



## Original Skin

*David Mark*

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From internationally acclaimed author David Mark comes the second novel in his wholly original and suspenseful Aector McAvoy series.

Simon and Suzie are two pleasure seekers defined by their flamboyant tattoos.

Peter Tressider is a politician on the fast track to the top.

DS Aector McAvoy is a policeman with scars to his body and career.

Each is marked in their own way.

And soon each will be branded by the same sinister foe.

Original Skin is a crime novel that leaves a permanent impression. Half serial killer thriller, half gritty police procedural, it examines the imprints that our darkest sins leave upon us, and just how far we will go to keep them covered.

## Original Skin Details

Date : Published May 16th 2013 by Blue Rider Press

ISBN : 9780399158650

Author : David Mark

Format : Hardcover 427 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Thriller

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## From Reader Review Original Skin for online ebook

### Nancy Oakes says

(my copy from the publisher -- thank you!)

Last November when I read David Mark's crime fiction book called *The Dark Winter*, I was surprised at how very good it was for a first novel. Now, with *Original Skin*, Mark has kicked things up a few notches to create an even better second series installment, set in the Hull, West Yorkshire area of England.

His protagonist, DS Aector McAvoy, is a member of the specialized squad known as the Serious and Organized Crime Unit under the direction of McAvoy's boss Trish Pharaoh. The unit is currently under fire from the Humberside Police Authority because of the rise of violent crime statistics, not helped much by the crimes of a gang viciously attacking and torturing smaller growers as a means of taking over their farms and intimidating them. After doing his best to convince the Police Authority committee members that the unit is working hard to solve the case, McAvoy decompresses by taking a walk along the towpath by the Humber, where a) he sees two people talking that may be committee members, and b) in the water among the litter of supermarket carts, bottles, mattress springs etc., he finds a cell phone and picks it up. Curious, he picks it up, thinking he might be able to fix it. What he finds on the phone starts another investigation rolling, one that leads to a very clever and rather nasty killer whose first crime, as it turns out, was written off as a suicide. If what I've written so far doesn't spark your interest (although for serious crime readers it should whet some measure of curiosity), and you're more of a *Fifty Shades of Gray* type person, you can add into the mix a young woman with a unique tattoo who belongs to the world of swinging sex parties, sexual submission and sex for thrills with people she's only met online.

Keeping the action up over 427 pages in any novel of crime fiction is a tough job, but the author does not disappoint. With his excellent characterizations, a well-plotted and rather twisty core murder mystery and his look at how the local area is primed for "high crime" -- for example, the decline of local industry, lack of investment, lack of "impetus on education," and the geographical "sense of isolation," -- all working together harmoniously, the 400+ pages fly by in no time. My own small niggle here is the amount of time spent with Aector's home life, but that's a personal issue, because I'm more about the crime, less about crying babies keeping both parents awake over several nights. It's all about character development, but I'm an impatient reader.

While McAvoy is a gentle giant of a policeman and a family man, the author takes him down some very dark paths in this book, so I'd recommend it to fans of more darkly-oriented police procedurals. While cozy readers may find this book a bit overwhelming, readers who enjoy more serious crime will definitely be glued. Do not, however, start the series with this novel, but instead with *Dark Winter*, as things in *Original Skin* build from the first book. Overall -- much better than the first book and an intriguing read any serious crime reader will want to read.

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### Maine Colonial says

*Original Skin* is the second book in the DS Aector McAvoy series, set in the gritty, down-at-heel northern port city of Hull. The debut book, *The Dark Winter*, introduced us to this very different kind of copper. Aector is a lumbering gentle giant, with red hair and a face that shows his every emotion. Despite all he's experienced, and being surrounded by tough-as-nails colleagues and villains, he hasn't learned to be cynical. He is a compassionate soul, through and through, no matter what that costs him.

The Dark Winter started with a hard-to-take crime, the public murder of a young girl, but Original Skin begins with a far more dark and brutal murder. The multi-threaded plot also includes a violent drug war over the marijuana market, the gamesmanship of local politics, played at the level of a full-contact sport, and the dark side of an adult sex games club.

As in The Dark Winter, Aector's refuge from the trials of his job is his home, with his wife Roisin, who comes from a "Traveller" family, and their two small children. In this book, we learn a little more about Roisin's past and about the Traveller world she came from.

