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Top Homicide cop Darian Richards has been seeking out monsters for too long. He has promised one too many victim's families he will find the answers they need and it's taken its toll. Now retired, a series of disappearances see him return to the gun. On his terms. But he knows, every promise has a price to pay.

After surviving a gunshot wound to the head, Darian calls it quits and retires to the Sunshine Coast in an attempt to leave the demons behind. But he should have realised, there are demons everywhere and no place is safe. A serial killer is prowling the Sunshine Coast area and Darian tries to ignore the fact his experience could make a difference hunting him down.

All he wants is to sit at the end of his jetty on the Noosa River and ignore the fact that girls from the area have vanished over the past fourteen months. All blonde and pretty. Youngest: 13. Oldest: 16. He knows they are all dead but the cops were saying 'missing' or 'vanished'. That's what you have to say if you don't have a body.

Jenny Brown was the first. She vanished sometime after 4 in the afternoon, Saturday 15 October the previous year. Except for her parents and her friends and everybody who knew her, it was thought she was just a runaway. Especially by the cops who allowed a good two or three minutes before arriving at that conclusion. By the time they'd reached the gate to the front yard of her house, before they'd even walked across the road and climbed into their cruiser, they would've forgotten Jenny Brown even existed.

But then others disappeared and they couldn't call them all runaways. Darian can't sit idly by and he decides he is going to find the killer and deal with him... his way.

Promise Details

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From Reader Review Promise for online ebook

Michael says

Darian Richard has had enough. After sixteen long years as the head of Victoria's homicide squad he has now retired to what he hopes will be the quiet life in Noosa. But unfortunately he soon realises even the seemingly tranquil surroundings of his retired paradise is not a safe place. A serial killer is loose on the Sunshine Coast with the victims all young and Blonde. The police put on a brave face saying they may be alive but Darian as an ex cop knows all that means is they haven't found a body yet. Haunted by the failures to stop serial killers in Melbourne Darian with the help of connections he made during his time in force goes about finding this monster and give him what he deserves.

On the other side of the coin is Winston a sadistic, immature and irrational man who gets his kicks by abducting the girls and then having fun with them before killing them. In Winstons mind he is the awesome one as he is the epitome of a master serial killer. Doing all he can to not arouse suspicion but in the end making an elementary mistake by taking pictures of his victims instead of discarding the phones batteries that make him traceable. Like many serial killers before he sees himself as someone who when eventually caught will be talked about for centuries to come.

This was not an easy book to read as along with chapters narrated by Darian and his associates we also have Winston who goes to great lengths to detail his delusions and the rape and torture of the terrified girls. Darian comes across as a no nonsense person and was a great character. He was smart enough after all his experience to not only find ingenious ways to pursue Winston but also knew how to play the police and even how to set up friends when it came along. Along the way we encounter a scared community, corrupt police, action galore and enough tension to keep you reading well into the night. If your a fan of the crime genre and am not put off by a heinous serial killer than Promise is a great read.

Bec says

The fifth book in this series, Kingdom of the Strong, was published last year and made it into my Top 15 of 2015. I decided to go back and start this series from the start, in the hopes of a new release this year. One of the things that sets the Darian Richards series apart is the setting – the Sunshine Coast in Australia. As an Australian, my family holidayed in Queensland, and often on the Sunshine Coast so the descriptions of the setting are particularly vibrant to me.

Promise is a tightly written, plot driven serial killer thriller with one of the creepiest killers creating chilling havoc on every page. The baddie is hilarious and strange (letting me know he got his duct tape on special at Bunnings for 3.99) with a ritual and system to killing that made me feel quite ill. The killer reminded me of the serial killers that used to feature in Matt Hilton's Joe Hunter novels, and there are some other similarities between these two authors. However, Cavanaugh goes more the police investigation route as opposed to the vigilante.

It would be remiss of me to review this book, or any book in this series without talking about Darian Richards – Promise sets him up as such an interesting and complex character. He's a hard-bitten ex-cop who just wants to be left alone, but can't really leave the cop's investigation alone either. He's conflicted, and has a strange relationship with 92 Berettas and the women in his life. Cavanaugh has done a wonderful job building a fabulous lead character, that I want to follow over multiple books.

