



## Harbor Nocturne

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## Harbor Nocturne Details

Date : Published April 3rd 2012 by Mysterious Press

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Author : Joseph Wambaugh

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## From Reader Review Harbor Nocturne for online ebook

### Thomas says

This book, like all Wambaugh books, has laugh out loud lines and some sad parts. The "Hollywood Love Story Award" in Chapter 8 is hilarious, with the couple singing "I got you babe" in a happy ending to a domestic violence call.

This book is more true to life of what it like to be an police officer than many police procedurals, in that Wambaugh was an LAPD cop for about 10 years. He said that he knew it was time to leave the LAPD when a suspect asked him for his autograph while he was handcuffing the suspect.

The melancholy parts of cops lives, including a high suicide rate, and alcoholism are part of the book. Cops are shown as human beings.

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### Jim says

I've been reading Joseph Wambaugh all my adult life. Two of his books, *The Choirboys* and *The Blooding* were absolute classics. It's difficult to relay just how different and affecting *The Choirboys* was when it came out. I'd never read anything like it, but it changed just about everything about American crime fiction. *The Blooding* was probably the best true crime account I've ever read, and all his other non-fiction is well worth a read too. I can't say the same for his fiction however, and I drifted away from his Hollywood cop stories because I'd read most of it before in *The Choirboys*.

Many years have gone by since I last picked up one of Wambaugh's novels, and I surprised myself by how much I enjoyed this one. A good plot, strong characters and a believable depiction of Hollywood and Los Angeles that led to a colourful and engaging read. To be honest, the "cop banter" was a bit stodgy and stale after a while, and he's still essentially writing *The Choirboys* with it, but it's part of the package. It may be a while before I pick up another of these Hollywood books, but I'm glad to think that I probably will.

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### jeffrey says

The author continues with most of the usual cast of Hollywood cops, dealing with the usual panoply of Hollywood characters. This time the action also centers around the San Pedro area, with the central story line involving a complex web of illicit human trafficking, nightclub dancers, and lots of cash circulating among the mostly thuggish players. Characteristic of the Hollywood Station series, the actual locations described in the story are often readily identifiable by the reader familiar with the L.A. environs, which adds a little more interest. However, overall, the story is a bit of a step down from the previous titles in this series. Perhaps the one biggest factor is with the narrator. Here, R.C. Bray provides a competent reading. But, Christian Rummel, the reader for the previous titles in this series is far superior, bringing life and verve to the characters, and definitely adds an extra 'star' for those works.

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### Kemper says

Joseph Wambaugh's collection of beleaguered cops that make up the LAPD's Hollywood Division are back

and dealing with the general stupidity, weirdness and brutality that makes their jurisdiction so unique. This usually means breaking up fights among the costumed 'superheroes' hustling the tourists or dealing with a domestic dispute between a couple of tweakers by getting them to do a duet of Sonny and Cher's *I Got You Babe*.

This entry borrows a page from *The Wire* by also having a story based around a bunch of women being illegally smuggled into the country that get killed by an accident in the storage container they were in. Along with a storyline of a good natured pothead longshoreman from San Pedro falling for a beautiful illegal Mexican immigrant stripper who overheard something she shouldn't have about that accident and on the run from a Korean and Russian gangster, Wambaugh also mixes in a bizarre undercover operation where an LAPD officer who lost a foot in a car accident is recruited to run a sting involving apotemnophilia.

Wambaugh's got a well established rhythm by now with this series where he mixes in random scenes of humor and tragedy that the cops encounter into an overall storyline. There's an especially touching scene where a couple of cops have to deal with an elderly woman who refuses to admit that her husband has just died while taking a nap.

It's another entertaining entry to this series, but it doesn't break any new ground.

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## Jim says

Harbor Nocturne by Joseph Wambaugh belongs to the Hollywood Cop series begun with **Hollywood Station**. It's an ensemble novel with cop characters that appear in several novels of the series: Only the victims, stooges, and perpetrators change.

Some of the action in **Harbor Nocturne** takes place in Hollywood, but as much takes place in San Pedro, aka "Fishtown," the Port of Los Angeles, which used to be the fishing port once upon a time.

Here we have smuggling Asian immigrants in shipping containers, white slavery via strip clubs that encourage prostitution, and a mix of Russian, Serbian, and Korean bad guys that lease their cars and houses and have no clearly defined economic relationships that would enable the police to get a handle on them.

Dinko Babich, a Croatian-American shipping crane operator, falls in love with Lita Medina, a nineteen-year-old stripper and prostitute on the run. She is on the run because she saw something she shouldn't have, so the villains are after her.

Although the plot is a little creaky, it doesn't matter as much here because of the broad humor of the Hollywood Station and what they find on the streets of Hollyweird. It's still worth reading, though.

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## Tim Countryman says

Easily my favorite Southern California cop novel!

