckett's growing self-awareness as he looks for answers to both the case and his own condition.

Beckett's tragic past could easily cause him to devolve into self-pity, and at times he indulges himself. But his self-awareness and longing for his partner's respect as both a cop and a man never allow him to get maudlin or lose sight of his job—to find justice for the victims. Even there, when Beckett identifies almost too strongly with the murdered woman and especially her needlessly slaughtered children (to the point they visit him in his dreams and ask him to cut away their pain with a saw), Beckett's emotional response hits just the right notes and never goes too far over the top. Another sign of terrific writing by an author who knows his craft.

Though the revelations as Beckett and his partner(s) Jen Tanaka and Patrick unravel the crimes are not all that surprising, they're still unexpected, and both the way the story unfolds and the resolution are entirely satisfying.

Dilts is someone you can expect to hear good things about in the future. He's going places, and I hope to go along for the ride.

rick. says

The Pain Scale is somewhat less personal than A King of Infinite Space and A Cold and Broken Hallelujah which are the first and third books in the Long Beach Homicide series respectively. It loses a bit of the intimacy and unique empathy Tyler Dilts infused the other novels with, but this is still a very good book.

Detective Danny Beckett is back on the job after a lengthy leave due to the fallout from A King of Infinite Space. His descent into alcohol, medication and depression continues as he copes with physical and emotional pain (thus The Pain Scale). His focus on the job is the only thing that seems to keep him going. Second novels in a series are difficult to pull off. This time the murders under investigation involve powerful people and it seems everyone gets involved: FBI, congressmen, military, mafia, and more. It almost gets too big and the characters and their intersecting relationships start to blur, but Tyler Dilts keeps it just grounded enough to prevent this from turning into a "thriller".

I would have been worried about the escalation (and continued depiction of violent crimes against women) if I hadn't already read the next in the series which is his best yet. Smart, character driven, and compelling - if you enjoy detective novels, this is a series you should be reading.

Also check out my review of A King of Infinite Space [Long Beach Homicide #1] and A Cold and Broken Hallelujah [Long Beach Homicide #3] which made my Best of Realistic Fiction: 2014 list.

Ted Kendall says

This is the second book from this author I have read (and, amazingly, his second book). I really liked his King of Infinite Space. This picks up from there and does it one better. Ironically, as I was reading this, I was down sick with pleurisy--a very painful illness. So I had some extra empathy for the main character. Still, Mr. Dilts has taken the characters from the first book and made an even better second effort. I look forward to his next one. If you like a good police mystery, you will like this one.

Erin says

Another quick, mostly enjoyable read. This is my second book in the series, and I liked it a similar amount as the first. We learn more about Danny Beckett, as the story picks up a year after the last book ended, during his progress (and lack of) with his hand injury, and his mental state as he jumps back in to homicide work. The story is captivating: a convoluted tale of murder and espionage, but again I am left really dissatisfied with the ending. It was not wrapped up nicely, in fact, there were so many open questions, like WHY were people killed? Who really arranged it? How did they get away with it? Why on earth could the detectives NEVER talk to the husband, and why as this dropped completely? What about all of the girls who were molested? What happened with the sirens best friend? Ugh, the more I think about how many loose ends there are, the more upset I get. Basically it's an enjoyable 2-day read, until you get to the end, and then it's like wtf. At least I didn't guess the killer half way through the book this time? Although I'm still not really sure what happened in this book.... But I already bought the 3rd one in the series, so here's looking forward to another good story with a baffling ending.

Trilby says

The characters in this Southern Cal detective story are the best thing about it--well rounded, vivid, believable. Dilts has a knack of showing homicide detectives at work in a realistic way. The story keeps the reader's attention throughout without needing the gratuitous sex scenes common to noir detective stories. The central characters, the narrator Danny and his partner Jen, have a solid working relationship. I worried, however, that the narrator was going to wind up insentient or worse when he described some of his self-prescribed painkilling efforts. But then, who would be around to finish the story?

The story is a page-turner--the action continuous. I would have given the book another star, however, if it weren't for the ending. The wrap-up seems hastily done. It left me wondering about the motivations of the people responsible for the murders with which the book opens. We know the detectives' thoughts, but there are too many answered questions about what was going on with the perpetrators.

William Doonan says

Danny Beckett is my new favorite detective. This is a wonderfully constructed book. When Becket worries, I feel his pain. I especially liked the homegrown California feel to this!