This leads me to one of my few complaints about this book – the background characters are weak. Casey, Maria, the police officers and Detectives all seem like caricatures of actual people. I wanted to scream at how many times Darian thought something along the lines of ‘female cops are smarter than male ones,’ I get it, you want me to think of Maria as being intelligent – and I can’t because what you make her do is stupid half the time. It’s this kind of ‘telling’ and not ‘showing’, especially when they are at odds with one another that pains me. I don’t even have an opinion on Casey yet, because he just seems wishy-washy. I know that Casey and Maria especially become strong, fleshed out characters by the fourth book, so I’m happy to run with it.

The ending was good, if a little dissatisfying, and certainly left me hankering for the next book in the series.

Meredith says

Compelling Protagonist

Darian Richards is a likeable character, despite his anti-social nature. He is smart and honourable and insightful. His associates and friends are colourful and varied, and the female characters are interesting and multi-faceted. Set in Australia, this crime story is not really a mystery, but a sort of portrait of a serial killer and the man who hunts him down. Personally, I found the details of the murders and what the killer does with the bodies grisly and too intense...

Sunnie says

Dark and disturbing.

PROMISE is the debut novel of television script writer Tony Cavanaugh.

Darian Richards is a retired homicide detective. Former head of homicide, in fact. He walked away from the job after one too many murders and too many haunted dreams. He has taken the law into his own hands more times than he cares to admit. Living in the beachside town of Noosa, Darian believes those days are behind him. But then young teenage girls start to disappear without trace.....

I’ll be honest, maverick outside the law investigators aren’t my favourite of the genre, however Cavanaugh’s talent kept me engrossed. It’s fast paced, witty and dark. The story unfolds with different voices, principally Darian’s, and also those of the victims and most disturbingly from the serial killer himself.

I read this book in just a few days so it is compelling. I’ll admit though my slight antipathy for outside the law investigators probably resulted in me rating the book less than it deserved. Will I read more from this author? Most likely but only after a considerable gap.

Lisa says

This book started off well but was a big disappointment for me did not finish

Charmaine Clancy says

Not for me. The crimes are too graphic for my enjoyment. I don't mind this in some novels but here the victims are little girls. It was too disturbing for me. I was left with a feeling of hopelessness as the top homicide detective (or so he keeps telling me) keeps missing this guy and another little girl is horrifically abused, raped, tortured and murdered. I did like the premise of a serial killer hitting a sleepy town and the local cops not being able to cope. And I enjoyed the setting descriptions. I'll also add my dad loved this book - so you decide for yourself.

Jocelyn (foxonbooks) says

Darian Richards has retired from life as a high profile homicide detective in Melbourne and retreated to Noosa to try to escape the ghosts that accompany that kind of career. But one of Noosa's inhabitants is abducting, abusing and murdering young girls, and regardless of protocol, Richards can't help but get involved.

I read this book in about two days and lived it the whole time, which is appropriate because the plot itself is set over only a handful of days. With about twenty pages to go I had to put it down and go to work and was really stressed about it until lunchtime when I dashed upstairs to read the conclusion!

The most disturbing aspect of this novel is that a good deal of it is seen through the mind of the killer; and it's not a pretty mind to visit. Cavanaugh captures the creepy, skewed perspective of this creature uncannily well. Both main characters are basing their actions largely on what they expect their foe to do, and this to and fro makes the novel both intriguing and confronting.

Richards is a classic anti hero, and his character rings true: haunted by his past, he's hell bent on stopping the killer, whatever the method and whatever the cost. The plot has enough twists to keep you guessing and more than enough tension to impact on the rest of your day! I'm hanging out for a sequel from Cavanaugh already.