In many ways, each thread of the plot is about the clash of different worlds. The social values of the Travellers are sometimes so opposed to Aector's that the difference threatens his relationship with Roisin. The drug war represents a new, highly organized and shadowy criminal hierarchy displacing the old-time, homegrown villains. The sex club, which had seemed like an environment to play at taking risks, was confronted by a new element that turned the play-acting risks real—and deadly.

A more comic-relief kind of clash occurs in Aector's relationship with his brash boss, Trish Pharaoh. The two couldn't be more different, which is probably why they work so well together. Though, I suppose, "well" might not be the correct adverb for a relationship in which Pharaoh tells Aector that she frequently wants to club him over the head.

Somehow, Aector always seems to stumble into the oddest situations: having to chase down a runaway horse in city traffic and horse-whisper him into compliance, thus saving the horse from a tranquilizer-gun shot at best; being challenged to a bare-knuckled fight to preserve his honor; bringing cops and suspects home for breakfast with the wife and playtime with the kids.

If you're looking for a refreshingly different protagonist and a gritty, north-of-England style police procedural, give the Aector McAvoy series a try.

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### **Lynn says**

David Mark is fast becoming one of my authors to look out for! Original Skin has bettered Dark winter by far with a hugely compassionate narrative.

A real "shut the world out" read! Highly Recommended to everyone!

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### **Annabee says**

David Marks debute 'De mazen van het net' was al zeer goed en heb ik vier sterren toebedeeld, deel 2 in de Aector McAvoy-reeks is nog beter. De auteur lijkt de beginnersschroom van zich afgeworpen te hebben en is zelfs enigszins overmoedig geworden, waardoor ik toch weer op vier sterren uitkom en niet op vijf, al zit het er heel dichtbij ... Want: de opstart van de diverse verhaallijnen is nogal complex, waardoor je van hot naar her lijkt te switchen. Natuurlijk begrijp je als lezer dat bepaalde zaken samen gaan vallen, maar je moet in den beginne en nog vele bladzijden daarna moeite doen de draad niet kwijt te raken. Op zeker moment wordt het overzichtelijker en vanaf daar is Mark niet meer te stuiten, evenals zijn protagonist Aector McAvoy.

McAvoy vaart op zijn speurdersinstinct en heeft maar weinig handvatten nodig om tot de conclusie te komen dat een moord op een jongeman is aangezien voor een zelfmoord. McAvoy verdiept zich met het

schaamrood op de kaken in de ver van hem afstaande scene van seksfeesten, parenclubs, parkeerplaatsseks en wat dies meer zij. Verder is er van alles loos in de drugscene, waar Vietnamezen het voor het zeggen lijken te hebben, maar ook Roma een dubieuze rol spelen. McAvoy's echtgenote Roisin is van Roma-komaf en helpt via oude connecties haar man een handje ... Tatoeages, paarden, rottweilers, politici, slapeloze nachten, (pogingen tot) moord, het kan niet op. In positieve zin, maar net iets te veel van het goede.

Spannend verhaal, met de nodige verrassingen. De karakters van McAvoy en zijn baas Trish Pharaoh ontwikkelen prettig door. Ook de overige personages, en met name Suzie, worden krachtig neergezet. Suzie is bepaald geen alledaags type en nog dapper ook. Zij zou best wel eens terug kunnen keren in een van de volgende delen van de serie. In Engeland is men inmiddels twee delen verder, laat maar komen!

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## Raven says

Following the successful *Dark Winter*, this is the second outing for the freckled, flame-haired warrior DS Aector McAvoy, and this sequel lacks none of the punch of the first- I would dare to say that I actually enjoyed this one more. This is an altogether darker and seedier affair from the outset, beginning with a particularly brutal murder that sparks a complicated and taxing investigation for McAvoy. When the investigation diverges into the world of local politics and police monitoring, it soon becomes clear that all is not as it would appear, causing McAvoy and his superior officer DI Pharaoh to navigate their way through a world of secrets and lies. Despite the thrust of the main investigation there is also ample time for McAvoy's horse-whispering skills and bare knuckle fighting as you will discover...