Randy says

Danny Beckett is back on the job after a year long absence recovering from a near loss of a hand at the expense of a suspect and his knife. Reattached, the year long therapy had judged him able to return to duty at Long Beach Homicide.

The first case back is a big one, a mother and her two children murdered in an apparent home invasion.

But Beckett is suspicious from the beginning. The living room is full of pictures, all but one of them the absent father, the son of a powerful congressman. That lone picture showed him with his wife and children.

Is Beckett right? Can he prove it?

Someone in the shadows keeps getting in the way, impeding the investigation. Seems obvious, but is it. A cop is attacked for his computer findings on the case. A suspect, one of the actual shooters gets his head blown apart by a sniper as the police move in. The one who hired him is found floating in the river, a hole in his head.

Beckett jeeps plugging along with his partner as his pains, both from the hand injury and mental keep assaulting him at inconvenient times.

Nicely paced thriller and one I didn't realize was the second in a series, the background so seamlessly woven into the narrative. The sign of a good writer.

Recommended.

Dan says

The second Long Beach Homicide book opens with the brutal murder of a wife and her two kids. Danny Beckett and Jennifer Tanaka proceed to investigate and it's not long before the bodies start piling up.

I have pretty much the same reaction to this as I did the first book in the series. It's a good little mystery and is seriously well written but for me it doesn't quite shine. I enjoyed it but like the first, I will quickly forget the plot. I really like the writing style, more than virtually everything else I have read lately, and the lead characters are both likeable and believable but there just feels like there is something missing.

The trouble is that despite how quick and enjoyable it is to read, there's nothing particularly clever or innovative about the central mystery. It doesn't shine in the way some other crime books do.

What I did especially like was the ongoing theme of the Pain Scale. Beckett is suffering from chronic pain thanks to the events of the first book and his therapist has told him to mark it on a scale of 0-10. So as Beckett goes through the case he does just that, realising his work numbs the pain. Dilts even opts to give the chapters the numbers on the pain scale the character feels during the chapter. You end up with a load of chapter numbers that at first glance make no sense whatsoever but on closer inspection worked really well.

Aside from the clever background concept, this is much the same as the first book, A King of Infinite Space. A really enjoyable crime story but lacking that special something to make it one that stays with you for a long time.

Larry H says

Tyler Dilts' debut crime novel, *The King of Infinite Space* really wowed me when I read it back in 2010, and in fact, it made my list of the best books I read that year. When I saw that he was getting ready to release the second book in his series featuring Long Beach police detectives Danny Beckett and Jen Tanaka, I hoped that the talent he showed previously would again be evident.

The good news is, *The Pain Scale* is just as good as its predecessor.

When the book opens, Detective Danny Beckett has just returned to the department from an extended medical leave following an injury inflicted by a criminal, an injury that nearly cost him one of his hands. His pain is nearly constant, and can only (barely) be controlled by Vicodin and/or vodka. But when he and Jen land a high-profile murder case, he hopes the adrenaline and the focus on something else will help distract him from his pain.

Sara Benton and her two young children were brutally murdered in what appears to be a home invasion. Sara was married to Bradley Benton III, the son of a prominent California congressman, who is being groomed to succeed his father. Every move that Danny and Jen and their colleagues make in investigating the case is being shadowed by the congressman's own hired guns, but that is unavoidable.

They have their suspicions about the case, but when evidence leads them in a different direction they're pleased to tie up some loose ends, but they know there must be more to these murders. What they discover is far more than they bargained for, and the actions they take leave them vulnerable physically, emotionally, and ethically. And all the while, Danny is struggling with managing and masking his pain, as well as his own emotional issues and the medical problems of a close friend.

Tyler Dilts knows how to tell a story. He hooked me from the beginning, both with Danny's struggles and the way the murder case unfolds. There's some great action and some terrific narrative, and I feel like Dilts really fleshed out his characters well. You think you know how you should feel about the suspects but when Danny and Jen aren't sure, you get drawn right in with them. And while the resolution of the case may not completely surprise you, the after-effects keep you reading.

While there's something to be said for occasionally reading a book heavy on action and light on character development and feasible plot, for me, a good crime novel combines both. And once again, Tyler Dilts has proven he's a writer worth being read, although I don't want to have to wait two more years for his next book!

Bonnie Brody says

The Pain Scale by Tyler Dilts is an intriguing and skillful mystery with character development that is impressive. It focuses on Long Beach California Homocide Detective Danny Beckett who, with his partner, Jen Tanaka, are trying to solve a heinous crime.