Carolyn says

This was an excellent debut novel from screenplay writer Tony Cavanaugh. As his protagonist he has chosen Darian Richards, retired after 16y as a top homicide detective in Victoria. He now resides in Noosa where he relishes the pace of life although he is not as anonymous as he hoped. Everyone seems to know about his past. When several young girls start disappearing around Noosa, and the local police can find no leads on where they have gone, Darian can no longer pretend to himself that it's not his business and feels compelled to investigate. The man he is chasing is clever and cunning and capable of staying well hidden. He is in fact a very creepy character with some unusual practices.

The narrative alternates between Darian and the abductor and sometimes it is hard to initially tell the voices apart. I don't know if that was deliberate, but for me it made it even more chilling when I'd realize it was the abductor and not Darian speaking. It was an interesting angle to see inside the head of the abductor, a psychotic, sadistic man as he planned his moves. Darian himself is quite arrogant and not quite moral in the actions he takes and the way he treats his friends. We get some insight into what made him that way when he thinks back to his days on the force and the nightmares that followed. Noosa makes a great setting with a mix

of wealthy retirees, colorful locals and never ending tourists with some great descriptions of the Queensland bush and rivers around the Noosa hinterland. All in all, an excellent psychological thriller with a very creepy killer on the loose.

Suzie Flohr says

I loved this book. It was set in australia. I hope tony writes another one .

Veronical says

Eh

ALPHAreader says

Darian Richards threw his service weapon into the ocean and walked away from his job as Australia's more successful homicide detective. He has left Melbourne behind after failing to catch 'the train killer', and has settled in for retirement on Queensland's Noosa River.

Darian spends the first few months enjoying his retirement and a certain notoriety in his new, small town. He has a similarly retired friend in Casey Lack, a fifty-something ex-brothel owner who also migrated from Melbourne, after his club was blown to high heaven. Then there's Casey's twenty-something girlfriend, Maria, a cop on the local force. Maria is beautiful and smart (as Darian believes all female officers are, far more than their male colleagues) but she doesn't like Darian, partly because her station has ruffled feathers over the country's top homicide detective moving on to their turf (retired or not).

And then girls start going missing . . .

Young girls, aged between 13 and 16, all with blonde hair have been reported missing. At first the local police were happy to write the disappearance of one girl off as a runaway case. . . but when more reports came in, with all the missing sharing similar physical descriptions, it was hard to ignore. And then the 'trophies' started showing up – the girl's mobile phones, with disturbing photos loaded, leave little doubt that all of the missing are dead, and met violent ends.

Darian cannot ignore 'Operation Blonde' for a minute longer. The local police are showing a disturbing level of incompetence, and in once case cover-up, and he is compelled to reach for his gun once again.

'Promise' is the debut Australian crime fiction novel from Tony Cavanaugh.

This is a highly-anticipated novel. Tony Cavanaugh has quite a resume – he's a writer and film/television producer (having worked on shows like 'The Sullivans' and 'Carson's Law'). He was also nominated for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for the screenplay 'Father' and the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for the screenplay 'Through My Eyes'. 'Promise' is his debut novel, and with a writing resume that stellar it is riding on high expectations . . . and meets them, in my opinion.

A few years ago Scottish crime writer, Ian Rankin, made the explosive statement that "the people writing the most graphic violence today are women ... they are mostly lesbians as well". Backlash ensued. But I would say that if Rankin were to read Tony Cavanaugh's debut novel, he might just eat his words.

'Promise' is a difficult read. Cavanaugh has written a bloody and masochistically violent killer, and he vividly documents the abuse of the missing girls in stomach-churning detail. The detail is especially overwhelming because parts of the book are told from the killer's point of view (interspersed with Darian's). That's right, from the get-go readers know who the killer is; he calls himself 'Winnie' and it becomes quickly apparent that he is warped and caught somewhere between man and child; he'll rank his favourite Disney movies in one sentence, and then go cut into his latest victim. The story becomes a cat and mouse game, as we read Darian close in on the killer, while also simultaneously subjected to the madman's thoughts, his creepily personal addresses to the reader ("brothers and sisters", as though he knows he has an audience) and then we read his torture, rape and eventual killing of his young female victims. It is supremely unsettling, akin to reading Patrick Bateman's first-person lunacy in 'American Psycho'.