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## Robert Carraher says

There may just be no writer alive who more accurately writes L.A. in all its ravaged beauty. Told with grit, biting observations of the denizen that populated Los Angeles and the surrounding area, and often with an extravagance that any Angelino could tell you isn't extravagance at all. Los Angeles may just be the one place on earth where truth IS stranger than fiction. If his bad guys seem over the top to the reader, then the reader has never spent any significant time in L.A. because in L.A. over the top is a way of life.

Same with his portrayal of cops. And he should know, he spent fourteen years as one of those cops. This extravagance, often displayed in what might seem parody, with liberal doses of satire, dark humor and grit is especially apparent in his Hollywood Station series which began in 2006 and introduces the multiethnic mix of police characters in the Wilcox Avenue station as well as the roiling melting pot of the general population. He followed up Hollywood Station with 2008's Hollywood Crows, amazingly his first sequel. Harbor Nocturne continues the tale of those cynical, often humorous blue collar working stiffs whose job it is to police the wackiest city on earth. Where else would a street cop be required to referee a fight between Spiderman and Ironman after Captain America calls 911? Where else would a street cop hold an impromptu version of Jeopardy, complete with answers required in the form of questions, with a bunch of drunks as the contestants and the outcome determining which went to jail for the night?

"Harbor Nocturne" by Joseph Wambaugh Harbor Nocturne picks up this cast of co-protagonists which are many; the various cops, including the surfer dude cops, one of which has only one foot, the wannabe movie star cop, the retired on active duty cop, the eastern European immigrant cop whose accent is so indecipherable that perps shut up and try and figure out if they are being arrested, the mousy, quiet female rookie who turns out to be the most macho of the bunch, and so many more you'll laugh at, cry with and get to love. Then, to follow suit, there are just as many co-antagonists of course; The Russian mafia gangster, who true to Hollywood, is actually a Serb, who changed his name because Serb gangsters just aren't Hollywood enough. Then there is the Italian wannabe gangster with a Mexican name, the Korean, who portrays himself as either a Japanese Yakuza or a Chinese Tong member and the collection of femme fatales whose stories are often fatal to only themselves.

But, and don't miss this point, all of these characters are actually supporting characters, even Dinko Babich, the son of a Croat immigrant, a second generation longshoreman, and a dope smoking slacker, and his star crossed lover Lita Medina, an illegal Mexican exotic dancer who can't dance, can't speak English, but is oh so beautiful and probably needs saving. No, the real star of the book; the real hero – and villain - of the piece is Los Angeles itself, and it's step child of a suburb, San Pedro (pronounced by the cognizanti "San Pee-dro", not "Pey-dro") which is only nominally connected to L.A. proper by that umbilicus of a freeway, The Harbor freeway.

Dinko is on suspension by the union and his employer for having gotten caught high and with pot while on the job. His money is running low and he still has a good number of weeks before he can go back to the job. He runs into a shady friend from high school, Hector Cozzo who sports a mullet haircut and a comical Al Pacino look from "Scarface," and carries business cards that say "Facilitator and Entrepreneur" and he tells Dinko he is a talent scout for strip clubs. He asks Dinko to do him a favor – for a couple hundred dollars. Pick up a new dancer, Lita, and deliver her to the Hollywood strip club owned by William Kim and his Serbian cum Russian business partner, Pavel Markov, himself an image conscious 70 year old with an Elvis pompadour.

Kim and Markov have their finger in many criminal pies, one of which involves human slavery, smuggling women into the country in shipping containers, including the one found with the 13 dead Asians on the very same docks where Dinko usually earns his paycheck.

Joseph Wambaugh: Profile Mean while, the men and women of Hollywood Station are on the trail of Kim/Markov for running a prostitution ring from a massage parlor, but when the sting goes totally wrong, and that avenue looks like a dead end, the cops start to think that the dead Asians in the shipping container might be connected to Kim and Markov. Especially when a dancer whose sister was one of the girls in the container turns up dead after having been last seen with Kim. The dead girl was a roommate of Lita's and Dinko sets out to save Lita.

The story, naturally is a police procedural, but in a way that only Wambaugh can, the genres get mixed. There is the romance that develops between Lita, a victim of circumstance trying to make money to send to her mother and younger siblings in an obscure Mexican village ravaged by drug gangs, then there is the many scenes of real life police work as they patrol the streets of Hollywood and Los Angeles and uncover gambling, theft, and very odd sex trade in of all things, apotem-nophilia (the desire for the amputation of a healthy limb or limbs). There are elements of the typical mystery, elements of noir, which seems like it was invented for Los Angeles in all of its cynical spot lights, and elements of the thriller genre as well.

I don't know that Wambaugh has ever written a weak book, but this surely is one of the best. It's fast paced, the plot and story line are not just topical but cover many, many topical subjects. The characters, though they are many – and Wambaugh can probably keep this many characters juggling as well as anyone in the business, but they are all distinct, and marvelously drawn in all their quirky guises, the story is fast paced, which is in and of itself a feat considering all the many subplots and characters, and of course, the scenery, the sense of place, are displayed so well even a midwester who has never left their state will feel he or she knows it well. Wambaugh continues to prove that old adage that things get better with age and time. Everything but Los Angeles.