I've really taken to the character of the slightly lumbering but incredibly thoughtful and moral McAvoy and as I've said before it's nice to see a police character not totally encumbered by the stresses of their private lives or less savoury habits. Despite the small blips caused by his marriage to Roisin who hails from a traveller background, McAvoy has the luxury of being able to pursue his police career relatively painlessly. He is a ruminator to the highest degree, much to the chagrin of his impulsive boss Pharaoh, and has an inherent compassion for people that leads him to not falling prey to snap judgements. He is what is known in the trade as a nice bloke, that consequently makes him an altogether nicer police officer if at times slightly too ponderous. His boss Pharaoh, who I have compared in a previous review to a watered down DI Steele from Stuart MacBride's series, lacks none of this hesitation. She is bold, impulsive, brash and completely brilliant! Her interplay with the diametrically opposite McAvoy is a joy, and transmits a sense of fun from Mark in the way they bounce off each other, but never losing sight of the fact of the effectiveness of their teamwork and this was one of my favourite aspects of the book.

As with the previous book *Dark Winter*, the setting of Hull is perfectly rendered throughout the book. Like other Northern based crime novels, this book reads as a twisted appreciation of a city down on its luck through years of urban degeneration, but still carrying at its heart an indomitable spirit. McAvoy is used as a mouthpiece for this obviously encountering the worst aspects of life that this formerly prosperous city has to offer, but appreciating the essential heart and soul of the city. In reflection of its setting, this is a particularly dark tale drawing on the more unusual activities of people's sexual behaviour, and I must confess I did enjoy the bloody outcome of a misjudged night of dogging- see now you're intrigued! As the plot unfolds there are dark revelations indeed emanating from those in positions of responsibility and the unwitting victims of their personal depravations, all hedged by Mark's firm control of the novel as an entirely satisfying police procedural. Overall a good read and I'm looking forward to the next foray into McAvoy's world.

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## Thomas says

I first started reading David Mark's books last summer. I won Sorrow Bound(book 3 in the series) last summer in a Goodreads giveaway and enjoyed it enough that I decided to go back and read books 1 and 2 in the series.

This book has several threads: There is a turf war over the growing of marijuana, with new, ruthless gangsters moving in on established Vietnamese grower/sellers. The new gangsters are brutal torturers, using nail guns and paint stripping burners to torture and murder their way into the business. The second thread concerns a murder written off as a suicide, which Aector Mcavoy suspects may not be a suicide.

The other threads are inter police politics and a family dispute.

I like the author's sense of humor, wherein a character has a 3 course meal--"bag of peanuts, packet of crisps and pickled egg."

I give it 4 out 5 stars.

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## Jeffrey says

In this second excellent Aector McAvoy novel, David Mark sets Trish Pharaoh's Serious and Organized Crime Unit, a specialized English police squad, after two markedly different, but nasty criminals. While one investigation involves a nasty drug gang, McAvoy looks into the death of a bisexual dancer, who was into orgies, swinger parties and illicit sexual trysts. Mark has shown a penchant for dark mysteries and this involved mystery will not disappoint.

Pharaoh's Unit is looking into a series of brutal attacks against illegal marijuana growers. A new gang is muscling into the area and uses extreme violence and torture against growers to intimidate them into working for the new gang. The police, however, have cultivated an informer, an ex wrestler, who has given them details about the gang. The police plan a raid, but somehow the criminals know about the raid. The police van is bombed, the informant is missing and her boyfriend, a member of a gang, is tortured, burned horribly, his hands nailed to his knees.

Trish Pharaoh is mauled by dogs while interviewing a possible suspect at his home. A young foul mouthed gypsy punk, set the dogs on Pharaoh and makes his escape during the ensuing chaos.

While Pharaoh recuperates in the hospital, the Unit is led by Colin Ray, who has his own bias against the "gyppos". Can Ray and his mates force the owner of the dogs to turn on the punk, find him and uncover how the criminals knew about the undercover raid. Ray may be biased, but he uses his wits and police know how to lead the Unit against the gang.

At the same time, McAvoy is pursuing his own little investigation on the side. He stumbled upon two men talking and saw one toss a cell phone into a mucky river. He retrieves the phone and while taking care of his new baby and pretty wife, puts it back together. Why would anyone throw away a fine expensive cell phone? Why indeed. Once fixed, the phone turns out to contain some lurid texts between Simon Appleyard and various men about sexual assignations. Unbeknownst to his bosses and while Pharaoh is still on the mend, McAvoy sets out to discover the truth.