Winnie's descriptions of his outbursts, sexual assaults and violent rapes are horridly vivid and hard to get through. But what is also creepy is his step-by-step 'instruction' on how to kidnap 'prey'. He speaks, at length, about how much he loves shopping centres; in particular, he adores shops like SUPRÉ and Sportsgirl, where he can pick his next victim, perhaps catch a glimpse of them in the change-rooms. . . As a female reader, I found the lead-up to Winnie's violence utterly terrifying, because there's no doubt in my mind that Cavanaugh has done research into how predators work – and it's horrifying to think how simple it is to be caught in some lunatics' crosshairs.

So, in that sense, 'Promise' is extremely unsettling. But at the same time, the violence and grotesqueness of Winnie's POV did add to the tension. I can't deny that it was damn good storytelling, no matter how disturbing.

I'm not sure if 'Promise' is the first in an ongoing series with Darian Richards, but I hope so. Because Darian is a very interesting ex-cop. For one thing, he's extremely smart. Cavanaugh places a lot of emphasis on Darian having been the top homicide detective in Victoria – with a kill-rate and arrest record that had him being courted by other states to clean up dragging cases and nagging cold cases. And I, for one, completely believed that Darian was that good. He receives some geeky tech-support help from a friend back in Melbourne called Isosceles (by all accounts a brilliant recluse) but for the most part Darian relies on his own wits throughout the investigation.

Darian is by no means an 'ordinary' cop – this job has got under his skin and it will never leave him. Darian's unique brilliance comes to focus in strange little paragraphs and asides. Like when he recounts the history of guns; that his preferred Beretta company goes back to 1526 and the Italian Wars, while the Smith & Wesson is from 1852 (coinciding with the American Civil War) and the Glock is a product of the 60's (and the Vietnam War). When he comes face-to-face with the more archaic and 'Neanderthal' attitudes of the local Queensland police force, he puts those deadbeat cops in their place (either with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the rule book, or physical force). Darian has been in the force since he was nineteen-years-old; and in his many years he has collected insights into the cop psyche that are Raymond Chandler-esque for their accuracy;

Cops have this thing about loyalty. When a cop puts on a uniform, it's like they've just departed the human race and joined another clan. I used to be like that. You think you're different and, in truth, you are. You think your loyalty is to your fellow officers but it's not. It's to the victims. Sometimes it takes a little while for a cop to discover that. Sometimes a cop won't ever discover it.

That's not to say that Darian doesn't have his faults as a protagonist. He is fascinating for his brilliance, but certainly lacking a more substantial warmth and, possibly, long-lasting interest. Darian is a solitary being,

and by no means perfect. He admitted to being an alcoholic at one stage in his career. Part of the reason he decided to retire to Noosa was because of a broken promise to a victim's mother, and the near-miss ethical over-the-line he almost had with that same mother. Darian doesn't do relationships – but he's not the womanizing archetypal cop so prevalent in the genre. Instead he prefers the once-a-week company of a young escort, who he 'quietly loves', but only needs human contact in small doses. At one point he reveals that his father abandoned the family when Darian was ten, to go and live in Thailand. But personal insights like that are far and few between, and I did wish that as a reader I had more of a human connection to Darian, more understanding of what makes him tick and future interesting human entanglements.

The more interesting character, really, is Maria who becomes a sort-of sidekick for Darian. Maria is young, and for her the sheen of the badge hasn't quite worn off. But over the course of 'Operation Blonde' she starts having nightmares, and begins to understand the inherent evil in some people . . . even more disturbing for Maria is the realization that her fellow cops are not perfect, that they do not have the same integrity as she does (particularly where female victims are concerned). Darian is not surprised, since he maintains that female cops are always smarter. But for Maria, circumstances and damning evidence lead her down a dark path;

'Guys and their dicks,' she said. 'Eighty-five per cent of violent crime comes from guys and their dicks.'