Article first published as Book Review: Harbor Nocturne by Joseph Wambaugh on Blogcritics.

The Dirty Lowdown

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### **Cathy Biggers says**

First of Joseph Wambaugh's books I've read, but have always enjoyed his television and/or movie productions. Felt like I was there with the characters and was fully involved. Great mystery and thriller.

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### **Eileen says**

The zany police officers of Hollywood Station's midwatch are back at it. Highlighted in this book are Flotsom and Jetsom, the surfer cops, who use the craziest, kookiest tactics to apprehend the bad guys. This series of books interweaves several story lines, all coming together nicely at the end. Classic bad guys vs. the cops, but very fun to read. The cop lingo and antics the officers pull are good for a few giggles, even though the story lines are pretty simple. I could see this actually happening in a police station in Hollywood.

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### **Karen Kinsella says**

I seem to remember enjoying Wambaugh in the past. But this one... not so much. Characters mostly caricatures, unique elements of the settings exaggerated, plot ending disturbingly predictable, procedural stuff not credible. But there was some good, too. I can't fault the technical writing skills, nor was there anything wrong with the pulled-from-the-headlines basic plot. When not overloading us with the craziness of Hollywood and the South Bay, the book provides some concise, well-drawn sketches of these areas. I think Wambaugh's problem with this one was an unfortunate tendency to exaggerate that which really does not benefit from it. And to foreshadow plot elements in a likely attempt to increase reader involvement in the story. Not necessary, either one. Both took a lot away from what could have been a much better book.

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### **Bill Shannon says**

The very definition of an easy read. Neither wonderful nor memorable, but never a slog.

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### **Fredrick Danysh says**

In LAPD's Hollywood Division, the surfer cops are called upon to go undercover for a human trafficking case. Many familiar characters are back as the area of San Pedro is investigated by the police. Wambaugh uses some unusual relationships in his story.

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### **Norm Lionberger says**

Followed my "first 100" rule but couldn't force myself to read page 101. Disappointing, especially for Wambaugh.

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### **Shawn says**

I'm so surprised about Harbor Nocturne--I really liked it! I'm just surprised Joseph Wambaugh (not to be morbid) is still kicking out the books, and that he wrote this one that is set, basically, almost at the apartment building I live in, in San Pedro, California.

I used to read the Wambaugh books when I was a teen; I mean, that is literally damn near 40 years ago! I look at the book jacket...when I was 15, Wambaugh looked like an old ex-cop (which I believe he is--on this jacket it just says he wrote a lot of books, and he lives in southern California). Now, he looks about the same, but so many decades have passed! Well, that's a different story. (Reminds me, True Blood is on HBO tonight!)

Wambaugh's first few were awesome, for me to read. Blue Night, The New Centurions, The Thin Blue Line, epic, epic reads for a young person, innocent of the big world. And then The Onion Field! He throws in a work of non-fiction that was an instant classic, about a senseless, brutal murder. The book showed, sort of from a cop's point of view, when solving a murder...you oftentimes do not uncover a Charles Manson, or a fictional Hannibal Lecter, but more like Spanky and Our Gang characters. Stupid, young punks, who have no friggin' idea when you ask them, "why'd you do it?" They just say, uhh...I don't know, I, uh, ran out of gas, I

saw a guy, he pissed me off, so I hit him over the head with a hammer, and he dropped dead. I think that's more like real life. Criminals tend to be your average dumb-ass.

Fast forward some decades. I skipped Wambaugh's next marathon of writing. He wrote 2 or 3 books with the word Hollywood in them, Hollywood Moon, stuff like that. I tried the first one, and I just wasn't in the mood. I haven't been in much of a Goodreads mood lately. I didn't add the last few books I read, but Harbor Nocturne is the first one in a month worth adding. It's all about San Pedro, and it talks about everything from the Sunken City, to the Vincent Thomas Bridge & The Harbor Freeway, oh!, and Pt. Fermin, people falling and jumping therefrom. The same things real people who live here talk about! It was a fun, awesome read for me. I really enjoyed it.

It was long on a funny and sad cop story, and short of discussing those themes that could point to the meaning of life, like, it didn't change my whole world, so 4 stars instead of 5. Great summer read at the beach (which, where I live is approximately 360 days of the year).

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### **Laura Leaney says**

Clichéd and overworked. The ghastly plot had not a single surprise. The characters are cardboard racial stereotypes: the Mexican pole dancer with a heart of gold; the Croatian slacker momma's boy who is changed for the better by the Mexican dancer with a heart of gold; the Croatian momma who cooks great quantities of food, who at first hates Mexican pole dancer but who changes her mind when son begins to shave and sit up straight; the Italian pimp; the scary Korean in black glasses who garrotes his victims with his own silk tie. You get the picture.

If the caricatures had been subversive or ironic, I might have laughed. As it is, I just felt sad and depressed.

It was interesting to read about San Pedro, apparently a cesspool of crime. I hope some creaky-kneed staff sergeant from Harbor Division reads this book and takes notes.

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