Appleyard, a peacocked tattooed dancer, has been found dead in what the police initially thought was an erotic suicide, but McAvoy suspects that there is more to his death. First, there is an odd bruise, and the crime scene just does not fit the suicide scenario. Other clues suggest that Appleyard was fairly happy and

had no reason to kill himself.

It also seems that some of Appleyard's boyfriends are up and coming politicians and other members of the rich and famous. By the time Pharaoh returns to help McAvoy, the investigation has turned up several possible well-to-do suspects and a political fixer is in the mix as well.

Meanwhile, Suzie, a single woman, friendly with Appleyard, with a flowery tattoo and a penchant for the same swinger parties and dominant-submissive sexual games is being stalked. Another young woman with a similar tattoo is attacked. A man she meets for a sex game is almost killed.

Can McAvoy and Pharaoh find the connection between Appleyard, Suzie and the killer, before Suzie winds up as dead as Appleyard?

It's a dark and nasty police story with strongly drawn characters, an unsettling story, a twisty plot, and a surprising ending.

It's a fast paced engrossing read from David Mark. It arrives in bookstores soon. Snap it up.

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### **Thomas Brusio says**

If you thought David Mark's striking debut novel, *THE DARK WINTER*, was a gritty, dark crime tale, then you are in for a real treat with *ORIGINAL SKIN*.

Darker, malevolent, and more heart-hammering violent, Mark raises the bar higher with his second Detective Aector McAvoy novel, *ORIGINAL SKIN*. The use of nail-guns and hammers will guarantee gut-wrenching nausea for some readers.

Mark can scare his readers and paint a macabre nightmare with his stylish and sinister one-liners. He sets the mood immediately with his seemingly simple writing structure. Short, punchy sentences, but they are enough to ruffle any reader's feathers. "Darkness. Now red clouds. A sensation of friction at his back and pressure at his wrists." Or, when McAvoy sits down with a victim's family member, "Carrie Ford was probably very pretty twenty years and five thousand cheeseburgers ago. She looks as though six months of grief have carved a lifetime of wrinkles into her skin."

And if this is your first foray into the world of Detective Aector McAvoy and you want to know who McAvoy really is, Mark describes his main protagonist in one quick, incisive sentence: "He is a procedural, methodical detective, given to only occasional flashes of instinct and hunch."

Mark writes with fiendishly fast-moving prose, and the reader will have a hard time closing the book and waiting until July 2014 for the third installment, "Sorrow Bound".

Violence, sex and the use of drugs escalate the already captivating story of *ORIGINAL SKIN*. Mark's characterization is just as impressive, however, creating people that seem to fly off the pages and into the reader's mind, as if his characters were true to life and going about their own business. *ORIGINAL SKIN*, with its fleshed-out, deeply flawed characters, makes this book richly satisfying. The reader is along for a twisty ride in this second installment that is becoming one of my favorite crime books this year.

No doubt: David Mark is one of my new favorite authors. And after you read this book, he might be an

author to keep on your reading list as well. Highly recommended. Bravo!

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## Serena says

### 3.5

Hmm... Where do I begin? I must admit I struggled through the first two chapters, nauseated by the use of present tense and clipped sentences - NOT to my liking AT ALL. I very nearly gave up, but I'm pleased I persevered. By chapter three I was invested in the building suspense of the story and that's what drew me in and kept me there.

The plot was well thought out and cleverly presented, giving just enough at the end of each chapter to keep you turning pages. There were a couple of questions that were still unanswered at the end (chapter 3 anyone???) but not enough to ruin an otherwise juicy tale.

I must admit, with my own knowledge of policing, I struggled to get on board with the idea of such high ranking officers pounding the streets, but then this is not London, so I will chalk that up to the characters working for a smaller force!

As for the main character - what a sweetheart! The embodiment of a gentle giant. I think his kindness was a bit overplayed in places; the man blushed/flushed/coloured/reddened more than most women I know and there were a couple of things that he did that made me think, "Yeah, right!" I fell in love with him though; it was hard not to.

All in all, a satisfying read. I now have David Mark's first McAvoy offering, *The Dark Winter*, on my shopping list, and his upcoming offering, *Sorrow Bound*, is on my wish list.