Something else I really loved about 'Promise' was how Tony Cavanaugh peppered the story with interesting insights and factoids about Australian police history, the most interesting of which concerned females in the force. For example, Darian (again, showing his mettle as an above-average cop) mentions that the first female police officers in Queensland were Ellen O'Donnell and Zara Dane, who joined in 1931, but *"throughout their lifetime careers on the force, they were never sworn in."* One of the most fascinating (and disturbing) factoids was about Lorelle Saunders, who in 1984 became the first woman to become a detective in Queensland – only to have her fellow officers charge her with conspiracy to murder a fellow cop (her lover), *"a charge of which she was innocent"*, but still spent ten harrowing months in prison for. Thanks to Cavanaugh, I went away and researched these juicy morsels of history.

All in all, 'Promise' is a fascinating and unsettling read. I welcome Tony Cavanaugh as a startling new voice in the genre, and hope that he intends to write more books for his unique ex-cop character, Darian Richards. Gruesome it may be, but 'Promise' is also a deliciously hair-raising thriller to keep readers hooked until the very last sentence. . .

Jill says

'Promise' by Tony Cavanaugh is a chilling story, full of suspense, terror and outright horror. It is generally not my kind of book, but is written with such panache it gripped me from start to finish. Imagine an anti-hero similar to Peter Temples' Jack Irish but much darker and even more complex. And instead of murky Fitzroy, the Noosa hinterland in Queensland's Sunshine Coast is the setting; it's a key part of the story and evocatively described, but it's definitely not that of the idyllic tourist brochure. This is a crime novel that haunts you from the moment you begin reading, but beware that the topic of the torture of young teenage girls is horrifying and disturbing and not for everyone. The only niggle I have is that a lot of the detective work to catch the killer wasn't done by our hero at all. Luckily for him (and the reader), he had a technology friend capable of accessing vital information no-one in the police force could actually get their hands on. Stretched credibility a bit.

Brenda says

Darian Richards, top Homicide Squad boss from Victoria, with sixteen years under his belt, was burnt out. He was extremely successful in his job, always caught the criminals, until his last case. After getting shot in the head in an unrelated incident, enough was enough. After he recuperated, he threw in his job, packed up his possessions and headed as far north of Australia as he could. Noosa was his place to retire, and he planned on doing nothing!

Until suddenly a serial killer is around, stalking the young blonde and beautiful girls of the Sunshine Coast. The cops weren't getting anywhere, and after more girls go missing, with none of them found, Darian needed to get involved. He couldn't do anything officially, as the local cops didn't like the thought of a 'star' of Homicide division, even if he was an ex-'star', on their turf.

So Darian worked out a way to be involved, without being involved! And as he got inside the killer's head, he didn't like what he saw. The absolute evil lurking there was chilling. This killer was so diabolical, he enjoyed taunting the police, leaving clues that no-one seemed to be able to connect! Would Darian be able to stop the killer before more girls were taken?

This thriller is horrifying, the chills are gripping! The only problem I had with it is that is written with two first persons, Darian and the killer. And with both of them speaking within the same chapter sometimes, I found myself getting lost, having to go back and re-read as I discovered I had the wrong person in my head! Hence the lower stars, but the story was good.

Bree T says

Darian Richards was one of the most successful Homicide detectives in Australia. After over 15 years as the head of Victoria's Homicide Squad and being shot several times, he'd had enough. Even though there was still one major case he hadn't solved, a serial killer riding the trains in Melbourne and snatching victims, he walked away. He was done promising people that he'd find out who murdered their loved ones.

He retired to Noosa on Queensland's Sunshine Coast where he keeps to himself as much as he possibly can. He's hoping that his newfound quiet, peaceful existence will help him put the horrors of what he has experienced behind him but it doesn't seem to be that easy. Because the Sunshine Coast has become the target of a serial killer, abducting blonde and pretty girls in their teens. Even though the local police are saying that the girls are merely missing, Darian already knows that they are dead.