A brutal crime has taken place in a ritzy area of Brentwood and a mother and her two children have been murdered. The mother was sexually tortured prior to her murder and the children were each shot to death. The types of crimes that Danny deals with torture him. He not only deals with psychic pain but with physical

pain.

"Pain is relative. It's been years since I've been able to sleep through the night on any kind of a regular basis. Even before I nearly lost my hand, I was already in a kind of pain. My wife burned to death in a car accident a few years ago. I've killed two teenagers in the line of duty. And as I've already mentioned, I've been obsessing over homicides for more than a decade."

In the first book of this series, Danny nearly lost his hand while trying to solve a case. He has had several operations for this injury. He treats his excruciating and chronic pain with Vicodin and Grey Goose Vodka. As he says, "pain does strange things to you...And to live in pain is to encounter the darkest possibilities of your imagination. When you do what I do every day, those possibilities are very dark indeed." He goes to a pain therapist who suggests he practice visualization but he finds that his pain lessens when he is on the job and absorbed with his work.

The chapters are not chronological. Rather, they are numbered according to the pain level that Danny is experiencing. The Pain Scale goes from one to ten, with ten being the most severe. Each chapter is labeled according to the scale of Danny's pain.

As Danny looks for the killers, the plot gets a little twisted and difficult to follow. The victims are the family of a congressman's son and the first line of suspected perpetrators are a list of Ukrainians that I had difficulty following. There were just too many characters to keep track of at one time.

I enjoyed this book enough that I ordered the first in the series. Mr. Dilts is a crime writer who will come into his own. He has a unique style, is very readable and is quite noir in genre.

Comment

Dindy says

I tried to get into The Pain Scale by Tyler Dilts, but the book fell short of my 100-page rule- the one whereby life is too short to spend time reading books that haven't grabbed my attention within 100 pages. Quite frankly this book feels as though it was written by a creative writing student who is trying to incorporate a checklist for fiction writing.

By page 90, the author had introduced such a bewildering parade of characters that I had lost all hope of trying to keep up with them. The main character, homicide detective Danny Beckett caroms from one character to another, engages in boring, unnecessary dialogue with each of them, and then shoots off to the next character with perhaps one tiny, meaningful scrap of information from each encounter. Perhaps. It's hard to tell if it is meaningful or not because there doesn't appear to be anything to connect the disparate parts.

Beckett has just returned from a yearlong medical leave and is still in horrible pain from some kind of injury to his arm. I'm not sure what happened to it other than the fact that it left a bracelet type scar on his wrist and left him with lots of pain, but doesn't stop him from using his arms to pull himself up to see over an 8 foot high wall three or four times before getting stopped by a beat cop. The author spends two pages describing this encounter in excruciating detail--Beckett gets caught in the blinding glare of the police headlights and puts his hand up, Beckett tells the beat cop he's on the job, the beat cop makes him keep his hands up and asks for his ID, Beckett tells the beat cop where the ID is, the beat cop approaches gingerly and after a half page of discussion about it, finally reaches into Beckett's pocket and pulls out the ID, the spends another half page apologizing to Beckett for requesting the ID in the first place. My point is that the meaningless details

of the encounter are strung out in such a way that the reader is clearly expected to miss the one important piece of information given out casually at the end of the encounter- the fact that some mysterious, unknown person had contacted the police to complain that Beckett was in the alley trying to play peek-a-boo.

The author tries to show Beckett as a multi-dimensional character, but ends up with a poor caricature of a hard-boiled police officer--a tough guy who threatens to put a television news reporter in handcuffs when she won't divulge the source of a video in which the murder victim is portrayed in the park with her two children, but a guy who cares enough about his faithful companion, a cardboard female detective, that we get to see him thinking about what songs he should put together for a special collection for his partner. In short, after reading more clichés and depictions of the author's imaginings of police procedures loosely strung together as a series of unrelated vignettes, and after having lost all recollection of the original crime, I'd had enough. I stopped reading in the middle of an intensely boring discussion of how the DNA results from the murder scene had already been analyzed--ALERT--this is clearly an important point in the plot. It should be obvious that some mysterious person is pulling stings on this investigation.

And so on and so forth, one boring encounter after another. I'm falling asleep just writing about them, much less reading them. My in a nutshell review--don't bother. Read something by Michael Connelly instead.

Disclaimer: A free copy of this book was obtained from Amazon Vine in exchange for unbiased review.