*Please note, I received a copy of this book free through First Reads.*

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## BookwormDH says

Excellent as always. Great local author.

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## Liz Barnsley says

You know how sometimes when you absolutely LOVE a debut novel, you approach the second in the series with some trepidation? That was me heading into "Original Skin" having pretty much adored "Dark Winter" and wondering if the terrifically entertaining David Mark could do it again. Well the title for this review should tell you.. as in "Oh Goody its FANTASTIC!" Aector Mcavoy is back and he's better than ever. This gentle giant of a man, with his innate sense of justice and quiet love for his family is just the guy you would want helping you out if you were in trouble. In this, his second outing, he is investigating the murder that

never was - that of a young man, Simon, who apparently killed himself some time before. After finding a phone, the information on it leads Aector to believe that this was not, after all, the case. His boss, the wonderfully funny Trish Pharoah, supports him in his quest whilst gently berating him for adding to the crime statistics. "Do you know why we don't carry guns in this country Hector?" she asks him. "Because if we did, I'd shoot you". Yes indeed Ms Pharoah - right there with you! Ongoing over the course of the story is the continuing "Drug Trade" issues and the eclectic cast of supporting characters take on this problem with flair and grace...well, kind of. Its all highly entertaining, dark in places and humorous in others. I especially liked the involvement of the travelling community - giving us a chance to learn a bit more about the background of Roisin, wife of Aector - another lovely character who stands by her man, often in ways he'd rather she didnt. Still, that is a wife's job after all. All in all a terrific read. Now I need to moan at Mr Mark for a while until we can have a third. Enjoy!

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## Deborah says

3.5 stars

See my review of the first McAvoy novel, *The Dark Winter*, here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show....>

In my review of *The Dark Winter*, I complained about both Mark's plotting (predictable) and his characterization (flat). I'm pleased to report that the plot of *Original Skin* is much better, but McAvoy's character continues to be underdeveloped. I am also becoming increasingly aware of a writing quirk which may develop into an irritant: Mark uses a lot of sentence fragments, particularly at the beginning of a chapter. Here, for example, are the first four full paragraphs of Chapter 11:

Electric fire, lit to the third bar.

Glowing red: hot against his cheek.

No other light in this stuffy, airless room.

McAvoy, squinting, struggling to see the words he is scribbling in his notebook with a pen that tears holes in the damp pages.

What this technique brings to mind, more and more frequently, are stage setting instructions in a screenplay. While some might argue that this type of "setting the scene" helps the reader visualize what's happening, I find the choppiness distracting, pulling my attention away from the story itself like a small child tugging on my sleeve and saying, "Look! Look!" Nevertheless, I enjoyed *Original Skin* and am happy to continue on to the third book in the series, *Sorrow Bound*.

One warning, though: I seriously considered skipping *Original Skin* because of its \$7.99 ebook price tag (I purchased the first book on sale and received free copies of books 3 and 4 from publisher Blue Rider Press). I am very glad that I didn't. Unlike another series I am currently reading and reviewing (the Peter Bragg series by Jack Lynch), the McAvoy series cannot be read out of order. There is a much larger and more complicated plot running behind the crimes of immediate interest in each book; even reading all four books virtually back-to-back as I did, I had trouble remembering all of the relevant developments from one book to the next. Mark plans to write 10 books in 10 years for the McAvoy series; I suspect this may end up being one of those series that, once finished, you immediately start re-reading from the beginning to focus on and follow the larger plot.

ADDENDUM: Aha! My analogy above to a screenplay was spot on. According to a January 16, 2014 article in the *Hull Daily Mail*, Mark wrote the McAvoy series with the thought of turning it into a TV series: "How it was pitched to the publishers was that it had been written in an easily adaptable style for TV."

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## Melissa says

I really liked the debut of this series and eagerly awaited this one, #2. I couldn't get into the story as much and I felt like the plot was quite fragmented. I gave it a 3 just because I like the McAvoy character. The next book will determine whether I will stick with this series or not.

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## Brenda says

Do you want the good news or the bad news first? Okay...