Darian could leave it to the local cops, ignore the smiling faces of the girls that have disappeared and continue along in his quiet life. But if there's one thing that he does understand, it's how people like this work. And this one seems to be an expert at staying under the radar, staying out of sight and being utterly unremarkable in every way. Darian has never been shy about administering his own sort of justice to types like this and he's willing to do it again, if necessary.

Tony Cavanaugh is a writer for film and television but Promise is his first novel. I read Danielle's review last year and knew immediately that I had to read this one. It's been on my TBR pile ever since and with my newfound resolution to read more male Australian authors this year, it was the perfect first choice.

Darian Richards has jacked in his job as a Homicide hotshot in Victoria and retreated to Noosa in Queensland to hopefully live a life of obscurity. Things aren't that easy though and most people around the place are aware of who and what Darian is – or was. When it becomes obvious that a serial killer is stalking young, blonde girls on the Sunshine Coast, Darian can see that the local cops are mostly clueless. He uses his connection with a local, a man from his past, who is dating a female police officer, to obtain information. He assures her that when he catches the killer, she'll get all the glory and Darian will simply fade into the background.

Darian is a difficult character to get a handle on. He's not particularly sympathetic, even though with the life he has behind him, he should be. He's quite arrogant and he seems to think that pretty much every police officer who wears a uniform is stupid, except for the women. The women are smart, because they're disadvantaged from the get-go, being women, so they need to use their brains carefully. Darian makes no secret of the lengths he's gone to in the past and the lengths he's willing to go to again. I've no doubt he will alienate some readers, with the sort of lofty arrogance he does exude but I think that it's probably quite accurate for a cop of his level and success. You need to back yourself, have faith in your instincts and your abilities to catch these people and I guess a lot of them probably do bend the rules when they need to and suit themselves quite often. I think the average person would probably be horrified if they knew a lot of the inner workings of very successful detectives.

Cavanaugh certainly knows how to set an atmosphere in his novel. This one is decidedly creepy and sinister, with Richards and often the female police officer creeping around remote areas, empty buildings and bushland. The novel gives you a glimpse inside the mind of the killer, as well as Darian in his attempt to catch him and that is incredibly eerie. I'm not sure I've ever read a book that gave me such an insight into such a disturbed mind and that certainly made it very easy for me to lean towards siding with Darian in his opinions on what is justice for people like this. Darian has that edge, where you wonder how much it's taking him to hold himself together after a lifetime of hunting down people like this serial killer. He's fascinating, a bit disturbing in a way but I know that I'd certainly like to know more about him. He does some pretty reprehensible things (including one very dangerous thing that I really could not believe he did, to someone he supposedly cares about). I liked being given an insight into how he worked (he turned his living room into like a crime fact board, pinning up all the pictures of the missing girls and amassing information, much as a detective team would) and there's no doubt that he's good at what he does. His methods are certainly unorthodox and seem to involve an awful lot of stuff I'm pretty sure is illegal, but he knows how to get what he wants.

And what the serial killer was doing? One of the creepiest things I've ever read!

Promise is a very tight debut, kept me turning the pages. Tony Cavanaugh's second novel, *Dead Girl Sing* will be published in March 2013 and features the return of Darian Richards, this time investigating someone preying on young women during schoolies week on the Gold Coast.

Kathryn says

This is a difficult book to rate and review. I liked the story line, and I was interested to read some crime noir - something a bit darker than my more usual cozy Phryne Fisher murder mysteries - and this certainly was darker...! But whereas I was happy for the plot line to be more complex, with a psychopath with disturbing issues, I could have done without the graphic descriptions of rape and murder - although this is obviously treading a fine line between getting us, the readers, into the mind of the serial killer, and giving us too much information that is gratuitous. I think Tony Cavanaugh almost got it right - there were just a handful of times that I thought he went too far. I also didn't enjoy the frequent bad language - and while sometimes I could

see that it was warranted, once again it was gratuitous at times and didn't add to the story at all.

For the plot of the story I would give 4 stars, but I wouldn't give more than 2 stars for the writing style. So I guess that averages out at 3 stars total.

I enjoyed the Sunshine Coast setting - although I may think twice before walking around Noosaville on my own in future ;-)