The bad news is this book has some problems. I think as readers we all must have pretty good reading comprehension or we wouldn't enjoy reading, right? I had trouble understanding what was happening for almost half this book. Things were disjointed. There is an early event with no character names that isn't explained until much later. There are Vietnamese cannabis growers that aren't very relevant in hindsight. There is a raid on a suspected warehouse that's found to be empty that only serves as a setup for an attack on the police. There is a scene where Aector catches a loose horse that isn't related to anything. There is a swinging sex club which is pervasive throughout the book. There are travelers (gypsies) who have set up camp in town. There are attacks on people, something to do with their tattoos. There was excessive use of some descriptions and phrases, like rain drenching to the skin. There was mention, as in the first book, of a name and previous police corruption that again remains unexplained. I felt the author didn't relate things soon enough or often enough to help the reader along. Connections were too vague until near the end.

The good news is that Aector McAvoy, his wife Roisin, and his boss Trisha Pharaoh continued, as in the first book, to be strong likable characters. More good news is that the sex was not graphic. Dialogue was very good.

The author has strengths that were put to good use here, but he was weak with the storyline. I'm hoping the author got the swinging sex stuff out of his system. I'm also hoping this book just has a case of "second-book-itis" and that book #3 will be as strong as the first. I also have a personal note to Mr. Mark. I saw what you did, and if you ever break up Aector's happy home and sanctuary, I'll be breaking up with you.

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## Leah says

### Sex, violence and misogyny...a losing combination...

When Detective Sergeant Aector McAvoy finds a lost phone, the images and messages on it lead him to believe that a death that had been ruled a suicide may in fact have been a murder. The victim is a flamboyantly tattooed young man who was clearly involved in the dangerous game of arranging sexual encounters with strangers. The reader knows a little more than Aector since the prologue shows us the murder taking place and tells us that the murderer is also hunting down another possible victim, Simon's friend Suzie. Meantime, a drugs war is kicking off on the streets of Hull, involving Vietnamese drug lords

and the brutal torture and killings of competitors.

This book seems to be getting a generally positive reaction so I'm afraid my review will be swimming against the tide - again. Hard-hitting and noir seem to be becoming synonymous with graphic and sleazy in current crime-writing, so Mark is probably on track for major success. There's no doubt that he has the ability to tell his story well. The drugs plot seems a bit pointless, thrown in purely to give a reason for some pretty graphic descriptions of violence and torture (including of course the obligatory tortured naked woman incident), but the murder plot is quite original, intriguing and brought to a reasonably satisfying, if unlikely, conclusion.

The character of Aector is fairly poorly drawn, I felt. Pretty much all that we learn about him is that he is the one moral man in the whole of Hull, he's tall, blushes a lot and loves his wife. We know these things because we are told them repeatedly (and boy, do I mean repeatedly) but there's no real depth to the characterisation. The other male officers are mainly as violent and lacking in morals as the criminals, and behave in ways that wouldn't be tolerated in even the laxest of police departments, and would certainly destroy any chance of a prosecution holding up in court. In Hull, apparently violence is the main male currency.

The women on the other hand come straight from the Misogyny section of Central Casting, and their currency is sex. The stay-at-home wife – foul-mouthed (as are all the women) but great in the kitchen and better in the bedroom; the female boss who sexually harasses her subordinates; the female detective who dresses like a hooker and hopes that allowing suspects to look down her blouse while she sexily crosses and uncrosses her legs will tempt them into confession; and Suzie, the nymphomaniac (literally), whose sexual fantasies and activities, while admittedly integral to the sleazy plot, are graphically described in endless gratuitous detail. There isn't a woman character who is not defined in one way or another by her sexuality.

But if you can overlook all this and ignore the constant use of the foulest of foul language, it must be admitted that the story flows fairly well and, despite my feeling that Suzie's story is mainly there to provide an excuse for titillation, Mark manages to make her the most believable and sympathetic character in the book.

So overall, as sex, violence and misogyny go, this is pretty well-written sex, violence and misogyny. But not to my taste – I see no reason why crime-writing has to wallow in the gutter. There are plenty of authors out there who can tell a hard-hitting story without descending to this level. 4 stars for the basic flow of the writing and the plotting of the murder element - less 1 for the gratuitous foul language, 1 for the repeated graphic violence and torture, and 1 for the constant soft-porn sex. All adds up to a 1-star rating for me. And I haven't even deducted anything for the misogyny...

NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, Quercus.

[www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com](http://www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com)

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